

At Home With

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BRINGING LIFE TO THE DESERT

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IN CONVERSATION WITH Rabbi Ariel Shoshan

*Rav, Kehillas Ahavas Torah/The Scottsdale
Torah Center in Scottsdale, Arizona*

Would the Rav please provide some background information?

I was born into a modern Orthodox family of Vizhnitzer descent. I grew up in Chicago where I attended high school at Ida Crown Jewish Academy. After two years in Eretz Yisrael at Yeshivat Hakotel, I entered the *beis medrash* of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore in 1995.

Which individuals or circumstances primarily influenced you in your life?

My *rebbe* in Chicago, Rabbi Meyer Juzint (pronounced Yujint), *zt"l*, who taught in Chicago *mosdos* from 1946-1999, was a primary influence on my life. I was very close to him.

I feel very privileged to have learned in Ner Yisroel for almost eight years. There, I was profoundly influenced by the *Rosh Yeshiva*, Harav Yaakov Weinberg, *zt"l*, as well as, *ybl"c*, Harav Yissocher Frand and Harav Tzvi Berkowitz.

I also have a close *keshar* with the Spinka Beis Yitzchak Rebbe, Harav Abish Horowitz, *shlita*, of Williamsburg. He came here several years ago and has been back six or seven times. I am in touch with him on a regular basis. My twin brother Rabbi Gidon Shoshan, a *rebbe* in Yeshiva Darche Noam (Shapell's) in Yerushalayim, and my father-in-law Rabbi Ilan Feldman, the Rav of Beth Jacob in Atlanta, continually inspire me. I have relationships with many other *rebbeim*.

When I initially came to Ner Yisroel, my intention was to remain for two months and then enter NYU on a scholarship.

I was so moved by the *ruach haTorah* there that I changed my plans and ultimately remained for almost eight years. I had never experienced such an awesome sense of *kvod haTorah*. I also perceived that learning in yeshiva was the only way to be successful as a *ben Torah*, although that did not preclude the notion of being successful in every other area of life.

Please share with us some recollections of your rebbeim.

Rabbi Juzint, a *talmid* of Slabodka in Europe, told me that as a young boy, he attended a *siyum haShas* with his father in Slabodka. At the event he told his father that he wished to likewise complete *Shas*; his father uncharacteristically responded "*Tov* — good." The *gematria* of "*tov*" is 17, and he interpreted that as a charge to finish *Shas* 17 times, which he did. On the occasion of the 17th *siyum*, he told me that at that point he felt that perhaps his days in this world were numbered, and he indeed did not live to make an 18th *siyum* before his *petirah* in 2001.

Please tell us about your shul, and how you came to the Phoenix area.

I had visited Phoenix several times, chiefly for a project Ner Yisrael *talmidim* had undertaken on behalf of Chinuch Atzmai. At a certain point I was seeking a position and was offered the position of director for the Phoenix Community Kollel, where I was responsible for all of our programming

and teaching activities. We moved to Phoenix in 2002. Among the families we were successful in reaching out to was a group in Scottsdale, a suburb of Phoenix.

In 2004, my wife and I moved to Scottsdale to start a Shabbos *minyan* in our existing satellite learning center, serving 13 families including several who had become *frum* through *kollel* programs. All were growing in *Yiddishkeit*, having been influenced by other inspiring people in the region.

The *minyan* outgrew the relatively small warehouse space that housed the center and moved into a house in 2005, becoming known as the *kehillah* that we are today, Ahavas Torah/The Scottsdale Torah Center. I retained my position as well as heading this project with the partnership of other *kollel* Rabbis. In 2007, I became the full-time Rav. At present we are in a much larger location, where we have a beautiful, uplifting shul environment, with classroom space, a kitchen and other features. On Shabbos we have several children's programs, which were facilitated by the *eruv* we constructed in collaboration with Chabad and other neighboring shuls. We have added *minyanim* gradually over the years, and have for years provided all weekday and Shabbos *davening*. We now have two daily *Shacharis minyanim*.

The shul has also become a haven for Jews from all over the world who visit Arizona for business, healthcare or vacation. We have hosted many *Gedolei Yisrael*. Dozens of families who are looking for an uplifting and appropriate environment for their vacation visit us each year.

Are there any meaningful memories you can share about your years in *harbatzas Torah*?

One particular family who has been with us from the very beginning has been an inspiration as they have grown in their observance, continuously progressing in their *Yiddishkeit*. They now celebrate *siyumim* on *masechtos* made by their sons.

Several years ago, this *baal bayis* once went to New York for a family *simchah* and stayed at the home of a first cousin, who had grown up observant. On Friday night he inquired of his cousin what time *Shacharis* would be, to which the latter replied "9:00." The visitor then asked, "What time is *sof zman Krias Shema* — the latest time for reciting *Krias Shema*?" His cousin did not know. He later began to cry and exclaimed, "I can't believe what's happening in my cousin's community. I grew up *frum* and my cousin didn't. Yet, now in Arizona he has become someone who is concerned with what time *sof zman Krias Shema* is — something I was not even thinking about." This family's lofty goals and courageous steps continue to inspire us.

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There are three children in shul whose parents told me that they owe their existence to the shul's influence.

Another gentleman, who had just learned to read Hebrew at the beginning of the shul's existence, has finished most of *Shas*, and his entire family are *bnei Torah*. Just in the past few weeks, three families have decided to become *shomer Shabbos*. There are countless examples of our members' amazing spiritual commitments, fueled by their own *bechira*.

Is there any advice you can offer for how to inspire people's growth?

Yes, one way is through one's own personal example — one's own passion and that of those around him helps to create a place of passionate *tefillah* and learning. Our members are sincere and gladly welcome visitors, but at the same time are serious about their own *avodas Hashem*, which emanates through the *ruach* in our shul. People from other shuls attend our shul on days when *Hallel* is recited because they don't want to rush through it, and they seek to be inspired by the singing.

How does your *Vizhnitzer* background impact your *harbotzas haTorah*?

My siblings and I were raised with a sense of belonging to an aristocratic *chassidishe* family. My great-great-grandfather, whose 100th *yahrzeit* is this month, was the prominent *Vizhnitzer* personality Reb Yidel Eber Rosenberg, *z"l*. Consequently, I have always been drawn to the spiritual dimension of *mitzvos* and the power of *simchas hachaim*. Yet, while *Vizhnitz* has served to define my identity and that of my children, that identity has been nurtured by many other *chassidishe sefarim* and sources, notably the *Nesivos Shalom* of the *Slonimer Rebbe, zy"ta*, out of which I deliver four *shiuurim* a week. It is the single most important *sefer* that has influenced our shul.

Do you have a parting message for our readers?

I once learned from Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, Rav of Aish Kodesh in Woodmere, New York, that the significance of Har Sinai was that we not only received the Torah's content, but we also came in contact with Hashem there. Successful homes and shuls ought to try to replicate this through enthusiasm, fire, and excitement for *mitzvos*, as we transmit not only the content of the Torah but also our connection to Hashem. Thank you for the opportunity to share.

Thank you, Rabbi Shoshan. We wish you much continued *hatzlachah* in your *avodas hakodesh*. ■