

PARNASSAH AS A COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

BY SHIMMY BLUM

"I am crying while writing this letter and I cannot concentrate. I am sorry for that. It is not easy for me to write but I feel that I have to.

"I live in (a major metro-area community) and we desperately need this in our shul. I am a hard-working individual and making a decent living. However, with several children, I am not making it through the month.

"I am a very private person and cannot ask for help. I am willing to help you in any way I can. I feel that this project is the best chessed one can do to help another Yid. We need to find ways to identify the people who break under the heavy burden of not making it through the week/month.

"The ones who have jobs but hardly make it are the ones who most desperately need someone to be there to help them. I can go on at length, but I'm sure you get my point."

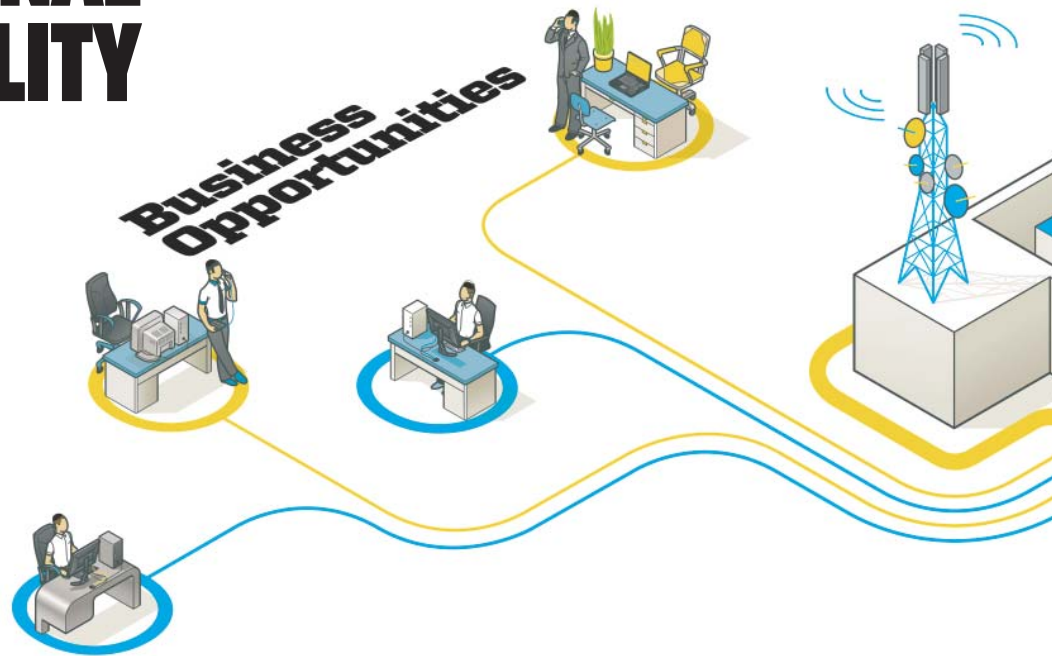
This email is among the many pieces of correspondence that the Parnassah Network organization has fielded in recent weeks regarding its new Parnes Batei Knesses program. Parnes Batei Knesses was introduced at the recent Agudath Israel of America convention by founder and director Reb Duvi Honig, along with Rabbi Paysach Krohn, an enthusiastic supporter.

As revolutionary as the program is, the concept behind Parnes Batei Knesses is remarkably simple: Each shul will have two *gabbai'im* who see the livelihood of every member as their *achrayus*. Each *parnas*, or *gabbai*, will serve as the point person on the ground for *parnassah* in their *kehillah* — just as there are a Rav, a *gabbai* and other individuals to fill other needs. Each shul, and its Rav and other leaders, is encouraged to focus on helping its members with *parnassah* by implementing this program.

One major responsibility for the *parnas* will be to help those who are out of a job and looking to work, to get back on their own two feet. However, more than being reactive, the *parnas'* goal will be to be as proactive as possible. He will work to familiarize himself with the vocation and economic situation of all *kehillah* households — and work to help everyone improve their success in every way possible.

Why is this initiative necessary? Won't those in need naturally turn to the proper resources for help?

The answer to this is multifold. Even those in need will often not know the proper address to turn to, or will be too complacent or ashamed to do so. So many in our community remain unassisted, or receive help belatedly after much unnecessary suffering. With a *parnas* in each shul, how many more people can be helped — and how much ear-



lier? How much pain could families be spared? How many people are walking around in our neighborhoods in a similar situation and have yet to be helped?

The *parnas'* task will be to proactively fill this gaping void. Additionally, the *parnas* will be on the lookout to help even those who are earning a reasonable *parnassah* to do even better. "The world would be an entirely different place if individuals in every one of our communities join in this effort and do whatever they can to help others — and themselves — in the area of business and *parnassah*," says Reb Duvi.

Thankfully, with this enhanced awareness, Rabbanim and activists in a broad range of shuls in our region — some of them very prominent — have contacted Parnassah Network and taken the steps necessary to join the program.

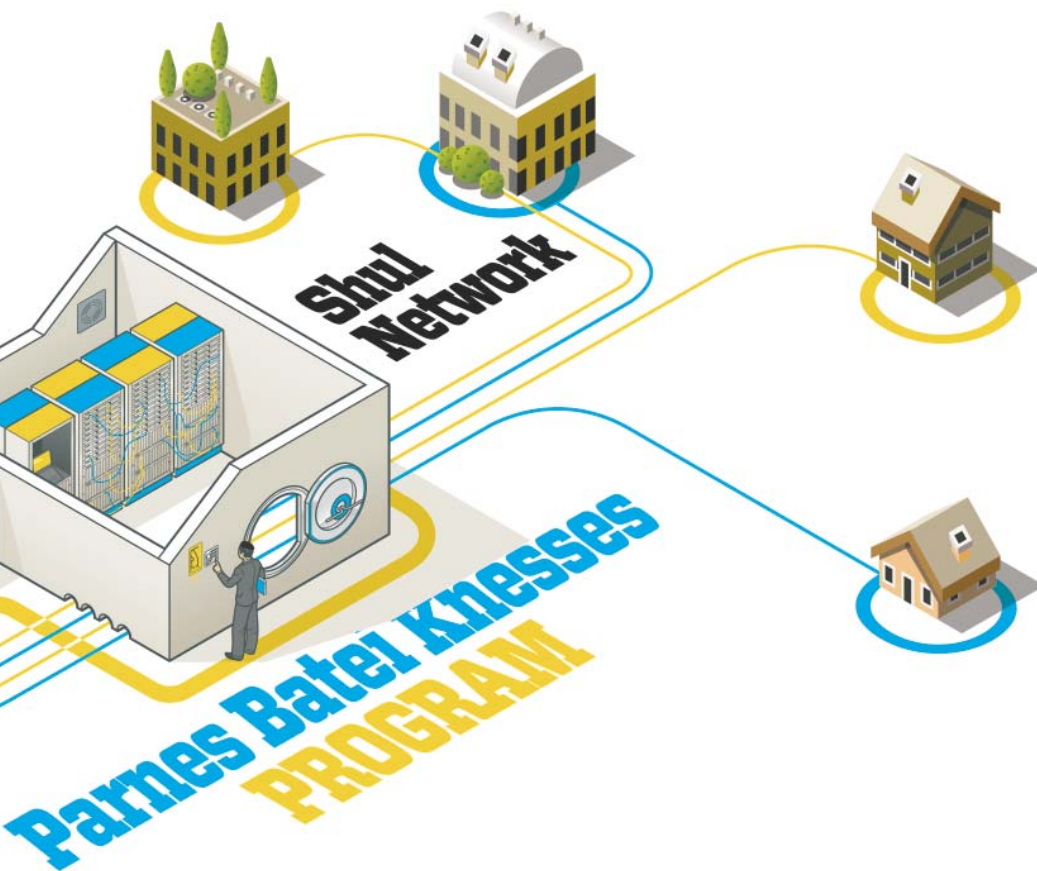
GATHERING THE TOOLS

Who can be a *parnas*?

The *parnas* does not need to be a professional headhunter, business or employment coach, or member of a social service agency. All that is necessary is the talent and motivation to undertake this lofty effort, along with the approval and partnership of the shul's Rav and other leaders.

Reb Duvi and the myriad branches of Parnassah Network and the Orthodox Jewish Chamber of Commerce offer a slew of resources that help those at any age and stage — in any industry or professional sector — aim towards their highest goals and succeed. The *parnassim* will have direct access to all of them. The Parnes Batei Knesses program itself will offer the *parnassim* the infrastructure to network with each other, and exchange ideas and resources.

Parnassim will receive professional training on how to identify the *parnassah* needs of members of their community; how to help them; and, most importantly, how to do so with the utmost sensitivity and respect. *Parnassim* will have the resources to identify and network with



PARNES BATEI KNESSES PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

A *parnas* is a volunteer who will be approachable, capable and fully confidential; and be able to facilitate assistance for those who would not ordinarily reach out for help.

A *parnas* can only be accepted into the Parnes Batei Knesses program if he provides written approval from the shul's Rav for him to assume that position.

Parnassah Network recommends an average of two *parnassim* per shul, but the number can vary according to shul size. *Parnassim* must realistically be able to reach out to all members of the shul, and offer effective assistance to all those in need.

Parnassim will reach out to all shul members via email or another effective medium, and compile a database of the occupations of husband and/or wife in each household.

The *parnas* will look to assess the successes and challenges of specific members' careers and household financial situations. This will not be done in an aggressive, prying manner, but rather through making members comfortable to share pertinent information.

The *parnas* will not only focus on the most urgent predicaments, e.g., someone who is unemployed or facing bankruptcy. They will seek to assist those whose incomes in their current job or business do not suffice for their expenses, and/or are earning less than their full potential.

In addition to continuous professional training, Parnassah Network will offer *parnassim* the full gamut of our *parnassah*-related resources.

A special online portal has been created for *parnassim*. This resource will help immensely with networking with other *parnassim*, and accessing other helpful resources.



Above: (R-L) Harav Malkiel Kotler, *Rosh Yeshivah*, Beth Medrash Govoha, and Harav Shaul Simcha Friedman, son of the Tenker Rav and Rav of Kehal Shemen Lemincha in Lakewood, at the *kvias mezuzah* for the Parnassah Network's office.

Below: Affixing the *mezuzah* to the door of the office.

the *parnas* in other shuls if they can be of help to anyone they know. The *parnassim* will also hold monthly *melavei malkah* or Sunday networking breakfasts which will be dedicated towards this crucial networking and exploration of new resources.

One key facet of the *parnassim's* resources will be the focus on the members of their community who *are* successful in their business or professional endeavors. These individuals will be encouraged to utilize their talents, experience and contacts on behalf of others looking to advance in their industry or area of expertise. There are so many around us who have so much to offer others when it comes to *parnassah*. The *parnas* helps put these priceless resources to use.

"*Baruch Hashem*, this program has gotten off to an amazing start, with phenomenal public enthusiasm," says Reb Duvi. The world is already a better place in this regard and will, *b'ezras Hashem*, be getting even better in the months ahead. "I hope the day is near when every Yid will have access to this resource," says Reb Duvi.

We are certainly a lot closer to that than we were just a few weeks ago. ■

For more information or to have your shul join the Parnes Batei Knesses program, please email duvi@parnassahexpo.com or see www.shulparnas.com.