

Lamplighters Mesivta

Volume II



When Mesivta 404 applied for the Kohelet Prize in 5778, we were a small prototype of Crown Heights “at-risk boys” striving to design our ideal school. It is amazing how much has changed in just one year!

We are now an official mesivta. But this has not made our job of constantly continuing to build our ideal school any easier. In fact, sometimes it feels as if forces that are pushing us to become normative seem to be even harder than those that seemed to push against our original formation.

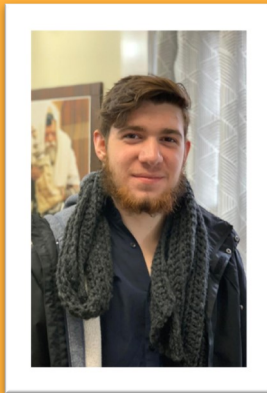
Here is Part II of our story, “From Mesivta 404 to Lamplighters Mesivta.” Join us, as we struggle with discovery and change in this new iteration of our student and staff co-designed yeshivah. Make sure to click when you see the youtube logos to watch video from this ebook.

**When you met us
last year...**

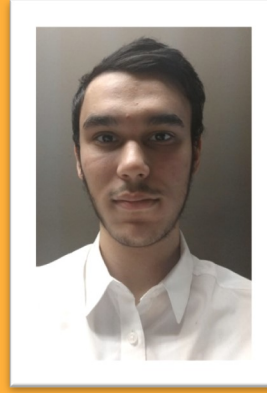
Mesivta 404



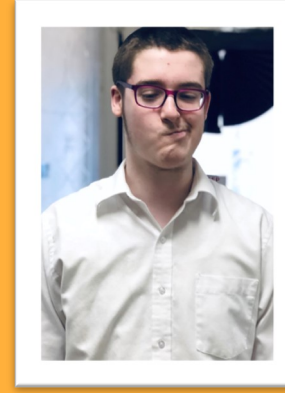
Our Story



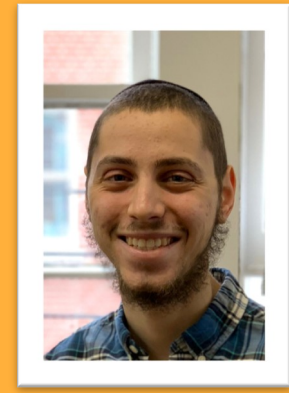
Meir Schack



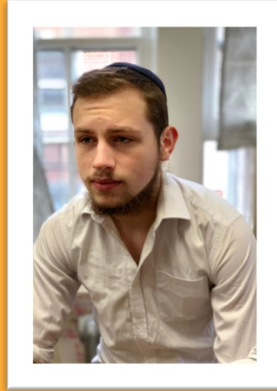
Eli Zilberman



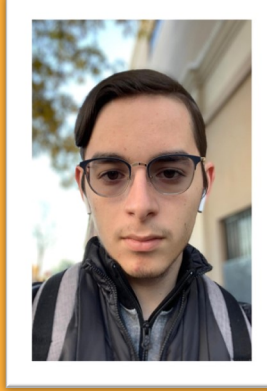
Mendy Rappaport



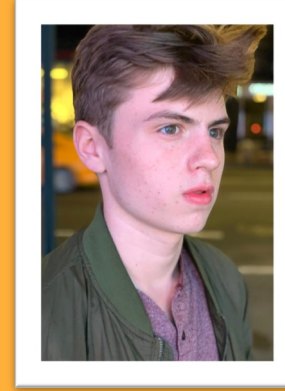
Zalmy Belinsky



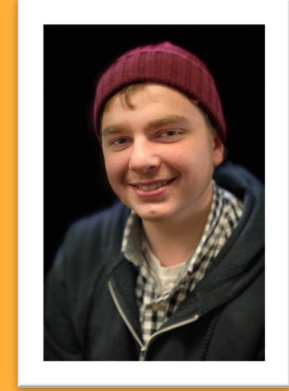
Yosef Yavitch



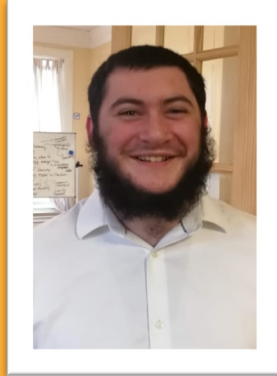
Yoni Ben-Oni



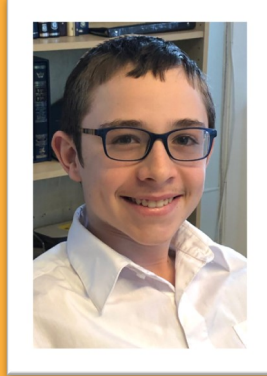
Shuey Werner



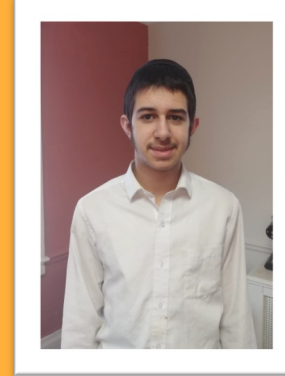
Filey Schack



Moshe Hurwitz,
Shliach



Pacy Crayk



Mendle Kuravsky



Yoel Shaked



Rabbi Yehuda Fenton,
Head of Mesivta



Morah Rivkah Schack,
English Coordinator



Rabbi Zev Nussbaum,
Instructor

Other Instructors

Malkah Schack, History
Rabbi Avner Tarica-Lechter, Math
Nessia Goldstein, Science
Vadi Albukurk, Student Services

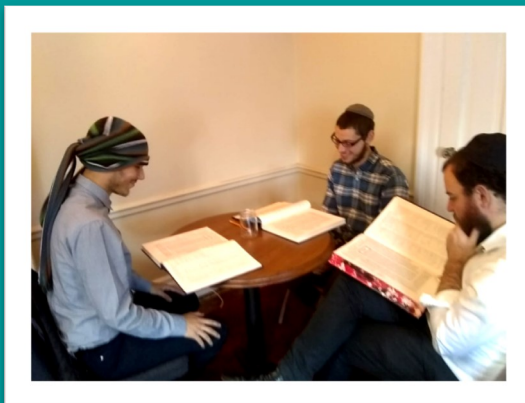
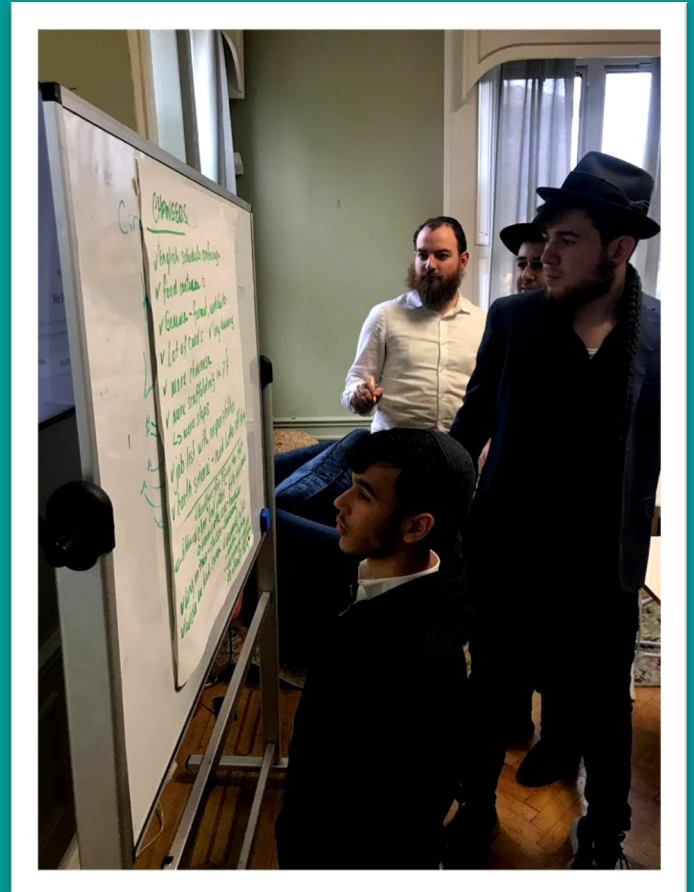
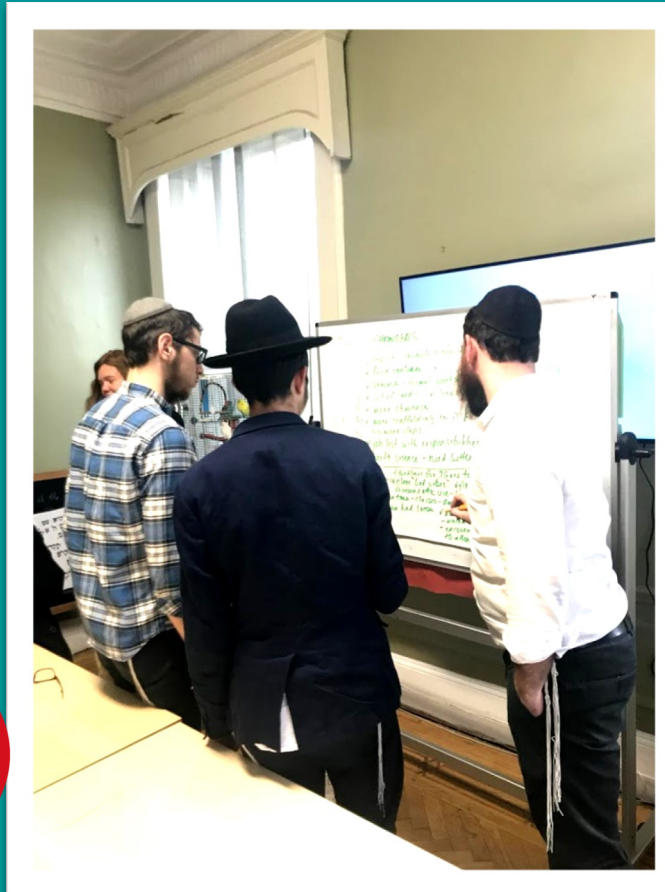
“ *We did something that's unthinkable—we did something that defied all odds and we did something that changed the lives of kids in our school and the people around us. It wouldn't be possible without the compromises we make, the challenges we face and the commitments to self-betterment it requires from us all.* **”**

Meir Schack, Mesivta student

Meet our Designers

New Stage...

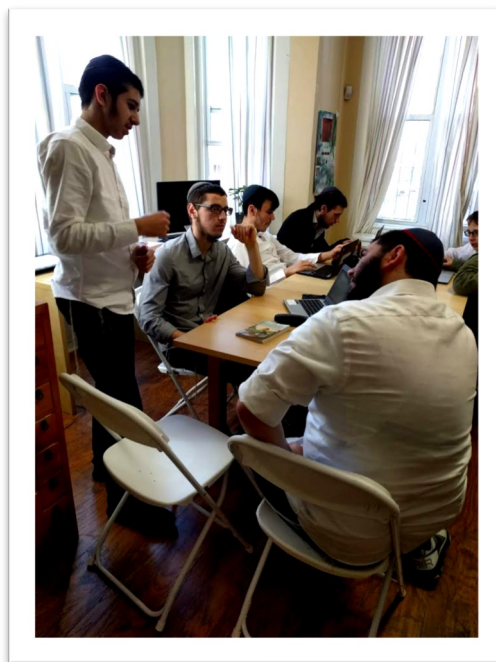
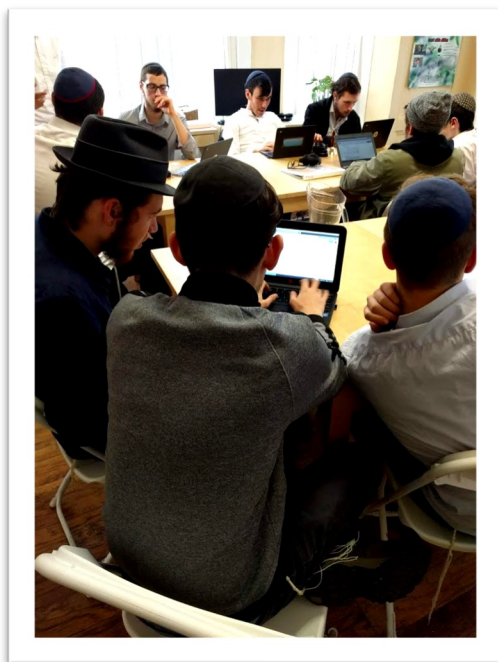
Rabbi Fenton speaks about the importance of Lamplighters design meetings.



THIS PAGE: Scenes from our latest "Design Meeting." FACING AND BELOW: Typical scenes of our daily learning and warm sense of family.

“We are still able to take risks and experiment, but we no longer will 'burn it down,' because our foundation is now complete.”

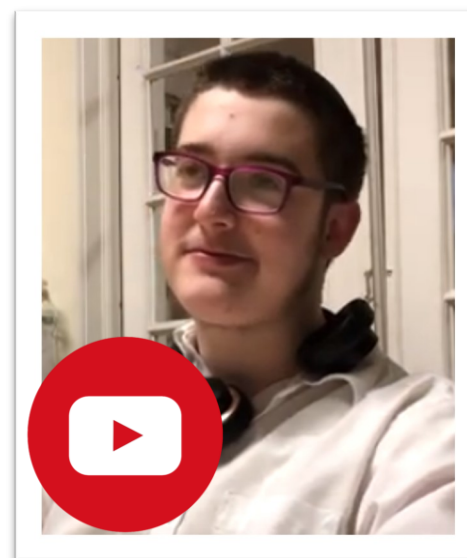
Mendy Rappaport, Mesivta student



This is truly a year of history-making.

From the humble beginnings of Mesivta 404, this year marks the inception of an official Lamplighters Mesivta under the auspices of Lamplighters Yeshivah. After two years of prototyping...we finally have our first test product.

But with this new stage comes new challenges. From the outset, the Mesivta's home-grown identity and fresh approach to traditional yeshivah education places us directly under the community lens of skepticism and uncertainty. For every program and student success moment, there are even more obstacles of risk and failure. We are continually reminded that growth is a slow, patient and intensive activity. Almost nothing of value in our school has been achieved overnight. We are gardeners of vision.



Mendy speaks about our new challenges this year as Lamplighters Mesivta

...New Challenges

The mesivta years are crucial for academic success. For many boys, these years will prepare them for their next stage—zal or college. For others, these will be the last years of formal schooling before they enter the job world. There always seems to be a tension between fully investing and focusing on the *learning for now* and also looking ahead at *what will come next*.



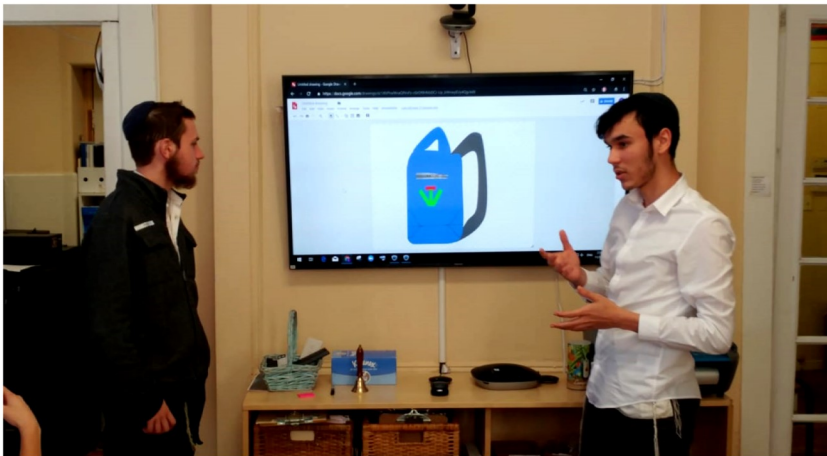
This is compounded at our mesivta by the wide range of academic needs of our students—some of whom have never formally learned the subjects of math and language, science and history before joining us. Still others find it a real struggle to learn Chumash and Gemara independently. In a school of twelve, there are literally twelve levels and beyond! In order to “up our game” of academics, we chose to leverage technology this year by joining the cohort of schools who are using the Altschool platform to personalize learning. It has TRANSFORMED our school in many positive ways.

BUT...not without kinks. With the uptick in productivity, came more pressure for academic performance. With the increased emphasis on academic achievement came a need for balance to make sure that the warm and loving nature of Lamplighters remained. Many group and individual meetings this year have focused on how to build rigor in our learning while not sacrificing student agency. We needed to make a firm decision on the place of computers and technology in our school. We had to fail a lot before realizing people and learning always come first. Tech is only there as a tool toward this end.

“Although we are still in the process of tweaking a few things, at the end of the day we went from failing students to succeeding students.”

Shuey Werner, Mesivta student





FACING PAGE: LL Mesivta joins the Brooklyn Public Library. Many boys had never owned a library card!
 TOP: Filey works through his Altschool playlist ABOVE: Yosef and Eli present their "Better Backpack" design in STEAM class TOP RIGHT: Mendle and Yosef learning about the many types of engineers in the world RIGHT: Pacy and Mendy build a tower out of marshmallows and spaghetti. RIGHT: Morah Rivkah speaks about Altschool



Morah Rivkah and Filey speak about how Altschool has contributed to our school's ability to offer personalized learning.

Upping Our Game

Balancing Freedom



ABOVE: Scenes of our typical day. RIGHT: Rabbi Fenton becoming the constant “nudge” reminding students to be on time and finish their work...but with a smile :)

“Things about this school are uncertain because they aren’t all figured out. When you give kids freedom it could end up a failure or success. Designing a “kids” school with the kids can feel like an impossible challenge and may have risky long- lasting effects.”

Meir Schack, Mesivta student



Rabbi Fenton speaks about the open work plan and the challenge of striking a balance between freedom and productivity.

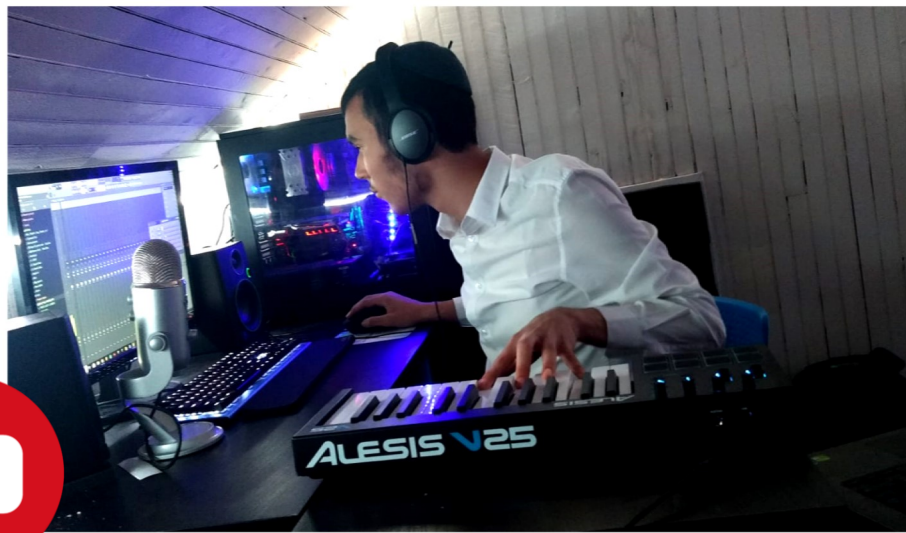




Perspectives on balancing freedom and productivity.

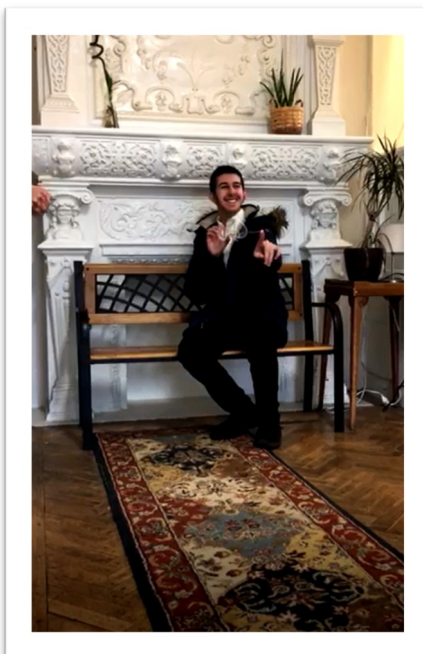
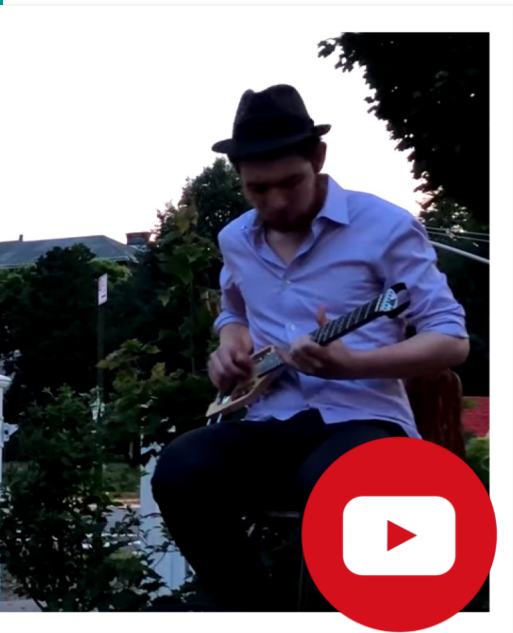
One thing that continues to challenge our mesivta program is discovering how to create the proper amount of structure so that everyone, even the newer students who have never been given much freedom or independence in their school experience, can be successful. Finding this balance has led to several important choices in the way we use time and space, as well as in the way our teachers interact with students:

- **Physical space**—the mesivta is spread out over several “zones” of learning. In one zone, students may attend a large -group, “seminar” type of class, in another they are able to gather in small groups or work independently while a teacher circulates to provide help, in still another there is a complete “quiet zone” for individual focused activity. Additionally, there is an attic for free-space and “tinkering”
- **Time**—block scheduling is not compatible with our group of students, as it does not allow for them to work within their own cycles of energy, nor does it support students learning different topics with different pacing; instead, we use a “real world” model of scheduling in which our students attend meetings and work on independent or group tasks and projects, much like in the modern work world
- **Teacher as Mentor**—the relationship a student has with a LL teacher can be likened to a “mentor to apprentice” in which the teacher is not the main purveyor of knowledge, but the guide to model how a student can access knowledge and apply it



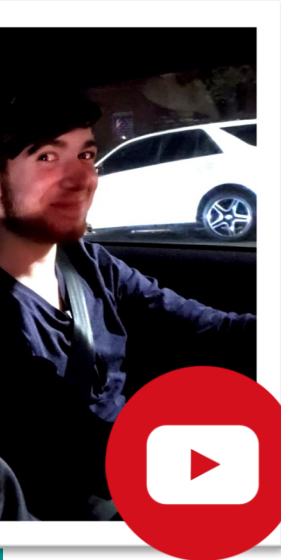
CLOCKWISE: Levy looks out over the Hudson on a mesivta camping trip, Eli mixes his own EDM music in the attic, Rabbi Loloyan and Meir perform a song they wrote farthest (he is looking forward to being an engineer one day), Dovid enjoys chemistry so he becomes a junior teacher to the middle school, Meir and Shey learn to d... includes "Cooking, Science and Halacha" into the night seder—a topic that many of the boys find SUPER fun and interesting, Nisi and Zalmy on the slopes during a sk...

School=Place to Pursue



One major departure the Lamplighters Mesivta has taken from traditional yeshivah norms in our community is the incorporation of personal interests and passions within the seder of learning. From the student's perspective, this is one of the most successful aspects of our design. This does, however, call into question the nature and purpose of "yeshivah" and what it is meant to accomplish.

For many of our students, Lamplighters is the first place they have found a community of other students and adults who create space for seeking one's individual mission—through exploring heart, will, mind and talents. *In our perspective, this is essential Chassidic education.* Yet, this year as we have begun to clearly make this statement, we have opened ourselves up to disapproval and criticism from those who do not understand us or feel strongly against our interpretation.



LISTEN to many perspectives by Lamplighters Mesivta students about pursuing our passions within school (and our challenges around making this happen)

“Life is all about risks. Trying to do something new can be a risk, especially if the people around you don't agree with what you are doing and say its dangerous. But, if you know in your heart that it is worthy—take the risk!”

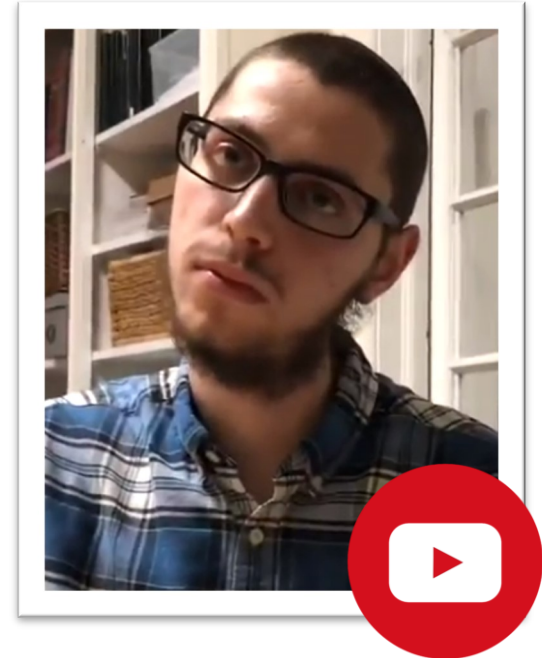
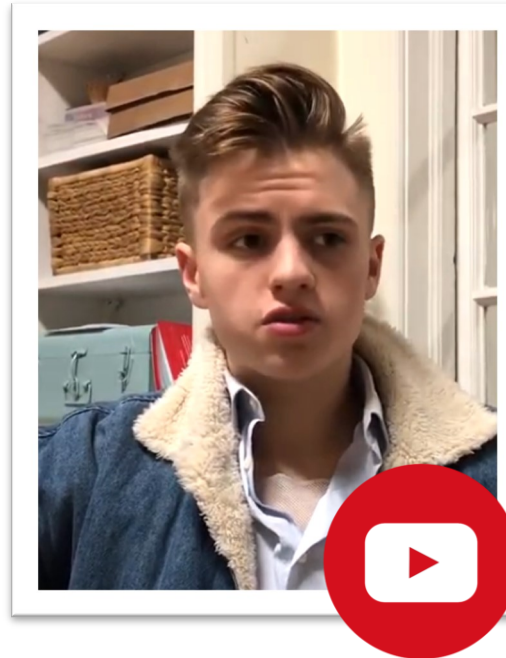
Eli Zilberman, Mesivta student

at the first annual LL Mesivta graduation, Mendle wins the STEAM class competition on who can catapult a cup the
 ive with Rabbi Jacobson by practicing on the way to C-Teen Queens where they volunteered last year, Rabbi Fenton
 trip that mesivta boys planned together

e Our Passions

“Our school is a changing place where over the time we've developed a relationship where we could work together to create a brighter future.”

Meir Schack, Mesivta student



LISTEN to many perspectives by Lamplighters Mesivta students and Rabbi Fenton about founding the Lamplighters Shul.

One of our biggest highlights of the year?? We founded a Lamplighters community shul!

Last year, in our 404 days, we made a very inspirational impromptu Yom Kippur minyan that was in all of our minds going into this year. In one of our design meetings, we discussed what it might take to form a permanent shul that could begin for Rosh Hashana but then continue into the future. Of course, as with all of the projects we have implemented as a school, there was a learning curve. The shul required fundraising, purchasing, minyan organization, housekeeping, etc. We would need to plan for children, alcohol consumption on Simchas Torah and the building of a shul sukkah.

Everyone mobilized. Despite the many little hiccups, the shul over Tishrei was a resounding success. But even more than providing a special community service for our greater Lamplighters family, the shul became the first conduit for Lamplighters parents of the younger grades to begin appreciating the Mesivta students. Rather than see us as a rag-tag group of at-risk students who seemed like less-than-ideal role models—now we were perceived as leaders for an initiative that displayed our strengths and our commitment to Torah.



LEFT: Our brand new shul, ready for Rosh Hashana, with a designated space just for the Mesivta! BELOW: Our first LL Shul initiative...the community sukkah. The boys fundraised, built and ran the sukkah over the holidays.



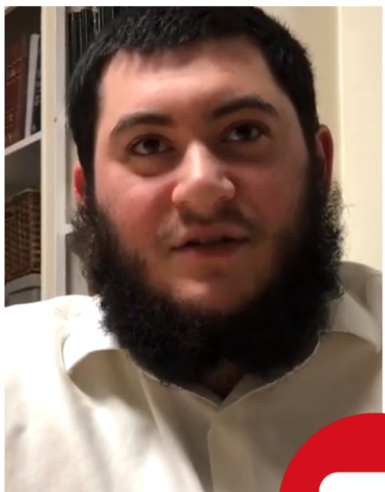
Let's Start our Own Shul!





TOP LEFT: Dovid shares his personal Lamplighters story at the annual Gala ABOVE AND CENTER: Mesivta students spread light on Chanukah in their school mitzvah tank. FAR RIGHT: Cocoa sale to raise money for fire victims in California.

Don't Forget to Lig



Now that we have become an official Lamplighters Mesivta, we are carrying the mantle of Lamplighters community service. As exciting as this may sound, this has also put us on display to the school and greater community, whereas last year we were still “under the radar.” In fact, we suffered a few disappointments. For example, we asked a local mesivta to join us in our Chanukah mitzvah tank. The school opted out because they were worried about the “level” of our students. We have been shamed in local shuls for the school we attend. People in our own school community worry that our presence will affect their sons negatively. We were uninvited to a teen dinner and learn event, simply because we were being judged

Our answer to this? Continue to grow and to live up to being a Lamplighter!



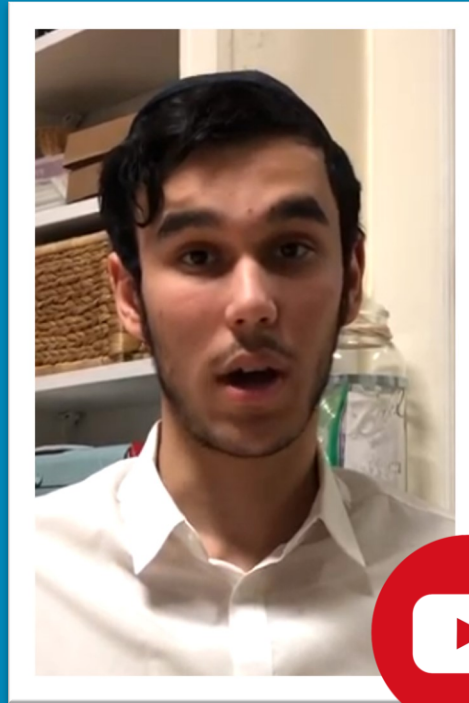
Listen to our perspectives on Lamplighting and what Lamplighters means to us.

“ My unique voice in this entry prize is that I walked into this school with the intent to improve from a feeling of neutrality to "President.” ”

Zalmy Belinsky Mesivta student

ght Those Lamps!

Aversion to Change




Looking back, we sometimes feel that what we are doing is not understood by the people around us. Check out the memory to the right...CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? We have had the chance to see something really not work in our own lives and then to be a part of changing it. What a privilege.

And then here we are striving to build it further for those who come after us. It is hard from within and without. Sometimes it is exhausting being an agent of change.

RIGHT: Pictures of our first design meeting, one-and-a-half years ago. Things seemed so easy then!



fail·ure

/ˈfālyər/ 

Noun

1. Lack of success.
2. An unsuccessful person, enterprise, or thing.

Synonyms

failing - fault - fiasco - breakdown - bankruptcy



“The work required to build Lamplighters Mesivta WILL NOT be PRETTY and IS going to be a STRUGGLE. The journey is an eternal process and is something in which all of our efforts are being drawn upon.”

Zalmy Belinsky, Mesivta student

Mesivta student, Eli Zilberman, speaks about feeling judged.

“ *This story is not over. It’s part of an ever-changing road that is life. It’s a stop along the way to self-refinement and perfection.* ”

Meir Schack, Mesivta student



RIGHT: Team backpack feeling positively FAR

RIGHT: Making predictions book carousel
activity CENTER: Pacy and Filey, our
youngest Lamplighters Mesivta students

During the summer of 2017, we began the planning of 404 2.0. We identified several basic principles that would need to be structured if we had a shot of succeeding. We would need the right teachers, the right space, the appropriate curriculum and instruction—but most importantly, we would need a commitment from the boys that they would partner with us to build a school that would work.

Several important components needed to be worked out with a delicate balance: using technology in a productive way, implementing a proper schedule that works with the boys' energy, allowing students to be responsible for parts of their learning while providing enough structure and, most importantly, building a positive reinforcement system to focus on the light, rather than to fight the darkness. Each of these components required a whole series of design meetings and prototyping in order to follow through on our commitment to partner with the students, rather than just imposing from above.

This year marked so many successes in these areas, as we moved from Mesivta 404 to Lamplighters Mesivta. Yet, not without significant additional risks and failures. But we have learned to “fail forward!” Our next tension between vision and current reality is simply our next challenge of opportunity.

TEN to Eli and Zalmy talk about the future.



Failing Forward

Our hope for Jewish education

The Kohelet Prize has now offered two years of creative reflection for our design team. Our experience of living through moments of risk and failure, and then telling our stories, has allowed those stories to become part of our oral history.

Many of our current Mesivta students graduate this year and will leave a legacy—the founding of a school. This has been an opportunity of a lifetime to contribute to our community and to the greater Jewish community.

The future is full of possibility.



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LISTEN to us reflect on what we hope our legacy might be as school founders.

LampLighters
ישיבה