

# Sephardic Minyan Gets The Auditorium At Yeshivah Of Flatbush

David Betesh

**M**uch has changed at the Yeshivah of Flatbush since I graduated in June of 2002. As I recently walked into the building, for the monthly Sunday morning program, I noticed more changes than just the extra coats of paint on the corridor walls, the new look of the lounge and the nicely renovated offices. Besides the new faces in the faculty and student body, I recognized a major change in the cultural demographics in the school. It was shocking for me to see that the school now has an overwhelming Sephardic majority.

This academic year, for the first time since its early inception, the Sephardic Minyan has been moved from the multiple classrooms and a small *Beit Midrash* into the large auditorium. This accommodation was needed for the large number of Sephardic students attending the school. The Ashkenazim, the former majority of the student body and faculty, have been moved into the *Beit Midrash* and smaller classrooms. This symbolic move reflects a major change in the demographics of the school and the Flatbush neighborhood in Brooklyn.

The neighborhood of Flatbush has been losing Modern Orthodox Ashkenazi families at a quick rate. These families have been moving out of Brooklyn in favor of Queens, Long Island, Staten Island, New Jersey, and other suburban areas. In the past, many of students traveled by bus to school (and many still do), but as the local schools in their areas improve, many parents are sending their children to those local high schools. As for the other Modern Orthodox families living in

Flatbush, they have become more religious and have sent their children to more stringent yeshivahs in the area. Because of these two major shifts, Flatbush has been losing a significant number of Ashkenazi applicants. These factors have been very important in the new demographics of the school.

Over the past decade, the Sephardic community has become more and more influential in the Yeshivah of Flatbush and the

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Flatbush neighborhood at large. From the Ladies Auxiliary to the board members (including the president and vice president), and from the faculty including the new *Rosh Yeshivah* to the student body, there have been a lot more Sephardic faces involved with the school. When I asked some of the students whether they sense that there are differences in the demographics, they said that they have definitely recognized the change, however, when I asked if they felt that the academic aspects of the school were different, they said, "it's the same hard Flatbush that your friend failed out of." In other words, the same high standards that Yeshivah of Flatbush has always prided itself on, still remain. This is probably due to the fact that the change in the stu-

dent body has been a gradual one, over the past few years, and it didn't change overnight.

Concerns raised by cynics are that the Sephardic students don't like to attend prestigious colleges or Israel for the year. This stereotype is being broken one student at a time as more and more Sephardic graduates have been accepted into high-ranking colleges and also go to Israel after they graduate. Most Flatbush students attend a four-year

college and many of them end up pursuing their education further and going into professional fields. At this point, it can easily be concluded that if any Sephardic parent sends their child to Flatbush, not only do they want them to be educated in the secular sense, but they also want to instill within them the values of Torah, the love of Israel, and a positive

involvement in the real world. The very values that the school was founded on.

On a personal note, it alarms me that there are so many more Sephardic students than Ashkenazi students. Not that there is anything wrong with having so many Sephardic students, but the lack of diversity is not the Flatbush that I remember. It benefits the Sephardic students tremendously to have friends that come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. I think it is a healthy learning experience. The traditional ratio of 50:50 has been the most effective for social education. I hope that in the upcoming years we can get the ratio back to normal. □

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