

## The Faces Behind Agra D'Pirka: Celebrating a Decade of Nationwide Growth

MARGIE PENSAK

In 2009, when Mr. Ezra Klein founded a learning program for *baalei battim* in his Flatbush community *I'ily nishmas* his mother, Pesi Rochel Klein, *a"h* (whose initials spell out "Pirka"), on her first *yahrtzeit*, little did he realize that it would blossom into a nationwide program. In celebration of its first ten years of tremendous growth, the Agra D'Pirka Decade Dinner will take place on Sunday evening, November 24, at the Tiferes Rivka Hall in Brooklyn at 6 p.m.

### The Backstory

"Agra D'Pirka is an organized morning learning program geared towards local professionals, business owners, college students, retirees and anyone else who wishes to increase his *limud haTorah*," explains Agra D'Pirka administrator and dinner committee member Rabbi Chaim Fuhrer. "The program typically runs from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., with an impressive roster of *Maggidei Shiur* at each of its many locations. Currently, Agra D'Pirka has hundreds of *shiurim* on TorahAnytime and Kol Halashon, enabling *limud haTorah* beyond the program's *beis medrash* walls."

Adds Reb Ezra, who is a Columbia University-trained lawyer by profession and manages his own law firm, "I decided that I wanted to start a *kollel* for *baalei battim* from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. After learning for many years during those hours, it occurred to me that there is a large segment of our population that doesn't need to go to work from 9 to 5 who can benefit from this. The need for it was so clear."

Since its inception, the free Agra D'Pirka morning *kollel* program, which includes a light breakfast, has expanded to include Boro Park, Queens, Lakewood, Monsey, Miami, Williamsburg, Baltimore and Spring Valley.

"We have about 500 people learning all morning, Monday through Thursday," notes Reb Ezra. "We have close to 100 top-quality *Maggidei Shiur*. The program is a sight to behold! There have been a lot of knock-offs of the program, which is beautiful; we encourage that and we try to help them out when we can — logistically and stylistically — with program ideas, because no one has a corner on Torah."

### The Honorees

Harav Aharon Kahn, *Mara d'Asra*, Knesses Bais Avigdor, in Flatbush, will deliver *divrei brachah* at the decade dinner. The renowned *maggid*, Rabbi Paysach Krohn, will be the guest speaker. The guests of honor are Mr. Moshe Aharon Hoffman of Agra D'Pirka of Williamsburg; Rabbi Yankel Herskovitz, daily *Maggid Shiur*, Agra D'Pirka of Baltimore; Mr. Meir Nussbaum of Agra D'Pirka of Lakewood;



Rabbi Dovid Heber at Baltimore Agra D'Pirka.

and Mr. Dovid Tanenbaum, of Agra D'Pirka of Queens. An award will also be given to the family of renowned *mechaber* Harav Avraham Finkel, *zt"l*. There will also be a special video presentation.

I had the privilege of speaking to the guests of honor about their participation in the program. This is what they shared with me...

### Rabbi Yankel Herskovitz, Daily Maggid Shiur, Agra D'Pirka of Baltimore:

"I started giving the *Daf Yomi shiur* about 40 years ago while working full-time and stopped after 33 years. I subsequently started giving a *Yerushalmi shiur*. About a month after I retired as a partner in a national CPA firm, over a year ago, I got a call from Ezra Klein. It was like manna from Heaven! I couldn't believe my great fortune ... I am getting tremendous benefit from being an Agra D'Pirka *Maggid Shiur*. We are learning at the level of an advanced *yeshivah shiur* — learning in a way that I have not learned since I left the *yeshivah* world. We discuss what we learn and get involved in the topic. *Baruch Hashem*, I reached a stage where I can learn in this manner and I have an audience who wants to learn the same way. I have to give Ezra Klein tremendous credit."

### Mr. Meir Nussbaum, Agra D'Pirka of Lakewood:

"Agra D'Pirka of Lakewood started out about six years ago with five people; in the last two to three years it has drawn more than 40 participants daily, from different backgrounds and various professions. Agra D'Pirka has been in my daily planner four days of every week, ever since the program began in Lakewood. I feel that it is integral to me being able to be *kovei'a itim l'Torah*.

"When it was first introduced to Lakewood, Agra D'Pirka could have been viewed as bringing coals to Newcastle. In spite of a somewhat understated beginning, we are flourishing ... The professionalism and consistent quality is a work of art that sets a standard which we all appreciate. Thank you, Ezra, for establishing this program in Lakewood and eight other venues."



Rabbi Eliezer Simcha Lief at Monsey Agra D'Pirka.

### Mr. Dovid Tanenbaum, Agra D'Pirka of Kew Gardens Hills, Queens:

"The Agra D'Pirka of Queens started nine years ago and it is a reflection of the diverse Queens Jewish community. The 20-30 participants are of varied learning backgrounds — Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Litvishe and Chassidische. When I turned 70, I retired and looked for a way to spend my day appropriately and productively. I have been going to a *Daf Yomi shiur* for about 48 years and I have been learning with a *chavrusa* at night for close to 25 years, but this is in addition ...

"Agra D'Pirka is a wonderful opportunity that I recommend highly. The interactive give-and-take between the *talmidim* and the *Rebbi*, and the *talmidim* with one another, adds to a very vibrant *kol Torah* and a *Torahdig* atmosphere. It is a real *beis midrash* experience ... I am tremendously pleased that Agra D'Pirka hopes to expand to West Palm Beach; when I go down for the winter I will find a ready-made Agra D'Pirka to pick up just where I left off here."

### Mr. Moshe Aharon Hoffman, Agra D'Pirka of Williamsburg:

"I helped arrange for the shul and *Maggid Shiur* in Williamsburg's Agra D'Pirka program about a year ago. We have close to 25 participants — mostly working people — for whom we accommodate with a later, 12-2 p.m. start time. They really enjoy the program and most of them are repeats, coming back every day. It is a tremendous *zechus* and an honor to be able to help people who want to spend a few extra hours during the day learning.

"I think there are very few people like Reb Ezra — he doesn't have the program to get *kavod* from the *kollelim*; there is no personal gain from the program."

### Harav Avraham Yaakov Finkel, Zt"l:

An award will also be given to the family of Harav Avraham Yaakov Finkel, *zt"l*. His grandson, Reb Akiva Klein, shares this about his grandfather:

"When my grandfather retired at the age of 70, he started a life of *harbotzas haTorah*, translating *sefarim* into English that got sent out by the Scranton yeshi-

### The Great Women Behind the Great Men Of Agra D'Pirka

"After my husband retired, although he continued being a *Maggid Shiur* in *Talmud Yerushalmi*, there was a large portion of his day that was unspoken for," shares honoree Rabbi Yankel Herskovitz's wife, Pesi. "It gives me great pleasure to see him have that focus and that interest — and the *sefarim* all over his desk marked off for reference in preparing his Agra D'Pirka *shiur*. He has such an enjoyment and a *zerizus* to go and give the *shiur* and interact with the participants. He gets so much out of it. It's just been wonderful to see this program take off; it's a great enhancement for Baltimore."

"A child of Holocaust survivors, I grew up on a farm in Lakewood in the 1950s and observed a beautiful, fledgling world of Torah learning," shares honoree Mr. Meir Nussbaum's wife, Sarah. "I am so proud to have returned to Lakewood seven years ago to see my husband become a committed part of that learning world in which Agra D'Pirka is now an essential component."

Honoree Mr. Dovid Tanenbaum's wife, Sandy, adds, "It's a very heartwarming feeling for me to know that at this stage of my husband's life, *limud haTorah* anchors his day. Agra D'Pirka has definitely facilitated a wonderful transition from a work schedule to a life totally focused on Torah learning."

vah twice a year to thousands of houses. They included *Chovos Halevavos*, different parts of the Rambam, the *Kuzari* and the *Nefesh HaChaim*, and many others. With that, he was able to teach all different types of people in a very unique way of spreading Torah. At an age when many people start retiring, that's when he started his career. Just as my grandfather found freshness at a later stage in life, so does Agra D'Pirka provide the opportunity to experience the freshness in *kollel* learning at every stage of life."

Concludes Reb Ezra, "It feels great to see how the Agra D'Pirka program has grown in my mother's memory, but there is lots and lots more to do. There is no shortage of locations to bring it to — it's just a question of money and some manpower to bring them to fruition. But with Hashem's help, we'll bring it to every place where there is a nice-sized Jewish community. Soon, we hope to open additional branches in West Palm Beach, L.A., Chicago, Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Dallas — perhaps, Montreal, but Moshiach should come sooner than that, so everyone can learn in Eretz Yisrael!"

For reservations or journal ads, or to begin an Agra D'Pirka in your community, please call: 212-661-9157; fax: 212-661-6606; or email: infoagradpirka.org.