

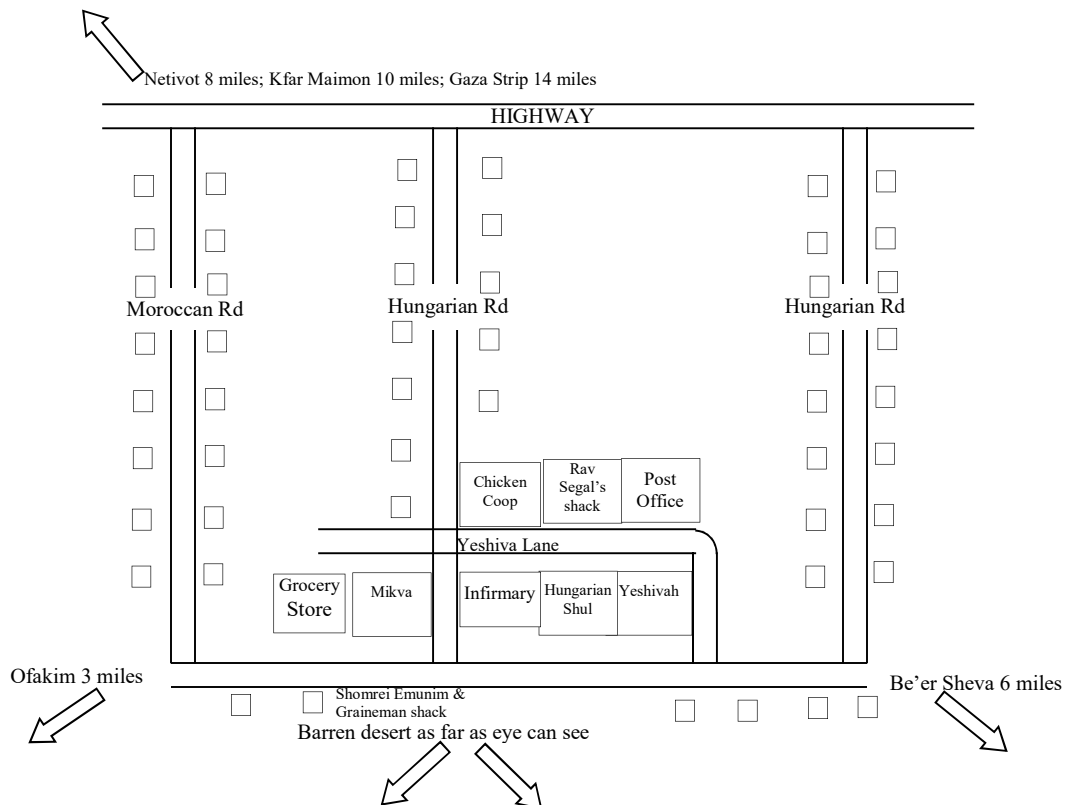
LIFE IN YESHIVAT TIFRACH IN 1970 page 1 of 5

I studied in Yeshivat Tifrach for one year in 1970, and frequently visited there during the year I studied at Yeshivat Ofakim in 1971. The following are my memories of it, which might have become distorted over the past 40 years. My friend, Shimon Hillel (who still lives in Tifrach and runs a yeshivah katana of his own there) recently helped jog my memory. As I remember:

Yeshivat Tifrach was located in Moshav Tifrach. Moshav Tifrach was founded in 1950 with about 100 immigrant farming families living in 100 shacks. Each shack was built of concrete block covered with stucco. Each shack was 45 sq meters (450 sq ft) in area, with only a bedroom, a living room and a tiny kitchen. The kitchen had a cold water spigot, and no means for hot water. The shacks were originally built with outhouses in the back, but by 1970 all the families, except for one, had replaced them with an indoor toilet. Each shack was built on a 20 dunam (5 acre) strip of land, of which about 17 dunam was used for farming. The moshav had a social hall, about 70ft x 70ft. Mail was not delivered to each home. Instead, each family picked up their mail at the communal post office shack. The moshav's city hall, infirmary, grocery store and mikvah were also each in a shack.

Since its founding in 1950, the residents were gradually moving away. By 1967, only about 60 families remained. That left 40 abandoned shacks and an underused social hall. So the moshav residents voted to invite Rav Yakov Friedman's small yeshiva, located in Kfar Maimon, to move to their yeshivah. Rav Yakov Friedman invited another small yeshivah, run by Rav Zvi Friedman and Rav Dan Segal, located first in Netanya, to join him. Both yeshivas moved to Moshav Tifrach in 1967.

MAP OF TIFRACH (not to scale)



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As shown in the drawing above, Moshav Tifrach was bordered on the north by an east-west highway. It had only four roads, none of which had a name. They included one 4000-ft-long east-west road that was south of the highway, and three north-south roads that extended 2000 ft from the east-west road to the highway. About 40 Hungarian families lived on the east and center roads. And about 20 Moroccan families lived on the west road. The Hungarian families spoke Hungarian or Yiddish amongst themselves. I remember that one Hungarian farmer's wife spoke only Hungarian and Yiddish, and not speak Hebrew. The Moroccans (even their teenagers) spoke Arabic between themselves. They were also fluent in French.

Tifrach had street lights that turned off at about 10:00 pm. After that, while walking on the road at night, the only light came from the moon. And on moonless nights, it was so dark that you could not see your hand even a foot in front of you, much less the road you were walking on. On those nights, I would find my way shack by feeling the contour of the pavement under my feet.

Rav Yaakov Friedman was the rosh yeshivah and also the lowest shiur's rebbe, Rav Dan Segal was the mashgiach and also the middle shiur's rebbe. Rav Zvi Friedman was the highest shiur's rebbe. Rabbi Obermeister taught the baalei teshuvah. In 1971, Rav Shachter (?), who was a twin married to an American twin, joined the staff.

The yeshivah had about 60 regular students ("yeshivah bachurim") ages 14-22 and about 10 kollel families ages 24-28 Each kollel family lived in an abandoned shack. The bachurim lived in about 7 other shacks, with about 5 beds per shack. Most of the students' shacks had a toilet and sink, some had a shower, and no means for hot water. Some had out-of-use outhouses. Tuition for non-Israeli students was \$50/month, which paid for room and board. Each student supplied his own linen and washed his own clothes.

Since there were no hot showers in the shacks, we showered in the mikvah shack. The mikvah shack, built 20 years earlier, had a women's section with its own entrance and mikvah pool, and a men's section with its own entrance and mikvah pool. The men's section had no electric lighting. When going to the mikvah at night, we took candles and matches to illuminate the mikvah. There was an overhead shower. But it had no drain. The floor was sloped to guide the shower water into a groove in the floor which led to a hole in the external wall. The shower water drained out of that hole, and vermin could enter the mikvah through that hole. One night, when a yeshivah boy was alone in the mikvah pool, he felt something touching him. He looked down and saw it was a frog swimming in the mikvah pool.

The social hall had a single large room. The moshav assigned it to the yeshivah. A thick drape was hung across it. The bais medrash was on one side of the curtain, and the cafeteria on the other. The bais medrash was full of wood benches and shtenders. The cafeteria had about 8 picnic tables. The social hall (serving as the bais medrash and cafeteria) had no furnace (or any means for heating the air) or air conditioner. But it did have a unit that supposedly cooled the air by spraying a water mist into the air.

In the summer, the weather was dangerously hot, with very low humidity. During the hottest days, a person could actually die of exposure if walking in the sun without a head covering for over 30 minutes. Drenched clothes would dry in the open air within 10 minutes. It rained only for about 2 weeks a year. Nevertheless, I never saw an air conditioner on any home or building in the moshav.

When standing on the east-west road and looking south, all you saw was a vast empty desert, with nothing but a few trees visible for miles around. Some of us would hike through the barren parched desert, where we passed dry ravines and saw some small flowers. While hiking

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in the desert, the silence was shocking. Except for a periodic passing plane, there was nothing in the desert that would make noise, such as the rustling of trees or grass, since there were no trees or grass.

There were about 4 wells scattered over the desert. Each was 100-200 feet deep, and lined with a wall of bricks for the first 50 feet and solid rock for the remainder. One well was surrounded by 1 foot high wall of stone, and the others were not surrounded by anything, so that a hiker not paying attention could fall in.

In the middle of nowhere in the desert, there was an abandoned large home made of stone, with a stairway that led to its flat roof. It had the same motif as Squires Castle in Cleveland. It was known as "Bait Haturky" ("the Turkish house"). Also in the middle of nowhere in the desert was a bridge spanning a valley between two hills, even though there was no road in sight. It was known as "Gesher Haturkey" ("Turkish Bridge"), and was probably built in the early 1900s in anticipation for a road that was never built.

Also in the middle of nowhere in the desert was a cave in the side of a hill. It had an entrance about 10 feet high and wide, and had a chamber that was about 50 feet in diameter and about 20 feet high. The cave was abandoned during most of the year. But for about 3 weeks a year, a nomad lived in it along with his wife, mother and some of his pack animals. Mrs. Pacifi (pronounced Pacheeefichee, who was married to the Italian dean of Ofakim's yeshivah ketana) told me she was hiking in the desert with her 3 year old son and met the nomad's mother near the cave. The nomad's mother offered some dried dates to the 3-year old son. The nomad told the rebbe'sin "I live like a nomad year-round, with no permanent home. However, I am relatively well-to-do, and own more animals than these that I brought with me to this cave this season. I could afford to buy a real house. But I live in tents and caves out of respect to my mother. She says 'my parents lived in tents and caves; their parents lived in tents and caves; so we will live in tents and caves.'"

On one hike, I was standing on the top of a gully looking down into it, and saw an Arab teenage boy walking in the gully. We started talking. He said he was on his way from his parent's tent encampment through the desert to his uncle's tent encampment. I asked where his family found water to drink in the desert. He answered that his family now-a-days brings jugs to the Jewish moshavs and fills them from spigots. But before the moshavs were built, they would fill their jugs from temporary streams that would form after a rain.

From the east-west road of Tifrach, you could barely see the city of Ofakim, about 3 miles away. I walked there often, straight across the desert. You could also see the city Beersheba about 6 miles away. I walked there and back, straight across the desert, twice. I also walked to Netivot, 7 miles straight across a variety of terrains. During that hike, I saw two nomad women, each running after the sheep (like a sheep dog does to keep sheep in line) while carrying a child on one shoulder; what stamina!

Boys could be found learning in the bais medrash at all times of day and night. I sometimes learned in the bais medrash with my friends all through the afternoon and night until about an hour before sun up, and then walked in the dark to the mikvah with my friends (with candles in hand), and then returned to the bais medrash where about 5 of us would start davening shacharis about 20 minutes before sun up so that we'd reach Shmoneh Esrai at sun up. Then we'd return to our shack to sleep for about 4 hours, and then start the cycle over again.

One time, at about 4:00 in the morning, when about five of us students were learning in the bais medrash, Rav Dan Segal came in and asked us to dance. We got out of our seats and sang and danced in a ring, each boy grasping his neighbor's arm. Rav Segal's arm was so thin

that my hand was able to stretch almost fully around it, (with my thumb almost touching the tip of my other fingers). Rav Segal gradually increased the tempo to a point that we could no longer keep up, and we ran of breath before he did. And then he left and returned to his shack.

Each bed consisted of a simple metal frame and a straw-filled mattress. There was no washer or dryer available to the students, so I washed all my clothes in a bucket. Four of the students cleaned up a long-abandoned chicken coop, moved their beds into it, and claimed it as their dorm room. The chicken coop was about 400 square feet in area and 6 feet high, with a concrete floor, and empty except for a cold water spigot.

The Hungarian couples were generally about 40-70 years old. Only about three of their male children lived on the moshav. Their younger generation had moved away from the moshav. The Hungarians spoke to each other in Hungarian. And the grocery store, which was owned and run by two Hungarian brothers carried the Hungarian newspaper Sziget. The Hungarians had their own small Hungarian shule, with a Hungarian rabbi.

The Moroccan couples were about 30-50 years old and had many children who lived on the moshav. Their children spoke Hebrew and Arabic between themselves. One of the Moroccan couples had 12 children, and their whole family lived in the 3-room train-style shack. The Moroccans had their own shule.

The three main roads of the moshav had no name. And the homes had no address numbers.

One of the Hungarian men lived by himself. He was divorced, and his adult daughter moved away. He had a vineyard and made his own wine. He would invite yeshivah boys to his home on Shabbos to share his wine and shmooze. He was proud to be the only moshav member not to have installed an indoor bathroom. He was proud to be tough enough to still use an outhouse, and proud to have been handy enough to upgrade it by installing a comfortable toilet seat on top of the hole.

Another one of the Hungarian men was Mr. Zitron. He was the only moshav resident who still used a horse to plow his field. He was a scrubby man, and learned Gemara by himself every evening in the bais medrash.

I believe Rabbi Yakov Friedman's wife was a professor of accounting at Ben Gurion University in Ber Sheva. He had two boys, 8 year old Zvi (Tzviki) and 5 year old Rafi, and a 4 year old daughter Michal. 8-year old Zvi had an amazing memory for Tanach. I used to test him by reading a pasuk I picked at random from any book of Tanach; and he would tell me the name of the book, the perek number, an approximation of the pasuk number, and an approximation of the total number of pasukim in that perek. I once asked him what his secret is for memorizing. He said "I don't know. I started learning how to read at the age of 3. I started learning Tanach at the age of 5. And by now, at the age of 8, I read Tanach three times over, and it just sticks in my mind."

Another brilliant student was Chaim Sofer, who was about 19 years old. His grandfather was the famous Sfardi posek Chaim Sofer who wrote *Kaf Hachaim*, which is like *Mishnah Brurah* for Sfarim. A year later, I attended yeshivah with his brilliant 18 year old brother, Moshe Sofer, at Yeshivat Ofakim, when I was 20 and he was about 16 years old.

The famous posek Rabbi Chaim Graniman (the Chazon Ish's nephew, who lived in Bnei Brak) would vacation in Tifrach for a few weeks each year. I was told he had 18 children. I don't know where he davened during those times, since I don't remember him davening in the bais medrash.

Similarly, the admor of Shomrei Emunim (whose shule is Mai Sharim) would vacation in Tifrach for a few weeks each year. He learned of our moshav because one of his Chasidim was a Tifrach farmer. I don't know where he davened during his visits, since I don't remember him davening in the bais medrash either.

Rav Piltz, who was growing in fame, also spent some time with us. I understand Rav Piltz recently moved permanently to Tifrach and took over as rosh yeshivah.

Rav Dan Segal was mashgiach and also taught one of the shiurim. He lived in an apartment in Bnei Brak where his wife was the principle of a Bais Yakov girl school. He would commute, by living in a two-room shack in Tifrach during the weekdays and returning to his home in Bnei Brak for Shabos. He would take about two hours to daven Shacharis, of which about Shmoneh Esrai took almost an hour. He davened in the bais medrash half the time and in his shack half the time. However, when he led the service ("davened for the amud"), he davened much quicker than anyone else. He was sickly thin. He would eat his meals in the shack. He often sang songs in his shack for a few hours at a time, often at midnight, that could be heard from the road outside. One time, my friend Larry Siegel was passing Rav Segal's shack at midnight and heard Rav Segal singing. Larry taped it on his tape recorder from outside the shack. Jerry let me copy the recording onto my own tape recorder.

One interesting person was Kalman Zeines, from Flatbush. He was an amazingly skilled photographer. He once captured a photo of Rabbi Katzenelenbogen (the rosh yeshivah of the Neturai Kartah yeshivah) that was so perfect that it looked as though Rabbi Katzenelenbogen posed for it even though Rabbi Katzenelenbogen would never let his photo be taken.

Another interesting person was Yosef Mizrachi. He was a 17 year old high school dropout from Buenos Aires who had weird but one of the smartest students in the yeshivah. One time, when the Rav Yakov Friedman was giving a class, Yosef Mizrachi contradicted the Rosh Yeshivah's interpretation of the Gemara. After a brief interchange between the two, Rav Friedman said to us "He's right. And the point that he found I erred in was the basis for the rest of my whole lecture. So the lecture is over."

To my knowledge, there were only 2 telephones in the entire moshav. All three were privately owned by families; no pay phones existed. If someone needed to use a phone, he would ask to use one of those phones and reimburse the owner for the minutes used. I also never saw a television or air conditioner on the entire moshav.

Yeshivat Tifrach was a yeshivah gedolah. That is, in only Rabbi Obermeister's class were the students taught the *pashut pshat* of the Gemara. Instead, even for the lowest level class, each student arrived in class already knowing the Gemara, Rashi and Tosfos, and the rebbe merely tied that in with Rishonim and Acharonim. All classes were taught in Hebrew. As with Israel's universities and working sector in those days, the weekend consisted only of Saturday; Sunday was as much a weekday (in terms of classes and work) as Monday.