

*Land
of
Israel*



THE BRANCHES OF YAD YISROEL

Yad Yisroel in Action

Yad Yisroel in Action

GAN YELADIM



Yad Yisroel in Action

JEWISH HOLIDAYS



Yad Yisroel in Action

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL



TOUR GROUPS



MONUMENTS



HOLOCAUST AWARENESS PROGRAMS

Yad Yisroel in Action
BUILDINGS



BAIS AHARON SYNAGOGUE



BAIS AHARON BOYS SCHOOL



MIKVA- FORMERLY JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER



BAIS AHARON GIRLS SCHOOL

Yad Yisroel in Action

YESHIVA PE'ER YISROEL



EXTRA- CURRICULAR



LEARNING WITH SCHOOL BOYS

Yad Yisroel in Action

COMMUNITY SERVICES

PUBLICATION OF RUSSIAN SIDDURIM



CHEVRA KADISHA



COMMUNITY CONCERTS



SOUP KITCHENS



ROSH CHODESH PARTY FOR BABUSHKAS

Yad Yisroel in Action

NATIONAL PROGRAMS



FREE SUMMER CAMPS



TAHARAS HAMISHPACHA SEMINARS



SHABBATONIM THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

Yad Yisroel in Action

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION TRIP



WARSAW...

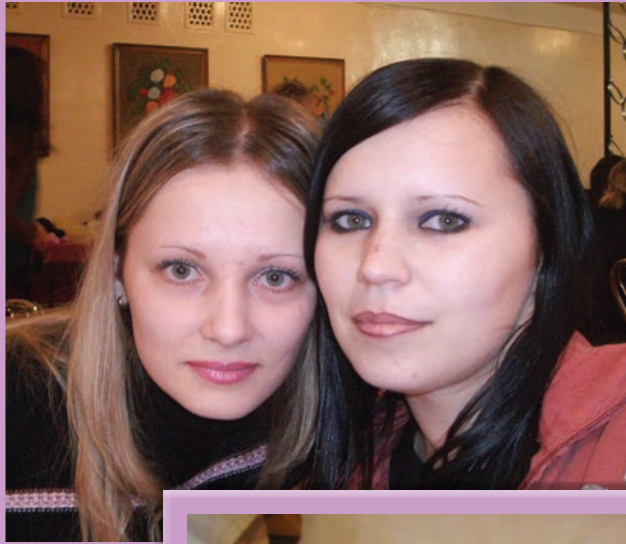


CLAIMS CONFERENCE PARTNER



AUSCHWITZ...

Yad Yisroel in Action
ORPHANAGE



Yad Yisroel in Action

KOSHER FOOD

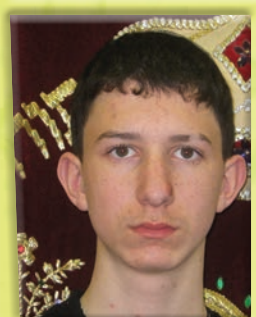
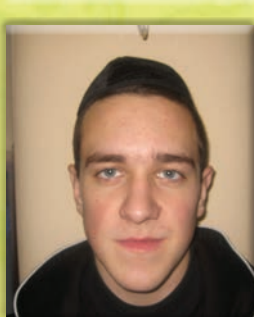
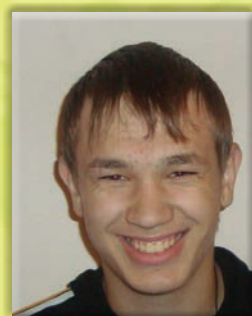
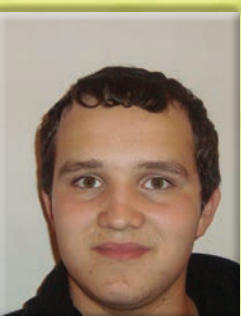
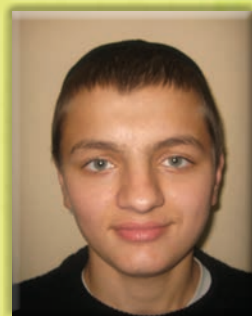
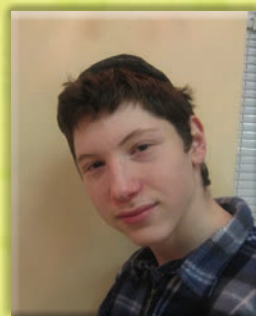
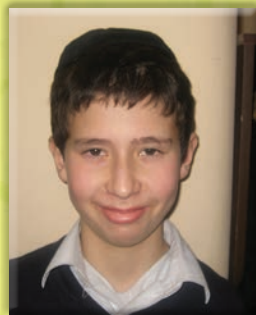


Students















Graduates



NECHAMA

KALINKOVITCH ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE/ MACHON SEM



KATYA

MINSK ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE/ OHR NAAVA



GITA

MINSK ▶ JERUSALEM
TOURO COLLEGE



LEAH

GOMEL ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE/MACHON SEM



ELISHEVA

BARANOVITCH ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE



CHAYA DEVORA

BREST ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE/ OHR NAAVA



YOCHAVED

RECHITSA ▶ MONTREAL
TOURO COLLEGE



KEREN

MINSK ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE/ OHR NAAVA



RIVKA
BARANOVICH ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO/ MACHON BASYA ROCHEL



LEAH DINA
BOBRUISK ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE/ OHR NAAVA



GILA
GOMEL ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE



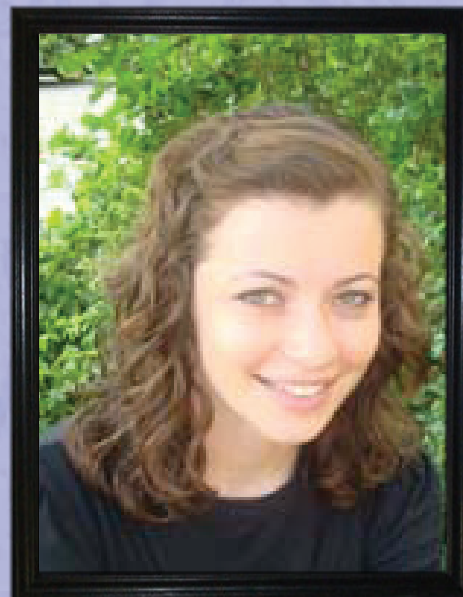
LEAH
MINSK ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO/ MACHON BASYA ROCHEL



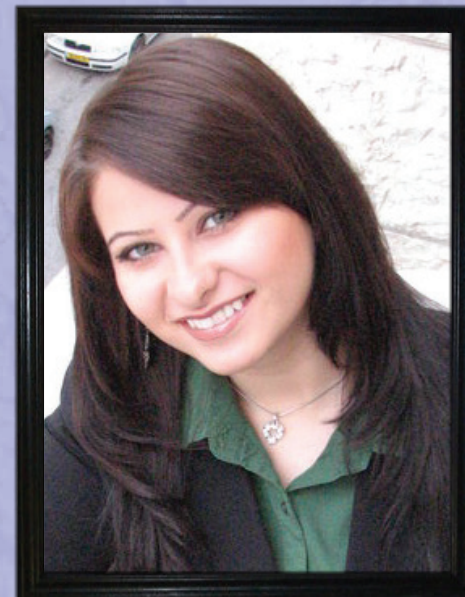
KAREN
MINSK ▶ BROOKLYN
TOURO COLLEGE/ OHR NAAVA



ORLY
MINSK ▶ JERUSALEM
MACHON MEIR



ORIT
PINSK ▶ JERUSALEM
MEOR SEMINARY



LEAH
BORISOV ▶ GATESHEAD
BAIS CHAYA ROCHEL



NATALIE
GOMEL ▶ ODESSA
ODESSA UNIVERSITY



RIVKA
MINSK ▶ JERUSALEM
ATERET YEHUDIT



SHAINA
MINSK ▶ PINSK
PINSK MEDCOLLEGE



GALIA
MINSK ▶ MANHATTAN
STERN COLLEGE



ARIELLA
GOMEL ▶ ODESSA
ODESSA UNIVERSITY



SHAINA
MINSK ▶ MANHATTAN
STERN COLLEGE



RACHEL
KALINKOVITCH ▶ JERUSALEM
ATERET YEHUDIT



RIKKI
ZHLOBIN ▶ JERUSALEM
ATERET YEHUDIT



YITZCHOK
BREST ▶ LAKEWOOD
TAL TORAH



MEIR
RECHITZA ▶ LAKEWOOD
TAL TORAH



ZHENYA
VITEBSK ▶ LAKEWOOD
TAL TORAH



YONOSON
LIDA ▶ LAKEWOOD
TAL TORAH



OVADIA
POLOTSK ▶ LAKEWOOD
TAL TORAH



MOSHE
RECHITZA ▶ LAKEWOOD
TAL TORAH



BORUCH
VITEBSK ▶ CLEVELAND
HEBREW ACADEMY



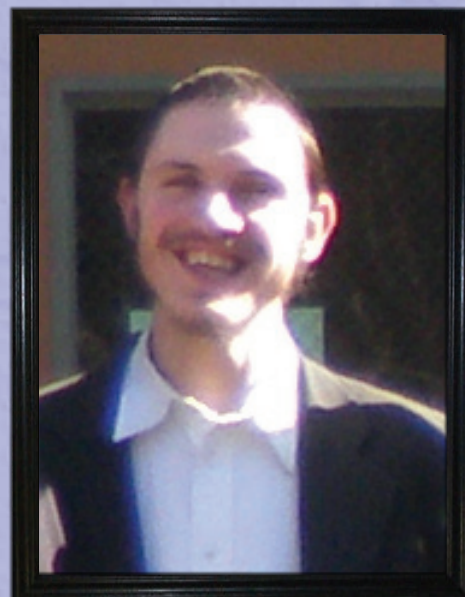
AVROHOM
MINSK ▶ KIEV
KIEV KOLEL



OVADIA
MINSK ▶ BROOKLYN
YESHIVA CHAIM BERLIN



ALEXANDER
BORISSOV ▶ KIEV
KIEV KOLEL



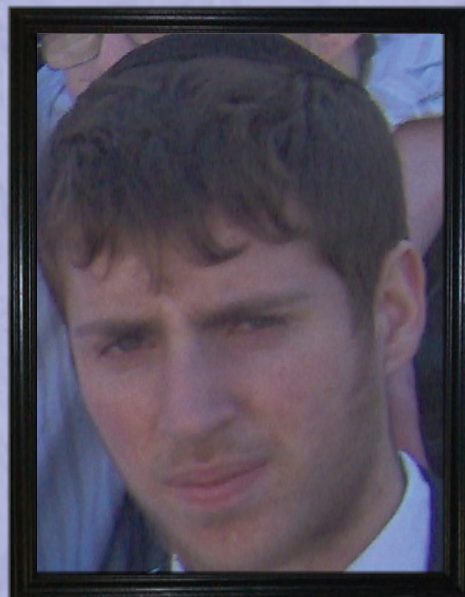
ELIEZER
BORISSOV ▶ KIEV
KIEV KOLEL



ARIEL
MINSK ▶ MONSEY
KOL YAAKOV



DIMA
BREST ▶ YERUSHOLAYIM
MACHON



AVROHOM
KALINKOVITCH ▶ YERUSHOLAYIM
MACHON MEIR



CHAIM
GOMEL ▶ YERUSHOLAYIM
MACHON MEIR



SIMCHA
MOGILEV ▶ YERUSHOLAYIM
MACHON CHAYIL

GRADUATES SENT TO LEARN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD 2001-2011

Adina Kovalova
 Agofonov Dmitry
 Agofonov Vladzislav
 Aharon Muzichenko Muzichenko
 Akiva Folko
 Alex Finski
 Alexander Dubrova
 Alexander Vilkovsky
 Aliaksandr Karol
 Aliza Kanapatskaya
 Alona Bobrova
 Aloshe Kikoyoin
 Aloshe Negreyev
 Ambrazhevich Victoria
 Anastasiya Dauhapolava
 Anastasiya Siniakovich
 Anat Rubinshteyn
 Andreyeva Yevgenya
 Anton Kochler
 Anton Sianko
 Artsiom Luhinin
 Artsiom Marsykevich
 Artur evseev
 Arye Leib Mazurov
 Aryeh Leib Daineko
 Aryeh Leib Dubin
 Avrohom Elimelech Gavrilovetz
 Avrohom Krol
 Avrohom Sheinin
 Avtushko Vladimir
 Ayelet Vainolovich
 Barabaner Arkady
 Yauneni Barnyach
 Barnyak Tatyana
 Batya Stepanava
 Batyukova Tatyana
 Berin Vlkadislav
 Boretzky Gleb
 Briksman Tatyana
 Bruria Edelman
 Bulgak Mariya
 Bulhach Viachaslav
 Butarin Mikhail
 Carmella Chizik
 Chaiko Maksim
 Chaim Maksayev
 Chaim Sheiny
 Chana Sidorovich
 Chana Yevtuchovich
 Chychykaila Dzianis
 Daniel Sitnikov
 Daniel Surovtzev

Daniel Zimovilin
 Darozhkin Aliaksandr
 Darya Subota
 Davidovsky Dmitri
 Denis Chichikaila
 Devoira Luzina
 Dima Chernin
 Dounar Katsiaryne
 Dovid Barchan
 Dovid Chaim Kravchuk
 Dovid Chaim Ritz
 Dovid Chasman
 Dovid Gitsovich
 Dovid Yitzchok Shklar
 Dubovetz Anna
 Dubovetz Stepan
 Dubovetz Tatyana
 Dziana Zakharava
 Efrayim Osipov
 Eidzelman IRYNA
 Eliezer Finski
 Eliezer Yishai Vilkovsky
 Elimelech Garkusha
 Esther Goldberg
 Esther Malka Subota
 Esther Simankova
 Evelina Nikelshpur
 Faina Korabava
 Flider Levy
 Fridman Aleksander
 Galaya Sverlitzkava
 Galya Hreisukh
 Garayeva Anastasiya
 Gavrilenko Semon
 Gennady Zhuravskiy
 German Yevgeny
 Gila Stepanyan
 Gilevich Elina
 Gita Zacharova
 Goloven Maksim
 Goloven Yekaterina
 Goloven Yevgeny
 Granika Yana
 Grishenko Anton
 Gromiko Sergei
 Gupalovich Ekaterina
 Guseinov Timur
 Halina Hreisukh
 Hanna Strizhova
 Harkusha Vasil
 Haurylavets Yauheni
 Ilana Gonikman

Ilya Dlinn
 Iryna Chumakova
 Iryna Yarets
 Iryna Yarets
 Ivanenko Viktoriya
 Kalchiba Artyom
 Kalmon Shimon Nefsichin
 Kaplanenko Andrei
 Karyna Lipai
 Katya Sitnik
 Kavaliova Sviatlana
 Keren Chizik
 Keren Chumakov
 Khazanovich Natalia
 Kola Kanapatsky
 Komisarchik Daniel
 Leah Konchits
 Kontorovich Moiseh
 Kostenko Yulia
 Kostroma Ekaterina
 Kupreshenko Alena
 Kupreshenko Maria
 Sara LevrentevaLea Burko
 Lea Orlova
 Lea Rabina
 Lisa Kanapatzkaya
 Lisa Molina
 Luba Finskaya
 Ilya Mahinitsky
 Maksim Dauhatses
 Marharyta Tuzhyk
 Maxim Dovgotolyes
 Meir Shimon Pleshko
 Menachem Mendel Prudnikov
 Menachem Mendel Ushenko
 Michal Demidova
 Michal Demidovich
 Mikhail Korabau
 Mikhailo Boris
 Mikulich Polina
 Igor Misak
 Moiseh Sitin
 Moshe Chaim Praspalavskas
 Moshe Dzerunov
 Moshe Leib Pashkevich
 Moshe Sholomo Poblkov
 Nadzeya Krasnikava
 Naomi Bobor
 Naomi Shpak
 Nastassia Nikitsenka
 Natallia Pihulskaya
 Naumov Vladimir
 Nesterovich Dmitri

Nesterovich Pavel
 Novik Ekaterina
 Oksusha Shelayev
 Ola Belayev
 Ola Podziukova
 Olga Kanopotskaya
 Orit Kavaliova
 Orli Yarets
 Osipenko Alina
 Ovadiya Vysotsky
 Palina Chyzyhyk
 Yauheni Patapouski
 Perri Krasnikova
 Pinchas Tarasenko
 Prokhorenko Roman
 Avner Pritulik
 Rachel Eskovets
 Refoel Akiva Vasilevsky
 Reuven Belozorov
 Reuven Minin
 Riki Elkavets
 Rivka Polokovskay
 Rivka Sinova
 Chaya Devora Sacharuk
 Sara Pigulskaya
 Sasha Duroshkin
 Sasha Ivseyev
 Sasha Kovalova
 Sasha Pervov
 Sergei Taranik
 Shaina Siniakovich
 Shaina Vaitraub
 Moshe Shapiro
 Shapkov Vladimir
 Shebsy Berukov
 Sheina Shmulevich
 Sheina Sorobovich
 Sheindy Markova
 Shestovetz Sergei
 Shestovetz Viktoriya
 Shimon Smirnoff
 Shimon Zimovilin
 Shimshon Tzvi Kochler
 Shipovalov Ivan
 Shkolnikov Vladislav
 Shmulevtzov Pasha
 Shtanyuk Olga
 Shuch Vladimir
 Shuchashvili Mikhail
 Shumyakova Yevgenya
 Shuskevich Anastasiya
 Rachel Shychansova

Ivan Shipavalau
 Sidorenko Ivan
 Simushkin Eliezer
 Sirotna Yuliya
 Sitik Tatyana
 Sitik Yuliya
 Sitnik Anatoly
 Sitnik Ekaterina
 Chana Skarysh
 Sophia Eidelman
 Gila Stepanyan
 Sukhashvili Mikhail
 Svyatlana Kavaliova
 Sysoi Noson
 Sysoi Zeev
 Timor Polokovsky
 Tuzhyk Marta
 Tuzikov Andrei
 Vlad Valdislav
 Vanuk Yana
 Vasa Dubik
 Vasilevskaya Yuliya
 Velvel Rabinov
 Vera Ilkavets
 Veranika Siniakovich
 Veranika Ushakova
 Veronika Sinyakovich
 Vika Bobre
 Viktor Zheleznov
 Viktoria Dubika
 Viktoriya Bobr
 Viktoriya Vainalovich
 Vita Kaplich
 Vladimirov Vladislav
 Voitekhovskaya Victoria
 Volha Silkovich
 Volha Vaintraub
 Volodkin Aryeh
 Yaakov Barchan
 Yaakov Vaksman
 Yaskavets Aliona
 Yauheniya Tarakanava
 Yefit Nevel
 Yisroel Paltzav
 Yitzhok Pakatayev
 Yuzepchuk Vernando
 Zecharia Juravsky
 Zhamoitsina ala
 Zhenya Nefsichin
 Zhenya Tulchinskaya
 Zoya Beder

Samples



Baranovich
2010



Brest
2011



Konchetser
2006



2010





Telchani
2008



Narostinach
2009



Pinsk
2007



Zavishi
2007

Konchester
2005



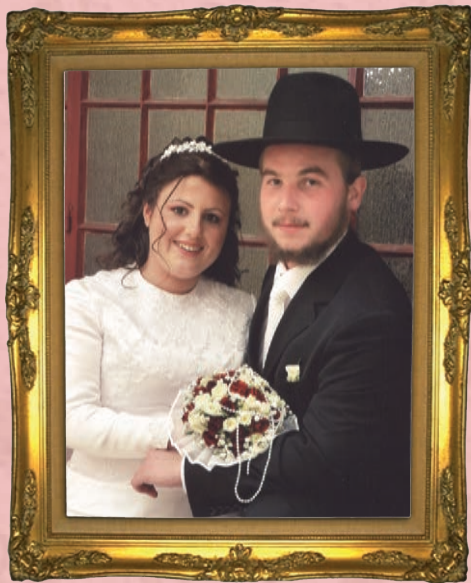
Narostinach
2009







Weddings



ARYEH LEIB AND ANAT MAZUROV
ISRAEL



MR. AND MRS. KAMADEER
ISRAEL



MR. AND MRS. MARCHENKO
NEW YORK, USA



YITSCHOK AND SARAH SEMEDOV
TORONTO, CANADA



MOSHE AND MICHAL POBOLKOV
PINSK, BELARUS



YISROEL AND ALIZA KOCHIS
PINSK, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. GRUBER
CANADA



YITSCHOK AND NAOMI KOSLOV
KIEV, UKRAINE



YAAKOV DOVID AND GITA KLUCHNIKOV
NEW YORK, USA



PINCHAS AND SHAINA TSINMAN
PINSK, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. ZIMOVILIN
LONDON, UK



SHLOMO AND SHAINA PICKMAN
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL



MR. AND MRS. KASTELANSKY



DAVID AND ERIKA RAPAPORT



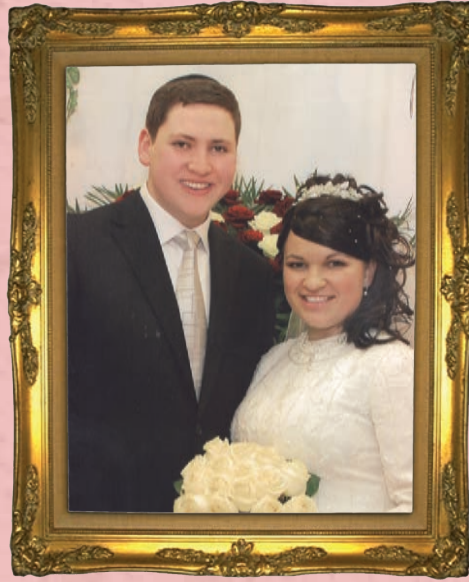
PINCHAS AND YAFIT MARSYNKEVITCH
KIEV, UKRAINE



AVROHOM AND RIVKA KROLL
KIEV, UKRAINE



SIMCHA AND SHEINA DUBINSKY
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL



YEHUDA AND SHAINA ORSAHANSKY
PINSK, BELARUS



ALEXANDER AND MICHAL FINSKY
KIEV, UKRAINE



NOCHUM AND ADINA ZHELEZNOV
PINSK, BELARUS



YOSSI AND ADINA GONIKMAN
KIEV, UKRAINE



RAPHAEL AND MALKY GOLDBERG
TORONTO, CANADA



MR. AND MRS. TARASENKO
TORONTO, CANADA



LEVI AND ESTHER NAZAROV
MOSCOW, RUSSIA



MR. AND MRS. MOSHE SITIN



MR. AND MRS. NOSSON TZVI BORSZTEIN



MR. AND MRS. YAKOV SHULAK



MR. AND MRS. PINCHAS MASLANIKOV



MR. AND MRS. DIRABINA



MR. AND MRS. SHUMITSKY



MR. AND MRS. TARASENKO



MR. AND MRS. YAAKOV PALEKOV

Mishpacha K'halacha



MR. AND MRS. DOBRINSKY
PINSK, BELARUS



MR AND MRS CHERNIN
MOGILEV, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. KONUCHOV
MOGILEV, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. KARLINSKY
PINSK, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. STAROBINSKY
PINSK, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. MISHKIN
KALILNKOVITCH, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. TREFIMOV



MR. AND MRS. PILOTOVICH
PINSK, BELARUS



MR. AND MRS. MAKIENKO



MR. AND MRS. GONIKMAN



MR. AND MRS. BARSHATSKY



MR. AND MRS. CHAZONOVITZ



MR. AND MRS. CHIZER



MR. AND MRS. EIDZELMAN



MR. AND MRS. KAUFMAN



MR. AND MRS. ROSENBERG



MR. AND MRS. LEIFMAN

In the News



a Lion, *not a* Lamb

*When **Rabbi Moshe Fhima** took a three-day trip to Russia in 1995, he was a curious yeshivah bochur with less than a bare-bones knowledge of Russian. Now he's a driving force in his adopted home, utilizing his gift of gab and indefatigable passion to maneuver his way through bureaucracy and mentalities reminiscent of the previous century. The fruits of his work have blossomed along with his own family, as Rabbi Fhima blends his 24/7 outreach machine with a big heart and lion's courage*

BY *Binyamin Rose*
PHOTOS *Ashi Bersin*

A Lion, Not A Lamb

Staring at the walls is usually a tell-tale sign of boredom, but anyone who gazes at one particular wall in Rabbi Moshe Fhima's office in the Belarusian city of Pinsk is certain to be captivated.

You might say the wall is Rabbi Fhima's trophy room, with its display of the wedding pictures of more than forty young couples he paired and marched to the *chuppah* since arriving in Pinsk, Belarus, ten years ago.

A picture of Rabbi Fhima's *rosh yeshivah*, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel *shlita*, graces another section of the wall. If Rabbi Fhima ever gets tired — and that's a big if, because for him, a forty-hour week means it's only Tuesday — he just needs to glance over his shoulder to recall the *mesirus nefesh* of the famed Mirrer *rosh yeshivah*, who battles debilitating illness on a moment-by-moment basis.

"I don't know anyone who comes close to the physical difficulties the Rosh Yeshivah has to overcome," says Rabbi Fhima. "I remember one day when he fell on Malchei Yisrael Street. Instead of returning home to rest, he insisted that he be taken directly to yeshivah because he had a *shur* to give. His famous motto is 'You have to do what you have to do.'"

Rabbi Fhima holds the humble title of community leader of Yad Yisroel, a Brooklyn-based organization that the Karlin-Stolin Rebbe established after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The nexus of Rabbi Fhima's activities takes place at the Beis HaKnesses Beis Aharon V'Yisrael, formerly the center of the Karliner Chassidus before World War II, in Pinsk, and he serves as *mara d'asra* for the city's estimated 1,000 Jews. But he has a large reach, one that goes far beyond his titles and runs well beyond the borders of Pinsk.

On an average day, he might receive as many as 200 phone calls and e-mails — that's about one every thirteen minutes — on matters of importance to the estimated 65,000 members of the Jewish community of Belarus, a land that Rav Chaim Volozhin, the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Shach, the Steipler Gaon, and members of the Stoliner dynasty once called home.

Almost one-third of Belarusian Jews are senior citizens or single mothers. While it is often difficult enough for people with that status to make ends meet in Western countries, the challenges are multiplied exponentially in a country that is on the verge of becoming Europe's next economic bailout project.

The economy of Belarus is so dreadful that the country is printing 100,000-ruble bills worth only \$20. Inflation is so wildly out of control that it takes \$20 to buy what used to cost just \$10 at the start of this year.

Just recently, Rabbi Fhima received 17 million rubles, or about \$3,400, to help someone in dire straits. "We got the money in a sack," he said. "It came in packs of 5,000-ruble bills, and each one is worth about 85 cents."

His life's mission has taken him to a country that can easily discombobulate anyone with even a vestige of Western mentality



A language for everyone

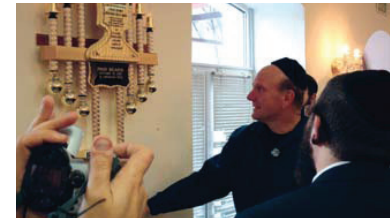
Having spent some time with Rabbi Fhima in Pinsk, I couldn't help but marvel at how self-possessed he is, even though his life's mission has taken him to a country that can easily discombobulate anyone with even a vestige of Western mentality.

He is equally at home when standing in front of his *talmidim* — who clearly adore him — and interpreting the words of visitors into fluent Russian, or when greeting visiting VIPs. And he's especially deft at dealing with the myriad local officials with whom he must maintain cordial relations.

"We are living in a special country where most things are scrutinized," Rabbi Fhima adds, choosing his words with care. "But when I look up and see this wall of *nachas* of forty couples, it obligates me to look ahead."



Rabbi Fhima is a picture of calm and control, even in a country still stuck in the last century



Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft, was moved to tears when he saw the memorial plaque for his mother

he has built the city and, more or less, they want to take care of him."

One of the positive aspects of Belarus's strict, authoritarian society is zero tolerance for crime. While the police might not hesitate to rough up a criminal, Rabbi Fhima, whose countenance brings a smile to anyone's face, has his own way of waging a war on crime.

One night, Shlomie was sitting with Rabbi Fhima in his office after official closing hours when a young man burst in. "He seemed to know Rabbi Fhima from somewhere," said Shlomie. "A lot of people in Pinsk know him. Anyway, this guy says, 'Moshe, I need money.' Rabbi Fhima said, 'I don't have money for you.'"

On hearing the bad news, the youth pulled his jacket open, revealing a gun hitched to the waist of his pants.

"I'm sitting over there and I'm getting a little nervous," said Shlomie, "while Rabbi Fhima tells me to start texting under the table."

Shlomie texted an aide to call the police, who got there before any harm could be done. What impressed Shlomie the most was how Rabbi Fhima treated a man who came to steal from him. "He was speaking to him like a father, asking him things like what he needed the money for."

Wit and Wisdom It takes astute men of exceptional fortitude to be able to wheel and deal with authorities in an authoritarian land such as Belarus. Over the years, Rabbi Fhima has had plenty of opportunities to prove his mettle. He was once arrested as a spy but was able to literally talk his way out of jail. On another occasion, he used his wits to keep a potential armed robber at bay until police could arrive. Yet another time, he used logic and wisdom to overcome the objections of city officials who were piling on bureaucratic delays in granting a permit for his new yeshivah building.

"Having someone like Rabbi Moshe Fhima is an asset for the city," says Shlomie Pilchick, who lived in Pinsk for close to five years — both as a *bochur* and as a married man — working alongside Rabbi Fhima. "The authorities know how much

A Lion, Not A Lamb

That Rabbi Fhima could speak to a thief in this manner comes as little surprise to others who have worked with him and have witnessed his composure in a variety of circumstances.

"Everyone feels like he's a father and a friend," says Lieba Rochel Flam, head counselor of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Fhima's girls' summer camp in Belarus. "He is the most devoted person. He is always available, and he finds ways to give emotional support and lend a listening ear to everyone."

Rabbi Avi Rubin, who today runs Partners in Torah Detroit, spent several years in Pinsk helping Rabbi Fhima establish one of his yeshivos. "Anyone who thinks you can reach his level of *koach* is joking, but my growth with him was extraordinary in all areas. He is a personality that you want to be around; he brings out your best qualities."



In Pinsk, the light never went out

Helicopter Diplomacy Just six months after arriving in Belarus, shortly after having set up a yeshiva, Rabbi Fhima had his first brush with the law. Since *bris milah* was forbidden under Belarusian law, Rabbi Fhima rented a "safe house" deep inside a forest where circumcisions could be performed with little risk of detection.

To defray the rent, plus the costs of flying in a mohel from overseas, Rabbi Fhima routinely sought donors for the cause. Since Belarus is replete with historical Jewish sites, such as the *kever* of Rav Chaim Volozhin and the yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Fhima thought it would be uplifting, in more ways than one, to treat the donors to a helicopter tour of the area.

It took two weeks to get official permission. Once they got off the ground, their flight was intercepted twice in progress, the second time ending with ground forces firing flares into the air as a warning to the pilot to land. As the donors climbed out of the helicopter and Rabbi Fhima identified himself as the group's leader, authorities slapped handcuffs on his wrists and informed him that he was under arrest for spying. The evidence: the helicopter had flown above several military bases, and he was in possession of a cellular phone — an almost unheard-of device in the Belarusian city.

Rabbi Fhima, who is not a small man, was confined to a cramped, dank cell where he could neither stand nor sit. This at least gave him some time to think, and when he was finally ushered into an interrogation room, it was soon clear that he had arrived at a somewhat outrageous defense strategy.

He informed his captors that his cellular phone was connected to an electronic chip implanted in his right forearm, which was hardwired straight to his brain. "As you know, I am a British citizen. If I push the button right here below my elbow, the British embassy will know exactly where I am, and if I do not check in within twenty-four hours, they will track me by satellite."



The boy's camp is in high spirits this summer

In those days, cellular phones were the size of an attaché case, and the small-town police who arrested him had probably never seen a computer in their lives, so Rabbi Fhima's threat sounded credible to them.

Now, it was a matter of who would blink first. The authorities did, with just two hours remaining in Rabbi Fhima's "ultimatum." It did take an additional five hours, however, until the paperwork could be completed, allowing him to walk out of jail as a free man. Noticing that twenty-seven hours had now passed since his arrest, one of his captors taunted him, "When are the British coming?"

"Well, what do you expect?" answered Rabbi Fhima. "Did you think they can make the distance from London to Radin in only three hours?"

House on Fire There was a hint of truth to Rabbi Fhima's alibi, because he does have a British connection. He was born in Manchester, England. His parents are originally

from Morocco, and his family name of Fhima is derived from the Arabic word for jeweler, which was the family business for many generations. As a young boy, he learned at a *chassidische* cheder, Talmud Torah Chinuch Norim, and then attended Yesodey HaTorah Day School. From there, it was on to the Gateshead Yeshiva, and then Yeshivas Mir in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Fhima might be able to talk his way out of life-threatening situations with most mortal men, but there was no way he was going to elude the circumstances under which he was handed his life's calling.

One Motzaei Shabbos in 1995, after having spent Shabbos in Rechovot, young Moshe Fhima hitched a ride back to the Mir with a Russian-speaking driver. At the end of a stilted conversation, the driver handed Rabbi Fhima a Hebrew-Russian dictionary. "Take it and learn a few Russian words," the fellow insisted.

Not quite sure why he was complying, Rabbi Fhima nevertheless spent a little time with his new "sefer" over the next couple of days, familiarizing himself with the Russian alphabet. Two days later, Rabbi Fhima was still awake at 3 a.m. when the phone rang. He ran to answer it before it could wake any of the other *bochurim*. On the other end of the line was Rabbi Yaakov Shteierman, calling from Yad Yisroel headquarters in New York. He was looking for volunteers to spend Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur in the Ukraine to give *chizuk* to the Jewish community.

Assuming it would be an eye-opening experience, and quickly calculating that he would only end up missing three days of yeshiva, Moshe Fhima agreed to fly out. His return ticket was booked so he could spend Succos in Manchester with his parents — but Yad Yisroel liked his work so much, they canceled the ticket on him.

Ever resourceful, Rabbi Fhima went to the airport anyway and found a fellow Jew who lent him the \$200 he would need to purchase a new ticket to England in time for Succos. From there, he planned to return to the Mir for the start of the winter *zman*.

Four days into the *zman*, Rabbi Fhima was summoned to meet with Rav Shmuel Auerbach *shlita*, who, after a brief conversation about his experiences in the Ukraine, told him, "Go back." Stunned, Rabbi Fhima went to his *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, who gave Rabbi Fhima a letter for Rav Auerbach explaining why Rabbi Fhima should remain in the Mir.

Rav Auerbach ripped up the letter and told Rabbi Fhima to take it back to Rav Finkel.

Shaken up at this point, Rabbi Fhima returned to Rav Finkel, who advised him to seek the advice of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *shlita* — who also told him to return to the Ukraine. Rabbi Fhima's mother had some strong objections, however, which forced Rabbi Fhima to seek Rav Elyashiv's advice one more time.

"What are you still doing here?" asked Rav Elyashiv when Rabbi Fhima returned. "If there was a house burning down, and there was a chance for you to save the children who were left inside, but your mother said not to go in, would you listen to your mother?"

The decision was rendered. Next stop: Kiev.

"That's what happens when you leave the yeshiva world for three days," quips Rabbi Fhima. "You never know how long three days will last."

It is clear to him now that this is what HaKadosh Baruch Hu had in mind for him. "He left me space to be *osek* in Yiddishkeit all day. From one point of view it's a big *zchus* and at the same time, a big *achrayvus*, because HaKadosh Baruch Hu demands a great deal from us."

A Day in the Life Rabbi Fhima spent the next five years in Kiev. Yad Yisroel's *menahel*, Rabbi Shmuel Dishon, along with Rabbi Shteierman, were hard at work to establish a *frum* community in Kiev, under the leadership of Rav Yaakov Bleich, chief rabbi of the Ukraine, as well as in Lvov under Rabbi Mordechai Shlomo Bald. Rabbi Fhima first arrived in Pinsk in 2001, where an infrastructure was already in place, thanks to Rabbi Yochanan Berman, who had come ten years earlier and supervised the reconstruction of the shul where Rabbi Fhima is now the rabbi.

In 1941, the Nazis slaughtered some 11,000 of the city's 30,000 Jews in one day. By the time World War II ended, Belarus was virtually Judenrein. Today, Pinsk has a boys' and girls' day school, a yeshiva, a synagogue, a *mikveh*, a soup kitchen, and a sprawling network of charitable institutions for Jews.

Belarus is a landlocked nation sandwiched between Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. After seven decades as a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, Belarus attained its independence in 1991. It has retained closer political and economic ties to Russia than to any of the other former Soviet republics. Government restrictions on freedom of speech and the press, peaceful assembly, and religion remain in place.

Home to 9.5 million people, Belarus has one of the world's



“ Rabbi Fhima just looks back over his shoulder at his “trophy wall” of *chasunah* photos and then the wall of worry melts away

lowest birthrates and highest death rates. The literacy rate is almost 100 percent and officially, unemployment is only 1 percent. Some Israeli high-tech companies have established plants to take advantage of the relatively well-educated labor force. Most Jews of working age are employed in various factories or small private businesses, such as mobile phone companies, travel and tourism, or in the building trades.

Since 2005, the government has renationalized a number of large private companies, and businesses have been subjected to pressure by central and local governments, including arbitrary changes in regulations, numerous rigorous inspections, and arrests of “disruptive” businessmen and factory owners.

Due to the heightening economic crisis, a new law was passed requiring employers to advance three months’ salary to workers so that they can take a summer vacation and not worry about money.

It’s a tough lot to overcome, but Rabbi Fhima just looks back over his shoulder at his “trophy wall” of *chasunah* photos and then the wall of worry melts away.

“It’s hard to encapsulate, but the main reason that makes you just want to be around him is his unshakable *emunah*,” says Perri Kobre, who has worked in Rabbi Fhima’s summer camps and today helps raise funds to help marry off his *shidduchim*. “He truly believes everything is going to be okay. Life is so unpredictable there, but for him, it’s always like, of course, this is supposed to happen because it’s *bashert*.”

What is a “normal” day like for Rabbi Fhima?

It might begin with a bar mitzvah, such as Moshe’s. Moshe came to Pinsk six years ago after a Jewish official in the education ministry referred his family to Rabbi Fhima. Moshe was one of five children from a single-parent family living in a 130-square foot apartment, which is about the size of a standard Israeli salon.

“I moved the whole family to Pinsk and gave them a big apartment here,” Rabbi Fhima remembers.

Of course, the personal attention did not end with an apartment; Rabbi Fhima remains involved in the children’s education and the family’s needs to this day, and made sure to be at Moshe’s side when he was called to the Torah for the first time.



Following Moshe’s first aliyah, Rabbi Fhima headed to the boys’ yeshivah to give a *shivur* and then returned to his office to work on administrative matters, including the challenges of meeting a payroll when it takes sacks full of money to make ends meet.

In the past two weeks, the *kehillah* has married off three couples; celebrated three brissim (for which the mohel was flown in from abroad); and was approached by four different people whose babies are at risk of being removed from their Jewish mothers and placed in government orphanages, as a direct result of the economic crisis, which has made people poor and homeless literally overnight. In the past week, Rabbi Fhima was also approached by two desperate young mothers; one with a young baby who has two growths in her head and a mother of four with a serious and life-threatening cancer.

This particular day ended with Moshe’s bar mitzvah party at 2 a.m. But a day in the life of Rabbi Moshe Fhima is likely to go on long past that hour. The first time we met was at a similar occasion — a *siyum* in his shul that ended about 2:30 a.m., with me staggering bleary-eyed to the car waiting to take me to my hotel, while the ever-energetic Rabbi Fhima urged me to visit his home and continue our conversation.

Rabbi Fhima is currently working on two other important projects. He is working closely with his right-hand man, Reb Yossi Goldblatt, to finalize plans to wrap up reconstruction of

the Confederatzia shul, one of forty-two shuls that remain in Pinsk. “We have the original plans of this shul from 200 years ago and we redid it exactly the way it was,” said Rabbi Fhima. “Reb Aharon HaGadol of Karlin davened here.”

The other project is a *chanukas habayis* for the boys’ school’s new building. This may end up being the biggest *simchah* of all, considering how obtaining a city permit for it has taken all of Rabbi Fhima’s considerable wiles.

The boys’ building is one of Pinsk’s most modern facilities and even has a fire-alarm system, but when classes were held before all of the paperwork could be formalized, the authorities called Rabbi Fhima to a meeting and ordered him to send the children home.

Rabbi Fhima asked them why his new, modern building was being singled out while most of Pinsk’s schoolchildren attend classes in old, dilapidated buildings, some without heat and indoor plumbing, not to mention without any fire-alarm system whatsoever.

“I told them, the difference between you and me is that you guys care about papers more than the human beings, while I

worry about the humans even if all the papers are not in place,” said Rabbi Fhima.

That line went over like a lead weight, at first. The official said, “Okay, wise guy, now I’m closing the school.”

“I told him, ‘How would it feel if I came like a lemel [a meek lamb]? I came here to argue with you!’ ” recounts Rabbi Fhima.

Having heard that, the government official began looking for ways to climb down from his tree. Rabbi Fhima extended a hand to him too, meeting him halfway. They conducted another inspection of the school and by agreeing to move a door a few inches from its present location and to add a few more bricks to a staircase, they were able to secure the permits.

“If you don’t have the gift of the gab, and don’t know what to tell them, and when to tell them, you will get into some interesting situations,” said Rabbi Fhima. “But you have to have a lot of *siyata d’Shmaya*, and you have to think before you talk.”

Rabbi Fhima’s quick repartee isn’t reserved solely for Belarusian civil servants; his talents are apparent even when the visitor is someone like the flamboyant CEO of Microsoft, Steve

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A Lion, Not A Lamb

Ballmer, whose own gift of gab and presentations at company meetings are legendary.

Through a connection with a travel agency, Rabbi Fhima heard that Ballmer, who is Jewish and whose mother was born in Pinsk, was coming with his sister to investigate his family roots, and that he was also interested in visiting the shul.

Ballmer received a personal invitation to the shul, where he lit a menorah with six *ner tamids* in memory of the six million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust.

"Then we asked him to turn around," said Rabbi Fhima. On the wall, was a plaque he had made for Ballmer in his mother's memory. "The *pintele Yid* in him lit up and he burst out crying like a child," said Rabbi Fhima. "After that, he went back to America and he gave us a nice donation for the new boys' school campus."

The Great Outdoors Even though Rabbi Fhima is certainly making an impact on the environment around him, one doesn't need more than a few hours in Pinsk to see that the neighborhood is still as quaint as it was generations ago. Most people live in old, tall stucco apartment buildings badly in need of repainting. The single-family homes are mostly wood-frame. Except for the main streets, most roads are unpaved.

With all the pluses and minuses of the Communist way of life, Rabbi Fhima and his growing family feel safe to walk the streets day and night, in any part of the country, and stay on good terms with their neighbors.

"I live in a private house next to an apartment block, and sometimes there is noise at night. There are some drunks, but the people are really very kind and they don't start up with us."

Rabbi Fhima's wife, Rikki, gives *shiurim* in the girls' school and is every bit the mother to the girls that Rabbi Fhima is the father to the boys. She also arranges a variety of programs in the summer camps, visits the aged and infirm, and ensures that everyone's birthday is remembered.

Perri Kobre describes Rebbetzin Fhima as "an amazing woman, full of energy, warmth and love," not to mention a vital role model for children who come from poverty-stricken, single-parent homes. "Just for them to see a healthy happy, Jewish couple is a big influence on them," says Ms. Kobre.

While she admits it is not easy for a young woman from

If you don't have the gift of the gab, you will get into some interesting situations. But you have to have a lot of *siyata d'Shmaya*

Brooklyn to pick herself up and go to Pinsk — "I cried for the first few days!" she admits — Perri says that the Fhimas make it infinitely easier to adjust. "It was very hard, getting used to food, the language — but you get used to it after a while, especially after you start seeing the results of things you're doing and you start feeling you have a purpose."

One of the tasks of the *madrichos* is to say Shema every night with the young girls. "One night we came in late, and we thought we missed Kriyas Shema, but then I started hearing what sounded like whistling under the covers," says Ms. Kobre. "When I listened closer, I could hear they were saying Shema on their own."

While temperatures in Belarus can dip into the thirties already by Succos time, the *chag* itself provides the warmth. Both the boy's and girl's schools have their own succah for eating, which the girls decorate beforehand in crafts classes, while the "hardy" boys have a separate sleeping succah at the yeshivah.

One year on the first night of Succos, the girls came out to eat in the succah and were startled to see Rabbi Fhima speaking on the phone. "He later told us that he had just learned that a boy in Minsk was diagnosed with a life threatening illness and that he needed to raise \$20,000 as soon as possible. That's what he was doing on the phone," Ms. Kobre recounts.

Thanks to Rabbi Fhima's intervention in this case of *pikuach nefesh*, the boy, who was in critical condition after just being diagnosed with three brain tumors, was flown on Yom Tov to Israel for immediate treatment.



The Pinsk shul proved that bureaucracy is surmountable

feel happy to be part of the mitzvah and be *mevater* on our time. That's certainly a lesson I learned from home."

While Rabbi Fhima strives to continue building his community in Pinsk, he will send protégées onward if he feels they will grow more elsewhere. There are currently at least twenty Pinsk girls in the United States. Chana Nortman, a Yad Yisroel volunteer in New York, keeps track of them, including the ones who live in cities such as Denver and Detroit.

One contingent that was placed in New York learns in seminary in the morning and attends Stern College or Touro College in the afternoons. "I'm in touch with them every single week, and I know where they go on Shabbos and also help arrange things like doctor's appointments for them," says Ms. Nortman, who was a summer camp counselor and also lived in Pinsk for about six months. She also helps find them part-time jobs, and locates families who are interested in taking one or more girls in as boarders.

While some of the girls experience difficulties learning English and getting adjusted to the new culture, most make a relatively smooth transition.

"The majority of them are doing really well," says Ms. Nortman. "It's beautiful to see how they become *frummer* and get involved in the community. The girls are always so surprised and say it is so interesting to see everyone smile and say good morning, because in Belarus they walk down the street and they feel that nobody's smiling. People in Pinsk are more worried about what's going to be tomorrow and whether there will be food to put on the table."

The ultimate success, at least for one girl who studied in the Denver Bais Yaakov, came two weeks ago when she mainstreamed herself by marrying an American-born *bochur* and established a new and more promising life for herself.

It's yet another picture for Rabbi Fhima's trophy case, and it is bound not to be the last. ❁

Lessons from Home Much as they have benefited the community with their founts of generosity and enthusiasm, the Fhimas have found Pinsk to be a wellspring of brachah for their family as well. Their first child, who is now eight, was born there, and since then Rebbetzin Fhima has given birth to three sets of twins. The eight-year old just completed third grade, where her instructor was a Bais Yaakov graduate from Israel. Class size can be small, however, and at the conclusion of this past school year, her only classmate left for Israel. When she expressed concern that she would be the only girl in her class, Rabbi Fhima consoled the little girl by explaining that in "the old days," having a private instructor was a privilege that only the wealthy could afford, and besides, the rest of the girls in the school would be like sisters to her.

Pinsk has one small kosher store that only stocks basic commodities, and the Fhima children have been taught they can't just walk into a store and buy what they want — although one child excitedly picked up a Coca-Cola off the shelf and said, "Abba, I found something we can buy!"

In spite of the challenges growing up *frum* in Pinsk, the Fhimas impart a living lesson in *chesed* to their children. It's a lesson Rabbi Fhima credits to his parents.

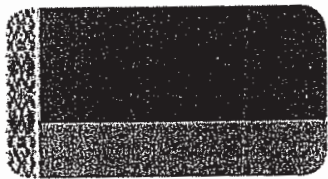
"When we would ride home from school," he remembers, "my father would repeatedly explain that you don't always have to think of yourself. Even though we're busy 90 percent of the day, when it comes to doing for other people, we should

From Pinsk To Touro

A Jewish Journey

BY: PERRI KOBRE

In the southwest corner of Belarus, a country in the Former Soviet Union, lies a small and unremarkable city called Pinsk. Unremarkable, that is, in landscape alone. For nestled within this drab-looking city is a spiritually pulsating Jewish community



that is growing and thriving despite the city's sordid history of anti-Jewish hostility. In the year 2000, Rabbi Moshe Fhima and his wife Rikki arrived in Pinsk. They were asked by the Brooklyn-based outreach organization Yad Yisroel to make Pinsk their home in an effort to make that Jew-

Continued on Page 10

From Pinsk to Touro

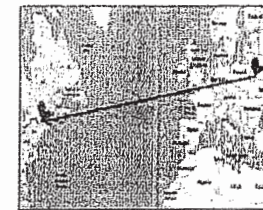
Continued from Page 1

ish desert bloom. The Fhimas took on the daunting challenge of finding Jewish children throughout Belarus and introduce them to their heritage.

The news of a Jewish school opening in Pinsk generated so much interest that the Fhimas were able to open two separate dormitory high schools, for boys and girls. Families were brought in to teach these eager students and a mivkah, kindergarten, kosher store and summer camps were not long in coming. Thanks to the indefatigable Rabbi and his wife, the community continues to expand exponentially, reaching boys and girls throughout the country who may not even have known they were Jewish until recently. Shabbos, Yom Tov, Kashrus and Tefilla are all introduced to the students who have never heard of such concepts and who take to them enthusiastically. The warmth of the Fhimas and the other teachers has helped many of these precious students overcome great opposition from their homes and choose the path they have come to love, that of Torah and mitzvos.

However, with success came a problem: What were the students to do once they finished high school in Pinsk? What sort of Jewish future lay in store for these students if they were to remain in their homeland after graduation? That's where Touro College entered the picture. Due to the unbelievable largesse of Touro's Rabbi Doniel Lander and Dr. Alan Kadish, a bright new vista was opened for twelve graduates from Pinsk. In keeping with the vision of Touro's founder, Dr. Bernard Lander, to create institutions that enable Jewish men and women to pursue higher education and career training in a Jewish, appropriate environment, they graciously opened their doors to these Pinsk girls, allowing them to join their institution and build a future

for themselves in this country. Dean Avery Horowitz and Mrs. Renee Blinder have been instrumental in making the girls' transition as pleasant as possible as well as Mr. Schabes whose help is invaluable.



How do girls for whom English is not a first language acclimate to a full academic program in that language? The girls first attend special classes that help them improve their English skills before integrating into the mainstream Touro classes. As their English proficiency improves, they begin taking classes toward their major, in areas like accounting, physical therapy or graphic design. "It's interesting for me to be in an English speaking environment," says Gila Stepanyan, who studied in Pinsk and is now working towards an accounting degree in Touro. "It's a different mentality, different type of teachers and it's hard to get used to these things, but once you get used to the subject, it gets easier." Gila feels that the staff and student body in general are very welcoming even though she may seem different than them at first. "Touro is a Jewish college so they are very nice and kind. I don't feel like I am alone. The girls are all really friendly and offer help with class work, which is really very nice. Touro has been very good to us, giving us the opportunity to be here."

It has already been almost two years since Rabbi Dr. Lander has passed on, yet his farsighted vision and generosity have continued to live on, as the institution he created, Touro College, helps these girls from Pinsk continue down a path that they were first placed upon by the Fhimas. 