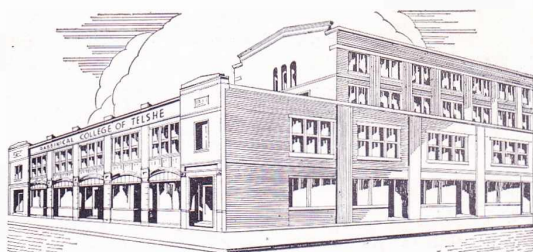


HISTORY
of the
RABBINICAL COLLEGE
OF TELSHE



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THE HISTORY OF THE RABBINICAL COLLEGE OF TELSHE

The Rabbinical College of Telshe is the result of the efforts of several young Talmudic scholars who laid the foundation of the institution in 1875. After a few years these men became rabbinical authorities of world wide reputation. Among them we may mention Rabbi Meyer Atlas who later served as Rabbi in Shavel; Rabbi Zvi Jacob Oppenheim who occupied a rabbinical position in Kelm and Rabbi Zalman Abel.

Within a few years, the efforts of these Torah pioneers bore fruit and an important institution of higher Jewish learning for young men was started which enabled its students to pursue advanced Torah studies and to be introduced to the thought and philosophy of Torah.

While this little seed was being planted in Telshe, there was a young man in Kovno, Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, who was acquiring a reputation as a great Torah scholar. When the famous sage and saint, Rabbi Israel Salanter, of blessed memory, left Kovno to devote himself to the dissemination of Torah and to start the moralist movement, he selected this young scholar to take his place and to deliver lectures to his students. After a short time the city of Kelm invited him to occupy its rabbinical office. Although he made no attempt to establish a Yeshiva, many eager students came to the city to drink of the rabbi's wisdom.

The youngest of the students who began to pursue Torah studies under Rabbi Gordon, Rabbi Joseph L. Bloch, set the character and established the standards of the Telshe Yeshiva in the method of Torah study, in wisdom and in the philosophy of religion. Rabbi Bloch later married the daughter of Rabbi Gordon. The young scholar sat at the feet of his teacher in Kelm for five years. Teacher and pupil were closely bound together in an eternal bond. They both decided to devote themselves to the cause of Torah and to the spreading of a new method stressing logic and reason.

In 1882 when the position of Chief Rabbi of Telshe was vacant, Rabbi Gordon was selected for the position. Coming to Telshe together with his group of students, the teacher and his pupils formed the nucleus for the development of the world famous Rabbinical College of Telshe.

The distinguished scholars, Rabbi Eliezer Gordon and Rabbi Joseph L. Bloch, joined hands and devoted all their efforts to the development and expansion of the Rabbinical College. In 1884, Rabbi Bloch was appointed professor of the Rabbinical College.

By this time the College had already received wide recognition and a famous reputation and many of its students became distinguished scholars. The greatest Torah authorities of the day indicated their recognition and approval of the College by looking with favor upon the College's emissaries to Jews throughout the world.

In 1885 Rabbi Shiman Shkop was appointed Professor of the College and, together with Rabbi Gordon and Rabbi Bloch, formulated and developed the special Telshe method of study in the philosophy of Torah and in profound thinking.

A new building was erected in 1895.

Rabbi Bloch left Telshe in 1902 and Rabbi Shkop the following year, to assume new positions where they continued their work in the field of higher Jewish education.

Rabbi Chaim Rabinowitz, famous for his unusual profundity of mind, was then appointed a professor in the College in 1904.

A great fire broke out in Telshe in 1909 and many buildings including that of the College were burned. Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, whose paternal benevolence was known not only among his students but also among the people of Telshe, worked constantly and at great personal sacrifice, to rebuild the destroyed edifices of the city. He erected a new building for the Yeshiva.

As a result of his work in rebuilding the Rabbinical College of Telshe, he incurred considerable debts, and, at an advanced age, found it necessary to go to London for the purpose of raising funds. The task proved too great for this noble soul and, after a few days, he passed away in 1910.

Rabbi Joseph L. Bloch was immediately invited to occupy the position of President of the Rabbinical College of Telshe. Thenceforth, a new era was inaugurated at the College. In addition to the method of study laid down by the founders of the College, there began a period of advanced studies in religion and ethics. The studies were bound up with the wisdom of Jewish law as well as the metaphysics and logic associated with religious philosophy. Rabbi Bloch was a distinguished figure and an excellent pedagogue who purified the young souls of his pupils and who introduced them to the realms of wisdom and holiness.

When the World War broke out in 1914, Rabbi Joseph L. Bloch and Rabbi Chaim Rabinowitz did not leave Telshe. A large group of students remained with their beloved teachers and pursued their holy studies amidst the fall of bombs and the catastrophic events of the war. When Vilna was captured by the Germans one year later, many students who had been forced to go to Russia returned to the College and the student body once again began to grow. When the war was over the Rabbinical College of Telshe became the Torah center of the world. Large numbers of students flocked to Telshe from all European countries as well as from Palestine, North America and South Africa.

Rabbi Bloch, who was a dynamic leader and great educator, clung steadfastly to his principles and raised his pupils to new heights. During a period when Lithuanian Jewry was preoccupied with Lithuanian nationalism, when all educational institutions were placed on a new, national basis and strange foreign elements were introduced into the religious education of the younger generation, the Rabbinical College expanded its activities so as to include the education of Jewish boys. The first step was to establish a Preparatory Academy which was under the auspices of the College. A preliminary knowledge of Talmud with the commentaries of Rabbi Solomon Itzhaki (Rashi) and the Tosofists was required for admission. The course in the Preparatory Academy required four and a half years.

Elementary education was also not neglected. Under the leadership and with the advice of Rabbi Bloch, many advanced students of the Yeshiva devoted their energies to establish an elementary school system built on the principles of Torah and conducted in a modern way. The educational program and system developed at Telshe served as a model for all Jewish religious education in Lithuania.

The College also made provision for the Jewish education of girls. The Hebrew Training Institute for Girls, "Yavneh," was located in Telshe and offered Jewish girls a thorough Torah-Jewish, as well as a secular education.

The Hebrew Teachers Seminary, which was founded in Kovno in 1918, was moved to Telshe in 1924 so that it might be under the influence of Rabbi Joseph L. Bloch and that it might be inspired and illuminated by the light of the Rabbinical College of Telshe.

It was indeed remarkable that the enlarged program of activities and the widened horizon at the College did not reduce the students' enthusiasm for learning or zeal for study. On the contrary, the Rabbinical College had a very high reputation for the burning zeal for study and diligence displayed by its students. The voices of students were heard in the study halls at day and at night.

In 1921 a Graduate School was opened at the College, in order to offer advanced courses. Students had unusual opportunities to develop themselves in Torah and in piety. Graduates of the course became famous rabbis and occupied the most prominent rabbinical positions.

Rabbi Abraham I. Bloch was appointed a professor at the College in the same year. With his keen, logical and analytical mind, he made popular the teachings of his father and teacher and influenced the students to adopt the special Telshe method of study and world outlook and to make sacrifices for their ideals.

A special building for the Graduate School was erected in 1927 and a new, beautiful building for the Preparatory Academy was completed in 1933.

The growth and expansion of the College required new, creative spirits in the College. As a result, the following distinguished scholars were appointed to the faculty: Rabbi Zalman Bloch, Rabbi Elijah M. Bloch, Rabbi Ch. Mordecai Katz and Rabbi Avner Oklianski.

Rabbi Joseph L. Bloch passed away in October, 1930. Rabbi Abraham I. Bloch was appointed President of the Rabbinical College to fill the position of his father, and, together with the numerous disciples of the late sage and distinguished philosopher, began to devote time and effort to the study of Torah and religious philosophy according to the methods introduced by his father, the late president of the faculty.

Rabbi Chaim Rabinowitz passed away in October, 1931 and his son, Rabbi Azriel Rabinowitz was appointed to the position on the faculty formerly occupied by his father.



One cannot conclude a brief survey of the history of the Rabbinical College of Telshe without mentioning the remarkable, blessed program dedicated to the dissemination of Torah to which students of the College gave of their time and effort. A special "Committee For the Dissemination of Torah" was established by advanced students of the College and had as its specific purpose the teaching and spreading of the Torah among the members of the younger generation in small Lithuanian cities and towns. Students of the Yeshiva were sent to several cities where they established Talmudical Academies. They tutored the students until they were ready for admittance as students of the Preparatory Academy of the Rabbinical College of Telshe. Every advanced student of the College served for one year, and at the end of this period, a fellow student replaced him. The program of the "Committee for the Dissemination of Torah" served as a model plan for the Rabbinical schools of Europe and was an uplifting, beneficent influence in the life of Lithuanian Jewry.

The Rabbinical College of Telshe thus grew and developed into a great, world-famous institution whose influence made itself felt and known in the complete educational program of an entire Jewish generation.

Even upon the outbreak of the Second World War and the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the Rabbinical College did not cease its efforts in the field of higher Jewish education. Unfortunately, however, contact with the College in Telshe was lost when the Nazis entered Lithuania.

The refugee students who successfully escaped from Telshe and reached Siberia and Shanghai, established flourishing branches of the Rabbinical College where they achieved wonderful results through their devotion to the study of the Torah and their remarkable efforts to bear the torch of Torah in those lands in which they were stranded.

Upon reaching the United States, the Professors of the Rabbinical College of Telshe, Rabbi E. M. Bloch and Rabbi Ch. M. Katz, together with those students who escaped from Lithuania, continued the traditional pioneering Telshe activities in the fields of higher Jewish education, by transplanting the Rabbinical College of Telshe to American soil in Cleveland, Ohio, along the same lines and in the same spirit as those which prevailed in Europe.

The American branch of the Yeshiva was established on October 28, 1941, the memorial day of the co-founder and guiding spirit of the Rabbinical College of Telshe, Rabbi Joseph L. Bloch. The Yeshiva was headed by Rabbi Elijah M. Bloch, President, and Rabbi Ch. Mordecai Katz, Dean, both of whom were members of the faculty of Telshe and who succeeded in escaping from Europe.

At first the student body consisted of a group of former students of the College in Telshe and, after a while, a group of American students came to the Yeshiva. As soon as the Yeshiva was opened, its name and

reputation became well known throughout the United States. Many students, particularly those who planned to complete their Torah studies at European institutions, flocked to the Yeshiva from all parts of the United States.

The Yeshiva consists of the Preparatory Academy which offers instruction in Talmud, Bible, Prophets, Jewish Law and the Hebrew language, and the Yeshiva proper which offers courses in Talmud, Bible,

Prophets, Philosophy, Ethics, Codes and Homiletics leading to ordination. There is also a graduate department.

Following the educational system developed in Telshe which offered a complete education in Torah, piety, good manners and deportment, the Yeshiva established a parochial school on September 7, 1943, known as the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland. The school is constantly growing in size and is making remarkable progress in giving the coming generation of Jews a complete and secular education under the supervision of the Board of Education. Graduates of the Hebrew Academy may continue their education in the Preparatory Academy and High School of the Yeshiva.

Plans are being completed to add a High School Department in September of the current year which will offer a full secular education taught by duly certified teachers. The school will be recognized by the Board of Education as is the Hebrew Academy.

The Rabbinical College of Telshe has made notable strides during the first two and one-half years of its existence. Students have come here from all sections of the United States. The educational program is being conducted with great success and the Yeshiva has gained a very fine reputation throughout the country. The Torah scholars of the United States and the thousands of Telshe Alumni are particularly proud and happy about the success and rapid growth of the institution.

Owing to the spectacular growth and expansion of the Yeshiva since its establishment, the building originally purchased at 985 East Boulevard became much too small to house its various branches. Consequently, a new and much larger building was purchased and now contains the Yeshiva proper, Preparatory Academy, High School and Graduate School. The 985 East Boulevard building, beautifully situated in a park, is occupied by the Hebrew Academy.

It is in such a fashion that devoted students of the Torah are worried and concerned with the future so that the light of Torah may not be extinguished. They hope and pray that the Almighty will illuminate the darkness of the world with His light, that humanity may be redeemed and that the destroyed world may once again be rebuilt.