

FOCUS ON FACULTY

The Yeshivah of Flatbush prides itself on both its graduates and its faculty. This column is designed to highlight members of our faculty who are also graduates of the Yeshivah. Each issue of the Flatbush Forum will feature a teacher alumnus/alumna.

A PASSION FOR LEARNING

Ever since her high school years at the Yeshivah of Flatbush, Leora Bednarsh (nee Feigenblum, E.S.'84, H.S.'88) has loved to learn and to delve into the intricacies of the Talmud. Her favorite class was always Rabbi Raymond Harari's *gemara shiur*. Her mentor to this day, Rabbi Harari instilled in her a love of learning along with the skills to explore the complexities of her subject matter. Her post-high school education brought her to Brovender's in Israel, where she spent an intensive year studying, appreciating the high level of learning and the freedom of independent study.



Always interested in the sciences, Leora spent a high school summer in a special program at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, working in a molecular biology lab. Although she did not feel satisfied with the lab work and experiments in which she was involved, she planned to pursue a career in biology when she returned from Israel and enrolled in Princeton University. She soon found that her proposed course of study was disappointing, as well, and she changed her career choice. She graduated from Princeton with a major in Psychology and a minor in Linguistics, writing her senior thesis on "Language Development in Children."

Along with her strong emphasis on academics and scholastic achievement in college, Leora found the time to continue her Hebrew studies. Winter and summer breaks were spent learning either in the U.S. or Israel, and her favorite class, the one she eagerly awaited every week, was a *gemara shiur* given by Rabbi Kenny Waxman, who would continue to play an important role in her life.

After college graduation, Leora took a year off to learn at Drisha Institute in Mnahattan, again under the tutelage of Rabbi Waxman, studying *halachic* and *Talmudic* texts in depth. At Drisha, Leora found what she was really looking

for: a *chevra* of women whose goals and ideals mirrored her own. Combining their passion for learning with their commitment to *halacha*, they sought, through a process of give and take, to find the intelligent religious woman's place in Judaism. Leora was one of the first three women to graduate from Drisha's program just last year, having completed a unique, rigorous and intense course of study.

Although ultimately, Leora would like to blend her interest in *halacha* with her interest in biology, probably in the field of reproduction, this past year she has returned to the Yeshivah of Flatbush Joel Braverman High School to teach *gemara*, while her husband, Assaf, is completing his *smicha* at Riets. She now stands at the front of the same classrooms in which she took notes not very long ago, but she acknowledges that she no longer feels like a student. Remarking on changes in the school, she cites the influx of young teachers, an increased interest in learning *lishma*, excellent attendance at *mishmar* classes and summering in Israel at various yeshivot, as examples. Her love and enthusiasm for her subject, together with her vibrant, warm and caring personality, have quickly endeared her to the students. Following the maxim *d'varim shebalev, enam d'varim*, "words that are in the heart are not words," she seeks to verbalize, express and clarify ideas. Turning thoughts into words and actions gives them validity, and, by example, she has become a wonderful role model for her students. Through her one-on-one and classroom *sichot*, she has developed strong personal relationships with the girls in her classes who understand how much she cares about them and are encouraged by her welcoming and non-intimidating manner. In addition, she tutors students in all Judaic Studies subjects, her patience enabling her to reach out to them. The field of education is the perfect medium for Leora, and her work at the Yeshivah of Flatbush has proved very satisfying.

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