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The Tiferet Center: A Post-High School Program for Young Women Ready for a Different Experience

Rabbi Azriel Rosner has no doubt that the post high school year in Israel for young women is extremely important and he fears there may not be sufficient room for all those who want a space. This is why he and **Rabbi Elie Mayer** founded a new girls' school, the Tiferet Center for Advanced Torah Studies for Women, in Ramat Beit Shemesh.

The only problem is, when the program began accepting applications last year for its first class, they were deluged. The school had more than 200 applicants and only 48 slots. "There are more girls in day schools and yeshivoth than ever before and an increasing number of them want to study in Israel," said Rabbi Rosner.

Organic Growth

Tiferet's *rosh midrasha*, or dean, Rabbi Rosner was in the US last month to interview some of the high school seniors who have expressed interest in attending the school next year.

He does not expect to accept an increased number for

next year's class because, he said, he does not want Tiferet to grow too quickly. "We want it to grow organically," he said. The biological reference is not accidental. The school sees itself as offering its students a "holistic experience."

Ramat Beit Shemesh is a diversely religious community some 40 minutes from Jerusalem. Most of the faculty reside within walking distance of the school, and students are encouraged to join their teachers and their families for holidays, Shabbat, and even just for some latenight conversation.

"Real" Israeli Life

The community is comprised of a mixture of native-born Israelis and recent immigrants, mostly from English-speaking countries.

Tiferet students are encouraged to become part of the community, which the school feels allows them to experience "real" Israeli

life during the course of the year.

"The experience at Tiferet aspires to enlighten its students and broaden their understanding and knowledge of Torah and their Jewish heritage, as well as inspire them towards a closer connection to the people, land, and nation of Israel. Its teaching staff instills in every student pride in Judaism and love for every Jew," said Rabbi Rosner.

Although Tiferet is undoubtedly rooted in Ramat Beit Shemesh, Rabbi Rosner said, in a real sense, the school views all of Israel as an extension of its campus. Tours, *tiyulim*, are considered an important part of the curriculum and the Israel experience.

"By exploring the rich history and stunning beauty of Israel, students deepen their love for the land, strengthen their bonds with teachers and other students, allowing the theoretical knowledge they possess to become tangible before their eyes, all while having an incredibly good time," he said.

Religious Zionism

Tiferet identifies as a religious-Zionist school. Academically, the young women study *Chumash, Nach*, practical *halacha, tefillah, mussar*, philosophy, and optional classes in Jewish history, Zionism, *chassidut*, and Talmud.

One course offered at the school is designed to help students learn how to defend the state of Israel and combat anti-Semitism they might encounter on a college campus when they return to the US.

A new class being planned for next year will include leadership training to prepare students to become active members of their Jewish communities.

Students spend at least one afternoon each week involved in *chessed* programs in the Ramat Beit Shemesh-Jerusalem area.

Leba Schneider, Tiferet's director of student affairs, not only leads seminars on the weekly Torah portion, she also leads students on volunteer efforts, such as "Table-to-Table" which provides meals for the hungry.

This past year, she and her students actively collected food, clothing, and children's toys for the Jews who were expelled from their homes in Gaza and northern Samaria.

No Tests

Although the school provides a practical *ulpan*, focusing less on rules of grammar and more on contemporary Hebrew-language skills necessary to communicate in Israel, all classes at Tiferet are conducted in English.

"We want each student to be able to express herself fully and completely," said

Rabbi Rosner.

Many of the classes are conducted through discussions and workshops, all taught, according to Rabbi Rosner, in friendly informal settings.

Classrooms do not have desks, but, rather, tables that are placed to face each other and surround the teacher, "fostering open discussion and closeness," he said.

There are no tests. "We provide a unique opportunity to grow through learning Torah *lishma*, just for its own sake. Tiferet students are motivated to learn Torah not because of external pressure, but because they have been inspired to do so," said Rabbi Rosner.

Not for Everyone

In his interviews for next year's class, Rabbi Rosner said he is taking into consideration grades, recommendations, interviews, and the essays applicants are asked to write. Most of all, he said, through the process, he looks for young women who exhibit "a willingness to grow."

"Tiferet is not for young girls who are coming to Israel to sow their wild oats.

We are not part of the Jerusalem social scene. We are not one block from Ben Yehuda Street," he said.

This year's class of 48 young women represent 26 high schools in New York, New Jersey, Boston, Washington, DC, Memphis, Boca Raton, St. Louis, Chicago, Los Angeles, Denver, Toronto,

and London.

Upon completing their year at Tiferet, all of them will attend college, with the school's blessings. "Some will attend Stern; others will go on to secular colleges and universities," said Rabbi Rosner.

Progressive Staff

The tone at Tiferet may reflect its founders and the staff they have assembled. Rabbi Rosner grew up in Flatbush and attended Yeshiva University for his bachelor's (mathematics) and master's (Jewish Education) degrees as well as for *smicha*.

Before making aliyah in 1996, he taught at the Ramaz School in Manhattan. In Israel, before dedicating himself full time to Tiferet, he taught Jewish law, philosophy, and Bible at Yeshivat Reishit Yerushalayim, Machon Gold, Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim, and Yeshivat Har Etzion.

He and his wife, Pesha, reside in Ramat Beit Shemesh with their four children.

Mrs. Schneider, who grew up in Teaneck (her maiden name was Stark), has a BA from Stern and is currently completing a Master's program at YU's Bernard Revel Graduate School.

Cooperating

Not surprisingly, Rabbi Rosner is concerned about those young women whom Tiferet will not be able to accommodate.

There are 12 post-high school religious-Zionist programs for women in Israel, and, according to Rabbi Rosner, the schools' administrators enjoy a close, cooperative relationship.

On Feb. 15, the schools will let their applicants know who has been accepted, rejected, or wait-listed. Then, he said, there will be a flurry of activity to find additional spaces.

“We will all work together to make certain there is a program for every young woman who wants to come to Israel. It may not be her or her parents’ first choice, but there will be a place,” he said, adding that, in the

years to come, programs and schools will have to grow to meet the burgeoning need. But at Tiferet, that growth won’t come too fast for the school to handle.

For more information about Tiferet, Rabbi Rosner can be reached at 011-972-2-999-6850. **American Friends of Tiferet** can be reached at 718-253-0230. The website is www.tiferetcenter.com.

“A Tiferet student emerges with a stronger sense of self and is equipped with skills and knowledge that enable her to strengthen the Jewish people,” said Rabbi Rosner.

S.L.R.