

# Jewish Journal

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## LOCAL

### Rabbinical advice goes high-tech

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Eretz Hemdah is taking on the world one community, one rabbi and one question at a time.

Through programs like "Ask The Rabbi," this Israel-based institute is providing answers to any layperson who needs them.

Through the multi-volume Responsa B'Mareh Habazak book, rabbis worldwide address questions.

The institute also prepares select rabbis to receive the "yadin yadin" ordination, considered to be the Ph.D. of rabbinical studies.

"If we want to serve all nations, we must try to understand everyone," says Rabbi Yosef

Carmel, one of the institute's founders.

Carmel was recently in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, meeting with rabbis.

"Rabbi Carmel is a special individual in his need to help rabbis in the field, and to help with continued education," says Rabbi Donald Bixon of Young Israel of Miami Beach.

Carmel says the institute's role is trying to raise "a new generation of Torah scholars" who are at their highest level of rabbinical studies.

"Only five new students [are accepted] every year from thousands of applications, because it has to be somebody very special," Carmel says. "It takes about seven years to be

ordained, and we choose them first based on their intellectuality, but we also want them to be with a personality that will give them the opportunity of working in a sensitive way with compassion, and to try to be in touch with any segment of every Jewish part of our nation."

This includes service in the Israel Defense Forces.

"This program is very Zionist," says Carmel, a seventh-generation Israeli. "Only someone who identifies themselves as part of the Israeli society can be accepted to be in the institute and, unlike the states, if you are not serving in the IDF, you are not a part of Israeli society, because in Is-



Rabbi Moshe Ehrenreich, left, with Yosef Carmel, heads of the Eretz Hemdah institute. SUBMITTED PHOTO

rael it is a privilege and a duty, and you have influence on the society."

Another condition is giving at least one day every week to the public.

"It can be done by taking a group of

teenagers, boys and girls, not religious, and to learn together the Torah, not teach them, but to bring them to be your friend. And the end of the story would be that they would love

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to be in touch with Torah and that they would love to be a part of our tradition and not be beside it, even if they are not as observant."

Education is a tool in these goals and to that end, Eretz Hemdah released the responsa book.

"They are an outstanding institute that prepares people to be rabbinical court judges, and part of what they

do is that they have these volumes where people send their questions from all over the world and [the institute] responds to them, collects it and put it into the book," says Rabbi Neal Turk of Beth Israel in Miami Beach.

Turk has been to the institute and met Carmel when he was doing research on a particular law.

"The answers are very detailed, with notes that you can easily look up their references, and for a rabbi

they are very useful," Turk says. "I would call it one of the most modern editions to responsa literature."

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The questions that people send in are questions that come

through "Ask The Rabbi," featured on [www.erezhemdah.org](http://www.erezhemdah.org).

"There are probably many people out there who have questions, who are either not affil-

iated, or they do not have a relationship with a rabbi, and everyone does everything online. So if, at 4 a.m., you feel compelled to ask those questions,

they are available to you," Bixon says.

Carmel says the Web site has answered more than 12,000 questions in English so far, and almost every question is a new one.

"Judaism is an ocean and every Jew finds his wave in this ocean and tries to surf on this wave and find his roots, and we try to help Jews everywhere this way, to try to be in touch with our people and our tradition," Carmel says. "In Miami, it is simple. If

someone wants to go to a shul or get in touch with a rabbi, in five minutes they are there, but not for some Jews who live in Albuquerque, Nevada or Oregon. Someone from Oregon wrote us, saying that the shul closest to her house was about 150 miles."

Now, it's just an Internet click away.

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