



Golden Leaves Institute: Nurturing a Brighter Future

Creating leaders is not just giving them the tools, but making sure they know how to use them properly...

“Our Jewish tradition acknowledges the legitimate pursuit of *parnassa* and the satisfaction of one’s material needs. In the Torah, wealth is part of Gd’s blessings,” said Rabbi Shlomo Sam Kassin, Dean of The Shehebar Sephardic Center in Jerusalem.

“Through the mitzva of *tzedakah*, the recipient of wealth becomes an administrator and redistributor of Gd’s blessings, sharing his blessing with those who have less. Wealth is positive inasmuch as we recognize that, ultimately, it comes directly from Hashem, who grants us the strength and wisdom to make a living. Most importantly, Judaism requires that wealth be acquired with integrity.”

On the basis of these guiding principles, Rabbi Kassin developed a new and innovative 11-month program that combines Jewish learning and ethics with business and community leadership. The program, called the Golden Leaves Institute, is run under the capable leadership of director Abi Bitton (son of Rabbi Yosef Bitton) and assistant director Yair Salem.

“I wanted to have a program that was outside the box that met a communal need,” said Rabbi Kassin. “This program gives the students as many as 20 college credits, and applies hands-on business training (internships) with practical knowledge. The students learn Jewish ethics and then apply that knowledge to the business world.”

Participants in the Golden Leaves Institute began their experience with two months in Israel devoted to the study of Jewish business and ethics under the tutelage of Rabbi Ezra Kassin and religious business experts. In October, 10 students flew to Pudong, China for a four-month period of study at YCC International Business School in Shanghai. The students live in two apartments in a compound where they enjoy numerous facilities and amenities. Their program includes classes in Mandarin and several field trips.

Community members provided internships to the brave students, and several met with the students. Morris Dweck of Bentex joined the students for their Hanukah celebration.

The Golden Leaves students hail from Mexico, Israel, the United States (Florida, New Jersey and New York), and England. Internships were provided by Morris Dweck of Bentex; Allan Shamah of E.L.F. Cosmetics; Joey Harari, Joey Habert and Stevie Korman of Jacques Moret; David Beyda of Town and Country Linens; Ricky Sutton of Lollytogs; and Joe Cohen and Albert Sassoon of Victoria Housewares. Jack Mann loaned the program a *Sefer Torah* to be used during the four months in Shanghai, in memory of his father, Nat Mann.

Josh Morrison, one of the British students, has a Golden Leaves blog at jbmreality.com. He noted that after the first Shabbat in Shanghai, some fellows were having trouble sleeping because of the time change, and so they watched the beautiful sunrise from the top of their building, 43 stories up. “I have seen many sunrises but this one was different, first – I was pretty high up, and second – I was in China overlooking Huangpu River, the largest river in Shanghai, and the second largest building in China.”

Visitors to Shanghai are welcome to come for prayers three times a day, as well as for meals and Shabbat services, at Dongtai Road 200 Long No.7, Pudong, Shanghai.

“The students are working hard, as the program is intense,” said Abi Bitton. “It is an experience they will never forget.”

In February, the students will return to Israel and spend four months in Ramat Gan, where they will take intensive courses in business, technology and entrepreneurship at Bar Ilan University. The program culminates in Jerusalem, where the students will learn about community and business leadership from Dr. Simcha Leibowitch, Head of the Leadership Center of the World Zionist Organization.

“In this section our main goal is to make sure the students learn how to take what they learnt the past 10 months and apply it to their daily lives, to their homes and communities,” Rabbi Kassin said. “Creating leaders is not just giving them the tools, but making sure they know how to use them properly.”

For more information about the Golden Leaves Institute, please visit www.goldenleaves.net.