

# Flatbush Turns Out in Support of Keren Ezer L'nefesh

Rav Shimon Alster and Rav Elya Brudny Lead Communal Effort

Last Tuesday, 25 Adar I/February 25<sup>th</sup>, saw an unprecedented event in the Flatbush community. Rav Shimon Alster, *rov* of Bais Medrash Torah U'tefillah and *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Gedolah of Cliffwood, opened his home to host a parlor meeting on behalf of Keren Ezer L'nefesh. Typically, fundraising events are held in the homes of well-known *askanim* or *baalei tzedakah*. When a *rov* opens his home and goes beyond the norm, we know that we are dealing with something unique. The event was attended by hundreds of Flatbush residents, among them many prominent *rabbonim* from Flatbush.

The program began with R' Ruvy Kantor explaining how Keren Ezer L'nefesh operates. This was followed by *divrei pesichah* from the host, Rav Alster, who stressed that it is the responsibility of each and every person to assist individuals suffering from emotional and mental health issues.

Rav Elya Brudny, who co-hosted the event with Rav Alster, spoke about the prevalence of emotional health issues among teenagers in our times. He stressed the importance of early intervention in dealing with these issues and how it can save future generations.

Rav Brudny also mentioned that when a project is undertaken by a *gadol* such as Rav Chaim Epstein, we need to do what we can to support the endeavor.

The final speaker was the founder and *yoshev rosh* of the Keren, Rav Epstein, who discussed the impact of emotional and mental health issues on the lives of those suffering as well as their families. He related several stories of cases he is personally involved in. He stated that supporting this Keren fulfills the *mitzvah* of *hachzokas haTorah*, *hatzolas nefashos* and *pidyon shvuyim*.



## So You Think You Know About Seforim?

A Review of "People of the Book" by Akiva Aaronson,  
Reviewed by Rabbi Yaakov Nataf

For those of us who spend so many of our waking hours learning from *seforim*, it is amazing how little we know about the actual history of the books that we use. True, most of us have heard about the Romm printing house that first published the classic *Shas* used today. But how many of us know that the commentaries of *Rashi* and *Tosafos* were only put around the text of the *Gemara* for the first time in 1483 by the Italian Soncino family, or that the very expression "*Shas*" - the acronym that stands for *Shisha Sidrei Mishnah* - first came into common usage to bypass censors who had become wary of the *Gemara's* contents? These and many other intriguing facts are part of an outstanding overview of Jewish printing re-

cently released by Feldheim Publishers.

In *People of the Book*, Rabbi Akiva Aaronson demonstrates his talents as a writer and researcher, culling vast amounts of information and presenting it in a most readable and intelligent fashion.

The research was carried out over the course of several years at the Jewish National Library in Yerushalayim, the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, and elsewhere. Almost as appealing as Aaronson's well-researched text is its accompanying treasure trove of photographs, a sampling of many of the most important books printed over the last five hundred years. With an eye-catching cover and design, this coffee table book will certainly be appreciated by learners of Torah and the general public alike.

The book is divided into four sections: the invention of the printing press and its significance; the main section, which deals with the history of Hebrew printing; a discussion of specific genres (*Shutim* and *Haggados*); and a final section that deals with censorship and various *halachic* questions that have

arisen as a result of the invention of printing.

While I found the entire book fascinating, the section on censorship was of particular interest, revealing many insights about Jewish history more generally. In this regard, the author's point that the story of the printed *Haggadah* itself shows "the history of five hundred years of Jewish exile and migration" could be said about this entire book as well. In fact, as a onetime teacher of Jewish history, I would recommend the use of this book in Jewish history classes, which are often in short supply of appropriate resources.

Another feature of great interest is the several lengthy quotes taken from the introductions or postscripts of many *seforim*. For example, we read of the very generous reception by the *Sefardi* community in Amsterdam of Rav Moshe Rivkes, the *Be'er Hagolah*, after his escape from the infamous Ukrainian pogroms of *Tach Vetat*. We also read of Rav Yonasan Eibeshitz's limited time to learn Torah, given his need to speak "with princes and priests" in order to explain and defend Jewish writings and practice. Finally, we learn of the efforts of post-World War II DPs to recreate Jewish life with the publication of *seforim*, printed on German printing presses that had only recently published Nazi tracts. In short, the reader will be left with a renewed pride in being a Jew and a deeper admiration for the *mesirus nefesh* of previous generations.

The disproportionately large percentage of Hebrew books published in comparison to the total European output at the dawn of printing gives us perspective on the connection between Jews and their books. It shows just how central *seforim* are to Jewish life and gives ample evidence to justify the book's most appropriate title, *People of the Book*.

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