



New Jersey Jewish News
Feature

Rabbi with New Jersey ties tapped for key post at upstart seminary

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Rabbi Yamin Levy, who launched his rabbinic career in New Jersey, has been tapped for a key position at [Yeshivat Chovevei Torah](#), a Manhattan-based training ground for Modern Orthodox rabbis.

On June 1, Levy will become vice president of yeshiva affairs at YCT, which was founded by Rabbi Avi Weiss in 1999 in order to train rabbis for what Weiss calls a “more open and inclusive Modern Orthodoxy.”

With backing from Howard Jonas, founder of the Newark-based telecom giant IDT, Weiss founded the seminary in part as a reaction to what he saw as a rightward shift in the Orthodox rabbinate. In his own pulpit, Weiss encourages expanded roles for women, has sought dialogue and appropriate cooperation with non-Orthodox denominations, and urges participation by Jews across the religious spectrum.

“The whole mission of the yeshiva is the rabbinate that I’ve lived — it’s an inclusive rabbinate, an open rabbinate,” Levy — who served as senior rabbi at Congregation Etz Ahaim in Highland Park from 1988 to 1990 — told *NJ Jewish News*. “This is an opportunity to train rabbis. Nothing could be more noble than that.”

The yeshiva created the position to meet its growing needs, according to Weiss, who serves as dean. The school has so far placed 26 rabbis and has accepted its largest incoming class for September — 15 or 16 compared with eight to 10 in past years.

It also has plans to begin a capital campaign, according to Weiss. “YCT is experiencing unbelievable growth,” he said. “There’s so much on the horizon. We need the highest level of administrating as our needs are all expanding. We need a senior rabbi, a master at his work who knows the rabbinate and can help us.”

Of Levy, Weiss said, “He’s the best. He’s a person of vision with extraordinary experience in the practical rabbinate. And he’s a *talmid haham* [wise student] and scholar. We’re delighted to have him on board.”

Levy, now academic director of Sephardi studies at [Yeshiva University](#), remembers his years as a pulpit rabbi in New Jersey fondly. “Those two years were so magnificent,” he said. “We had so much *nachas* watching the community grow and transform. It inspired us to go on and continue.”

After leaving Highland Park, he moved to Seattle. There he founded the day school Yeshivath HaRambam and the Maimonides Heritage Center, a nonprofit organization created to perpetuate the life and legacy of Maimonides and revitalize the economy of Tiberias, where the medieval sage and physician is buried.

In 2000, Levy returned to the East Coast, where he served a synagogue in Great Neck, NY, and then joined the YU faculty.

Levy and Weiss first met when Levy, then a student at YU, served as youth adviser and rabbinic intern from 1984 to 1986 at Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, NY, where Weiss is religious leader. Both said they have remained close. Levy said it was observing Weiss that attracted him to the rabbinate in the first place.

“I remember watching him even as he conceived the idea for YCT,” said Levy.

As vice president of yeshiva affairs, Levy will focus on YCT’s overall mission of recruiting, training, and placing rabbis in North American synagogues. But his vision will expand placement into “European pulpits, in South American pulpits, in key positions in Israel. The future also might involve training educators to be open intellectually in our yeshivot and day schools,” he said, adding, “It’s no secret that Modern Orthodox day school teachers represent the more right-wing yeshivas.”

Although he is of Sephardi background and led Etz Ahaim, a Sephardi synagogue, Levy will leave that focus at the door of YCT. “I’m looking forward to breaking down ethnic barriers. I believe each community should preserve its minhagim [customs], but for training rabbis, there’s a universal model that Chovevei has created. It’s an openness to Halacha and Jews of all backgrounds. I don’t see the Sephardi banner as a centerpiece of what I’ll be doing there.”