

Dear Editor:

This past December I was very fortunate to be a part of Kollel Avrechim's **Winter Yarchei Kallah**. The extremely successful program ran for 5 days from Sunday to Thursday 9:30 am to 1:00 pm and was attended by some 50 Bale-batim who further crowded the already cramped quarters on Coldstream that the Kollel calls home. We were treated to a Shiur Iyun in our sugia each day given by Reb Chaim Dovid Kulik. Already after the first day the "true" Lamdonim in the group agreed that he is clearly one of the rising stars in the Kehillah.

I would like to put down some of my thoughts about the program to offer the rest of the community a window of that week.

I think that most people who would be asked to describe the Yarchei Kallah experience would talk about how remarkable it is that people who are immersed in their work for a whole year and truly deserve a "vacation", chose rather to commit themselves to grow in learning. This praise is extenuated by the fact that each and every one of the participants has a myriad of other legitimate responsibilities and distractions that could occupy their time. I would certainly not disagree with this viewpoint and consider it to be true.

Nevertheless, I had a poignant experience during the week that struck me as being perhaps more germane. It was Tuesday, December 25 as I left the house at 9:45 (fifteen minutes late!) for seder at the Kollel. Now on most Tuesday mornings at this late hour, there is a considerable amount of activity. Being December 25, the streets were deserted. Neither cars nor people were to be seen. This sense of calm, solitude and serenity stayed with me as I searched for a parking space nearby, parked and went inside.

As I opened the doors to the Kollel though, I was immediately struck by the cacophony that was emanating from the people learning inside - a roar of Torah mamash! At that moment it occurred to me that this is perhaps the greatest lesson of Yarchei Kallah.

As the rest of the world sleeps and, irrespective of their religious belief or level of commitment, takes the day off. A Torah Jew by participating in Yarchei Kallah, makes the statement that I do not march to the beat that is playing around me. To me, as choshuv as the learning that is taking place, is the message that taking this time to learn, makes it totally clear that we are committed to shaping the destiny of the world and not vice versa. What the others may look at as a day of repose, a Jew sees as an opportunity to recompose.

As a pretty regular visitor to Miami Beach (my in-laws live there) I know what it means to take a vacation. Yet I think that those who participate in the Yarchei Kallah would agree that it sets a haymishe tone for the rest of the year. Notwithstanding our being surrounded by a sort of "Disney World", we won't lose our focus on the real world.

Wishing you a warm winter,
Yaakov (John) Kaplan