

## Agra d'Pirka's Upcoming Decade Dinner — Historic Event Celebrates Ten Incredible Years



Harav Aharon Kahn at Flatbush Agra D'Pirka pre-Pesach program.



Harav Shmuel Simcha Horowitz speaking at Flatbush Agra D'Pirka siyum on Masechet Megillah.

### CHAIM FUHRER

It all started ten years ago at Knesses Bais Avigdor, a centrally located *beis medrash* in Brooklyn. That's when Agra d'Pirka, an innovative concept in Torah learning, first opened its doors. Fast forward ten years and today this morning *kollel* program has turned into a flourishing movement that is galvanizing close to a thousand individuals in nine different communities to commit to Torah learning.

What is Agra d'Pirka? It's an organized morning *kollel* program geared towards local professionals, business owners, college students, retirees, or anyone who wishes to increase his morning *limud haTorah*. The program, founded by Mr. Ezra Klein of Brooklyn, runs from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Monday through Thursday, with an outstanding roster of *Maggidei Shiur* at each location.

How did it all get started? When and where did it all begin? Reb Ezra looks back at ten incredible years and reminisces about the early days.

"Ten years ago," says Reb Ezra, "there were no mid-morning *shiurim* that I knew of in Flatbush. There were *Daf Yomi* groups and also *chavrusa* programs, but nothing quite like Agra d'Pirka."

After visiting several local shuls, Reb Ezra concluded that "there must be a large populace in Flatbush that could benefit from mid-morning *shiurim*: people with flexible job schedules, business owners, consultants, and even college students who don't take morning classes."

He wondered whether he could create a program that would serve this sizeable population. But it wasn't until several years later that he actually put his plan into action. In 2009, Reb Ezra's mother, Pessi Rochel bas Ezra, *a"h*, passed away. "She was a scion of a very storied family," he said. "Her father was *Rosh Yeshiva* of Arugas Habosem and a *talmid* of the Arugas Habosem himself. She survived Auschwitz and then rebuilt a beautiful *Torahdig* family after the War in Forest Hills."

Reb Ezra says his mother would strive for greatness. "She never rested on her laurels. Even in her later years, she created a *shidduch* forum for singles to meet."

Reb Ezra created the program as a tribute to his mother. Harav Aaron Kahn, *Mara d'Asra* of Knesses Beis Avigdor and spiritual leader of Agra d'Pirka, suggested the name Agra d'Pirka as an acronym for the initials of Pessi Rochel Klein. Today the program is dedicated in memory of both Reb Ezra's mother and his father, (Avraham Elozor Klein ben Yisroel Yehuda,

*z"l*), as well as his in-laws, (Yisroel Zev ben Avrohom Tzvi, *z"l*, and Yehudis Baila bas Shlomo Yehuda Breiner, *a"h*).

It was a bold initiative to be sure, but Reb Ezra sensed that the world was ready for it. With the baby-boomer generation contemplating early retirement and many others either working remotely or with flexible hours, there were plenty of people who could benefit from such a program. "In Flatbush alone, there must be three or four hundred people who are learning in different venues during the morning." Agra d'Pirka would serve to unify them in one location. "Think of us as a University for *Yiddishkeit*, a yeshiva that offers multiple *shiurim* by a variety of *Maggidei Shiur* on a range of topics."

Reb Ezra understood that to attract bright and dedicated participants, he would have to offer engaging and articulate lecturers. He hand-picked his *Maggidei Shiur*, choosing exceptionally talented and knowledgeable *talmidei chachamim* for his program.

"We offered a 'Dream Team' from the very beginning," he says. Remarkably, most of that original dream team is still giving *shiurim* at Agra d'Pirka, even after all these years. Harav Shmuel Simcha Horowitz, Harav Reuven Scheinberg, Harav Yerachmiel Frankel, and of course, Harav Kahn, are with the program since its inception. And the steadily growing number of committed participants who join on a regular basis is testimony to their success.

Reb Ezra advertised the program extensively back in 2009 but was still apprehensive about what would happen on that first day. As it turned out, the program opened to a full house. "It was astounding," he remembers. "We had a crowd of 50 people from day one. They came by the score not just from the local area but from all corners of Flatbush and also from Boro Park. I was so shocked that within a few months, I decided to open in Boro Park as well."

Thus was born the concept of opening Agra d'Pirka in multiple locations. "I hadn't yet come to the realization that every neighborhood needs this," says Reb Ezra, "until sometime during the first year. But the fact is that people over 40 who are independent exist in every Jewish community. Agra d'Pirka brings them together."

In Cheshvan of 2010, just a year after the Flatbush grand opening, the Boro Park Agra d'Pirka was born. After that, there was no stopping the momentum. In 2011, a branch of Agra d'Pirka opened in Kew Garden Hills. In 2012, it opened in Lakewood, in 2014, in Williamsburg, and in 2015, at the Miami Beach Kollel.

Then, in April of 2016, Agra d'Pirka teamed up with Mr. Moshe Klein of FountainView in Monsey to

start a program in that facility. That led to a Baltimore program opening in September of 2018, and an innovative Spring Valley/Monsey evening program in November of the same year.

And it doesn't end there. Agra d'Pirka programs are currently being planned for the communities of Los Angeles and West Palm Beach, as well as Chicago and Atlanta. "*Limud haTorah*," says Reb Ezra, "is unlimited."

Agra d'Pirka doesn't run on autopilot, and there's a full staff of employees and volunteers who work tirelessly to make it happen. These people, under the direction of Mr. Chaim Fuhrer, arrange the light breakfast that is available at most locations, schedule the speakers, enlist substitute *Maggidei Shiur* when necessary, and — most noteworthy — coordinate the highly anticipated special legal holiday programs that draw large crowds.

Reb Ezra says he's running Agra d'Pirka like a business, a Torah business. "And we're doing it on a shoestring budget." There are currently a total of 55 staff members, including representatives at each location who manage the programs and report directly back to the central office.

All these people are vital to the program, of course. But the ones who really make it happen are the *shiur* participants who show up day after day, week after week, to be a part of this awesome endeavor.

It's not easy. "Most of the *shiurim* are on a high level," Reb Ezra points out. "And you have to make an effort to keep up."

But the thirst for Torah is overwhelming. "Agra d'Pirka," he says, "brought advanced Torah learning to the masses who did not spend their formative years in Lakewood or similar yeshivos learning full time. That phenomenon hardly existed back in the eighties. There were *yechidim*, yes, but most people didn't have that opportunity which their children have today."

That's why Agra d'Pirka is such a game-changer. "When they got married 30 or 40 years ago, these participants didn't have a chance to learn seriously. Now they're making up for it by learning two or three hours a day on a consistent basis."

Invariably, they are saying that the program is changing their lives.

Join Agra d'Pirka's Decade Dinner celebrating ten years of Torah illuminating nine communities. The dinner will be held Sunday evening, November 24 at Ateres Reva Hall in Brooklyn. For more information, contact Agra d'Pirka at [info@agradpirka.org](mailto:info@agradpirka.org) or call 212-661-9157.