



# Universally Accepted

**N**ervous and excited, I feel like I'm going to camp for the first time. But I'm not. Far from it.

I'm a 27-year-old *yungerman* learning in *kollel* in Eretz Yisrael, like thousands of other *yungeleit*. About a year and a half ago I was living in Lakewood and learning

in BMG *kollel*, like thousands of other *yungeleit*. Hashem blessed me and my wife with two children in the first four years of marriage, like thousands of other *yungeleit*. *B'kitzur*, pretty nondescript, but just fine by me.

My wife, however, tends to be a little more out of the box, a trait she inherited from my *shver*. So on a whim, she answered an ad for a *kollel* opening in Eretz Yisrael. After a pretty intense screening process, I met Rav Yosef Kamenetsky and Rav Leib Kelemen to interview for the *kollel* they intended to open in Yerushalayim. One of the *kollel's* requirements was to receive Rabbanut *semichah* on all the subjects of halachah they plan to cover. In describing it to me, Rav Kamenetsky told me their *semichah* is earned via a very intense and comprehensive test, and therefore universally accepted.

With Hashem's help, I was accepted to the *kollel* and entered the intricate world of halachah. The *kollel* immediately began exposing us to Rabbanut-style tests by showing us tests from previous years. Just to give a little perspective, here's how essay questions are answered: One is expected to begin by presenting

the relevant Gemara and then continue with the Rishonim and Acharonim until reaching the final *psak* of the *Shulchan Aruch*. These questions really test your breadth of knowledge; the correct answer could be one small detail buried in mountains of information. The test takes about five and a half hours. (In their "mercy," eating is permitted during the exam.)

Fast forward some ten months. The *kollel* has just finished a particularly involved segment of *Yoreh Dei'ah* and, after many practice tests, the big day has arrived. I am on the way to our first *bechinah* in Binyanei Ha'umah in Yerushalayim, scheduled to start at ten thirty and end at four. I head out at around nine, afraid of getting caught in an Israeli *balagan*, but with very light human traffic I arrive early, get my receipt stamped, and am off to find the room where the test is administered. My early arrival allows me the luxury of a few minutes of relaxation.

I enter an enormous room, still mostly empty, find a seat, and make myself comfortable. As the hall starts filling up, I witness a scene so surreal it's hard to describe. Slowly but surely the room fills until, ultimately, some 2,000 test takers have arrived.

There is no "type." They come from all walks of life and their colorful headgear is testimony to their diversity. Their ages range from early 20s to mid 60s. There are Israeli yeshivah guys with hats and jackets, others sporting the white-

shirt, black-pants look, chassidim in full regalia, and gun-toting Yesha residents. Then there are the typical Americans like myself, struggling to understand the Hebrew instructions and rules.

One *kippah-srugah*, sandal-wearing, bearded fellow walks up to me and my friend and starts testing our knowledge. His similarly dressed friend really seems to know his stuff. During the exam, he asks for a new notebook after filling up all 18 pages of the test book.

I realize what an incredible *kiddush Hashem* I'm part of. My *chavrusa*, who's as wowed as I am, says, "Just look around. You know how hard we all worked this year. Can you imagine how much Torah was learned?!"

Indeed, as the *rosh kollel* said, this *semichah* is universally accepted, but its universality is expressed not only in the different communities that honor its credentials, but in the actual people coming to take the test.

I view these varied members of one nation, who, from all walks of life, have left everything behind and gathered in this one room with one goal in mind — to see how well they have learned Hashem's Torah — and I am overwhelmed with a tangible emotion: This room, at this moment, cries out the universal acceptance of Hashem's Torah. ●

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