

WORKPLACE REVOLUTION IN ISRAEL

A FLOURISHING PHENOMENON BENEFITTING FAMILIES AND EMPLOYERS

BY TAMAR ANSH

I enter the main lobby of the Shaarei HaIr building, off a busy corner of Yerushalayim's downtown area. Ascending to the ninth floor, I enter the Jerusalem Hub, a one-of-a-kind bustling business center created exclusively for religious women. The attractive layout in this office is very inviting: There is a cozy little inside meeting area, a kitchenette, and the thoughtful design of a patio overlooking Yerushalayim's skyline. As I walk in, I notice the quiet hum of women working at computer stations. Mrs. Shaindy Babad, the director of Temech, greets me, ready to share an inside look at the many initiatives Temech is involved with beyond the Jerusalem Hub — most significantly, a program to help frum women with the job crisis they face in Israel.





ISRAEL AND THE JOB CRISIS

My name is Chaya. I learned computer programming in seminary, but when I graduated, I couldn't find work. I was feeling rather down about the situation when I noticed an advertisement for a course given through a place called Temech. It announced a programming course for frum young women that would train us to get a specific job, and since it promised that 75% of their students would be hired, I registered.*

Baruch Hashem, a potential employer invited me to an interview while I was still taking the course. I was nervous about the interview, but Temech offered a short training session for surviving interviews and it worked – I got the job! The employer made a place available specifically for us, a group of frum women who thereby gained our own workspace in this company.

In fact, it wasn't just the job itself that Temech arranged; they also worked out many of the details that made the situation comfortable for us, from having our own microwave (to enable kashrus), to filtered internet, and much more. Because of my earnings, my husband is still in full-time learning, baruch Hashem. Today I work for Chevrat Pat.

Poverty within the hard-working chareidi sector of Eretz Yisrael has been an ongoing challenge for years. Because young women are encouraged to live a kollel lifestyle after they marry, they often seek post-high school programs to train in various fields so they can earn a decent living. But when they go out to find jobs, they face enormous hurdles. There is a serious dearth of available jobs in the frum sector, and salaries

are low. Often, women are forced to compromise and take a lower-paying job or one completely out of their field because they are unable to find work in their areas of expertise. Turning to the secular market is frowned upon since the atmosphere in many workplaces is not conducive to a chareidi lifestyle; in any case, as frum women, they want to work at jobs within a setting that will meet their Torah criteria.

To exacerbate the issue, by the time a married woman has two or three children, it becomes increasingly unfeasible for her to continue working due to the combined costs of travel, babysitters and other expenses that leave her with little profit at the end of the month. Add to that her physical exhaustion and the tension of not being able to earn enough to supply her growing family's basic needs, no matter how hard she works, and the picture becomes quite dismal.

My name is Naava, and I live in Yerushalayim. After high school I attended a program called Siur Mochot to learn web design. While I was there, additional programs were introduced to give us a higher level of education. I was very interested in advancing because I knew I could do it, and that the pay upon successful completion would be far better than in any entry-level job. Taking advanced courses gives a person the financial advantages that a higher level of university studies does.*

However, it was quite expensive, and I didn't have a way to pay for it. Siur Mochot told us that those of us who were serious about the coursework could get financial help through Temech. They accepted my application, and with Temech's help I was able to complete the advanced program. Today I

Left: View of the computer workplace at the Jerusalem Hub of Temech, available for women to use. Right, top: Front desk at the reception center in the Jerusalem Hub, a project of Temech. Right, bottom: Photo of outside of the Shaarei Halr building, on the corner of Yaffo and Sarei Yisrael streets in Yerushalayim, where the Jerusalem Hub, a project of Temech, is located on the ninth floor.

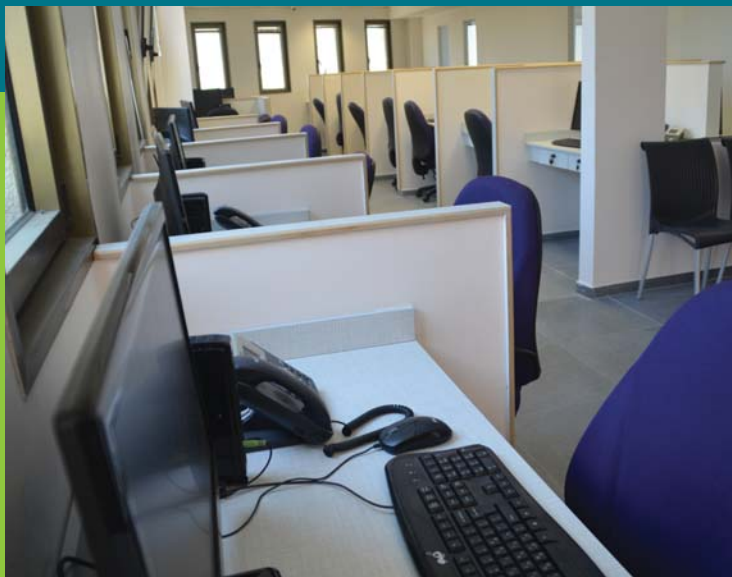




Photo credit: Avi Schron

L-R: Mr. Avi Schron, Rabbi Itche Rosenbaum and Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, the chairman of Temech and its founders, taken in the home of Harav Aharon Leib Steinman, *shlita*, following a meeting with him.

work for companies in web design and UX (user experience), as well as a freelancer. My husband learns and is a *meishiv* in his yeshivah. We have five children, *ka"n*, and *baruch Hashem* we are able to support ourselves on my paycheck.

THE FORCE OF 'MARKET' AND EBT

"Everything, from businesses, executives, decision making, all the way down to the customers and clients, are driven by this force called 'the market,'" Mrs. Babad explains. "Therefore, it makes sense to us to offer training programs only when the business market actually has a current need for people trained in a specific field. With EBT, Employee-Based Training, there's such beauty to this model because in addition to knowing in advance that there is a market need for a specific job, we *also* have a commitment from the company itself that the jobs will be available for *frum* women upon completion of the training period."

Mrs. Babad knows what she is saying; she's been out there helping

women for many years. "*Frum* women are dedicated, bright and motivated," she asserts. "All they lack are the means and the funding to be able to acquire the exact training necessary to land good jobs. Since we provide those tools, while knowing in advance that those jobs are open and employers are ready to accept them, we are able to help our student reach the goal of a landing a good job.

"As part of my work for Temech, I reach out to a wide range of successful companies — and at this point they number over 150. We meet with the actual employers to get them on board and assure us of job openings. We are able to show them how *chareidi* women's ethics make them excellent employees, and that it makes financial sense for them to invest in our programs."

If company owners and managers realize that this move is a financially sound one, they will listen. They want stability because a high employee turnover and constant retraining of new workers is very costly.



The wall in the Jerusalem Hub of Temech, covered with the many logos of companies Temech has worked with, to train and employ *frum* women all over Israel.



WHAT IS TEMECH?

In 2001, the *frum* communities being established in Eretz Yisrael did not have the financial infrastructure to support their residents. The model of large-scale employment opportunities for religious women already existed in America, where thousands of women support their families *al haTorah v'al ha'avodah*. The challenge was to replicate that model in Eretz Yisrael.

Several *askanim* took action. Mr. Avi Schron, Temech's chairman of the board, opened VisaCal, a bank's customer service division; Mrs. Libby Affen developed Matrix, a software development department, as a *chareidi* division of an Israeli company; and Rabbi Itche Rosenbaum started Citybook Services, the back office operation of Madison Title Agency. With proof of this successful concept in hand, they were ready to show others how to follow this innovative model. They approached Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, then executive vice president of Agudath Israel of America, and asked that Agudah create the platform for this project. Thus was Temech born.

Frum women are talented, intelligent and dedicated employees, willing to work hard in the proper environment. Temech has presented proof of this concept to many Israeli companies that subsequently carve out a department where *chareidi* women are comfortable, in essence creating a sub-company within their company. Temech educates the employer, trains the employees and acts as liaison between the two.

In Eretz Yisrael today, the three aforementioned companies employ over 1,000 women, and Temech has helped provide *frum* women with more than 6,000 jobs.

Photo taken at the 2015 Temech Conference for Religious Women in Business, held at the Ramada Hotel in Yerushalayim. Nir Barkat, the mayor, addresses an overflow crowd.



HELPING KOLLEL FAMILIES

All this definitely impacts positively on the entire family. "I can give you a concrete example," Mrs. Babad clarifies. "The Israel Electric Company opened a branch in Be'er Sheva. This is about a 20-minute drive from Arad, which has a large *frum* and chassidic community. Creating communities in far-off places solves part of the housing crisis, but how will the community fund itself if there are hardly any jobs available nearby? We set up this EBT training model with the electric company in Be'er Sheva and were able to find employment for a whole group of women from Arad, so of course their husbands were then able to stay in *kollel* far longer!"

AVOIDING DIFFICULTIES OF A SECULAR WORK ENVIRONMENT

As *frum* Yidden, we naturally want *frum* women to be employed in a setting that will not be detrimental to *Yiddishkeit*. Mrs. Babad works with the companies to arrange the necessary details for this to happen. For instance, in some cases, a wide section of one floor was designated for *frum* women; they were hired as a group, so they work near each other. They get different break times than the rest of the company to avoid mingling. When hot lunches are provided, the company was even willing to bring in special packaged food with a *hechsher*. The company also agreed to arrange work shifts that are more compatible with a *frum* mother's schedule.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

After her experiences with so many companies, Mrs. Babad asserts that the overall feedback is positive. This is due in

large measure to the women themselves. When women work with integrity, it creates not only a *kiddush Hashem*, but also a positive and successful workforce, which speaks volumes to the employers. With a wide smile, Mrs. Babad exclaims, "This business model makes such great financial sense. It's beautiful! Any company around the world can copy our model. It benefits everyone, which is our ultimate goal."

My name is Shoshana and I've been working as a manager for Maalam Team for over 25 years, far before Temech was established. When Temech began their EBT program, Mrs. Babad turned to me. Though Temech helps *frum* young women find jobs, once they are working, they need guidance from within. I started as a volunteer in a mentoring capacity. The young women are able to ask me anything they need to know, such as how to work as part of a team when not everyone is religious. I do not take the place of a Rav. However, because I am right here and have vast experience working in this company as a chareidi woman, there are many ways in which I'm singularly qualified to help the newcomers.*

Temech has assisted numerous women to find employment. At the time that I started, more than two and a half decades ago, there were almost no chareidi women at these kinds of jobs, but now there are so many. I am in charge of a large group of chareidi women, and they are wonderful to work with. Their productivity is outstanding; they are smart and honest, which pleases our clients and satisfies our bosses.

*My name is Leah and I live in Bnei Brak. Before I opened my own business, I worked for others in the insurance industry for a long time. What I did was a direct spinoff: I offered courses that would train *frum* girls and women in the computer skills*

necessary for work in insurance companies. I was fortunate to receive direction and guidance from Elyavitz Bituchim, the company I used to work for. By developing and running this course, I felt it could help a lot of people because insurance is a good line of work for frum women.

I got in touch with Temech to see if they could assist in getting my business started. Together, we now offer my courses, called Tzad Bituach by Burstein. I recruit the women and Temech screens the applicants and co-funds the course for them. In this way Temech not only helped me personally to establish my new business, they also helped me to assist others in landing jobs with respected insurance companies. Baruch Hashem, 99% percent of our graduates find employment. At this point companies call us directly to ask for our graduates because our coursework puts these women ahead of others in the field.

THE INTAKE PROCESS

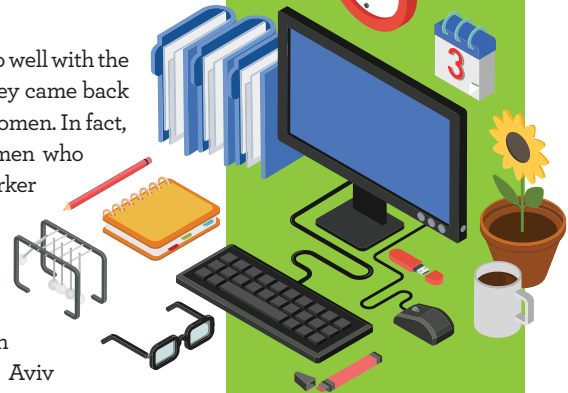
Large companies have a very tough intake process, which begins with the interview. Temech soon realized that as well trained as the women were, they were not making it through this part. To counter this, Temech runs pre-intake workshops before the women go for interviews. Once this happened, the frum women's acceptance rate rose significantly: eight out of 10 women passed, whereas the company's statistic for other applicants show that only one out of every 10 made it through.

It is easy to see the pride in Mrs. Babad's

eyes. "Frum women did so well with the electric company that they came back to us to hire more frum women. In fact, one of those initial 15 women who were hired won the worker of the year award! When other companies saw the success of frum workers, they also turned to us. We then opened branches in Tel Aviv and Haifa."

Shoshana adds: A few years ago Maalam opened a branch in Beitar and a good portion of our employees were chareidi women from there or nearby areas. For business reasons, the bosses wanted to close that branch. At the meeting to discuss this, I told them, "If you move to Yerushalayim, these women won't move with you, because it will be too hard for them to be home in time for their children's return from school." The company chose to stay in Beitar simply because these chareidi women were such an important part of their staff.

Mrs. Shaindy Babad and the staff at Temech have really created a huge revolution. This is something unique in Eretz Yisrael for the chareidi public, a movement that is truly helping thousands of families. Mr. Avi Schron, Temech's chairman of the board, contributes enormously to what Temech has achieved. We owe all those involved a huge debt of gratitude. ■



FUNDING SOURCES

Temech partners only with companies that have a vested interest in them. The company itself finds an instructor they deem suitable, who will teach the material the way they need it taught, at market standards. Funding has several components. The company must invest in the program; this way they are committed. Additionally, the women who participate pay a subsidized fee. The rest is covered by Temech through philanthropic donations. Government funding has been sought, but Mrs. Babad says it is not currently supporting these programs. Mrs. Babad and Temech are continuing to work on procuring the government's involvement as they believe that the Israeli economy stands to gain greatly by supporting these programs.



Instructor from an Israeli high-tech company teaching a course at Temech in their computer lab at the Jerusalem Hub.