

SPOTLIGHT

# From Brachas to Brake Jobs

*Rabbi-mechanic Danny Rosenblum keeps the cars of the faithful running smoothly.*

**PAUL MARGOLIS**  
SPECIAL TO THE JEWISH WEEK

**W**orking under the hoods of cars is one of the last places you'd expect to find a rabbi. But that's where Orthodox Danny Rosenblum spends his working days.

The owner of Danny's Diagnostic Center in Flatbush, Rosenblum holds both *smicha* (rabbinic ordination) from Plaza Torah Center in Queens and a degree in automotive technology from De Anza College in Cupertino, Calif.

A slim, articulate man in his mid-30s with a short, well-trimmed beard, Rosenblum wears a plain black kipa while working, and a mechanic's uniform with "Danny" stitched over the left breast pocket. His garage has a mezuzah on every door and the calendar is illustrated with scenes of Jerusalem instead of the scantily clad women more commonly found on garage calendars.

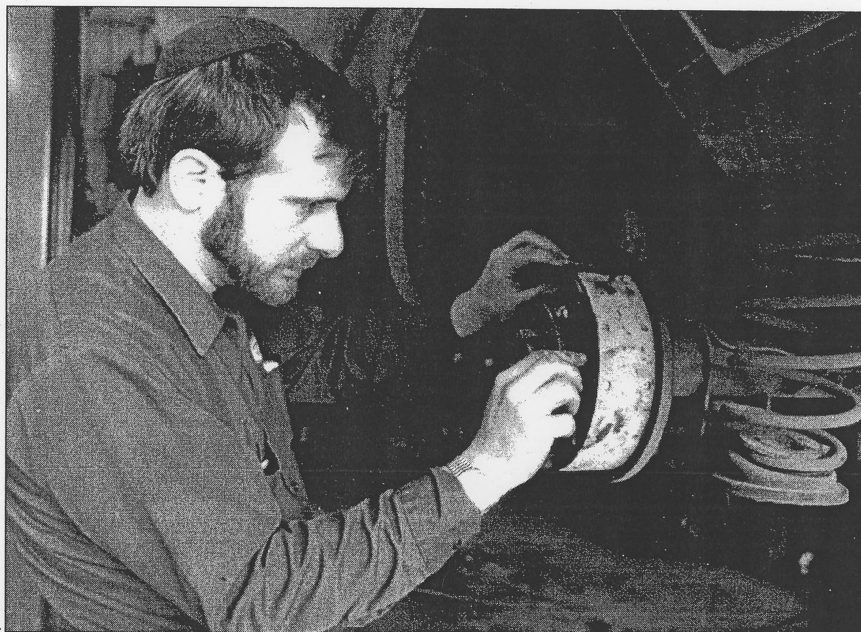
What is a rabbi and former yeshiva teacher doing getting grease under his fingernails? Rabbis have a long and honorable tradition of doing manual labor, Rosenblum explains.

"Many rabbis in the Talmud, and in Jewish history, worked with their hands. Reb Joshua was a blacksmith, and Reb Yohanon was a shoemaker," he says of two rabbis who contributed to the Talmud. "Reb Yohanon said that when he sewed a shoe's sole to the uppers, it was the same as if he were joining heaven and earth. The Baal Shem Tov [the founder of chasidism] was a woodchopper."

Rosenblum attributes his early interest in things mechanical to his father, who was an Air Force machinist in World War II. After the war, the elder Rosenblum taught shop, art and photography at a Brooklyn high school.

"My father was always building things," Rosenblum says. "In the apartment where we lived in East New York, one bedroom was made into a machine shop."

Father and son shared a love of machines and in finding out what makes them tick. The younger Rosenblum's first love was cars, and even while he was in yeshiva he loved to tinker under hoods.



**In the tradition of the Sages of the Talmud, Danny Rosenblum works with his hands and brings a rabbi's wisdom to the physical world.** *Photo by Paul Margolis*

Rosenblum is convinced that his talmudic training gives him an advantage over other mechanics. "Studying the Talmud requires several things that are essential to a good mechanic," he says. "The first is patience, doggedness. There's a Yiddish word, *sitzfleisch*, the patience to sit and think about something until you figure it out.

"After patience comes an ability to read and understand difficult texts. Cars are complicated machines nowadays — all the computers and electronics in them — and you have to be able to understand the manuals."

Most important, he says, are the analytical skills that a thorough talmudic education gave him. "In the Talmud it's written: 'A good question is half the answer.' For example, a customer calls and says his car won't start. When I hear that, I know what exact questions to ask him: Does the motor turn over, or is it completely dead? From the answers to those ques-

tions, I already have half the diagnosis' even before I get the car into the shop."

Talmud study "teaches you that you can never make assumptions, even when something is apparently true," Rosenblum says. "You have to keep an open mind because there are always at least two different sides to an argument."

Rosenblum came to his current career via a circuitous route. After Yeshiva Eastern Parkway, he attended the Plaza Torah Center, where he got his *smicha*. From there he went to Rabbi Joel Kramer's teacher training program in Brooklyn.

For a few years he taught in yeshivas in the New York area. Rosenblum then was offered a job teaching Judaic studies at the South Peninsula Hebrew Day School in Sunnyvale, Calif. He taught there from 1981 to 1986, rising to the position of assistant principal.

During the years he taught in Sunnyvale,

Rosenblum maintained his interest in cars. He earned an applied science degree in automotive technology and continued to work on cars in his spare time.

After five years in California, homesickness drew him and his family back to Brooklyn. When he returned, Danny found a position as a yeshiva teacher. However, he quickly discovered that "in California, qualified yeshiva teachers are rare, so they are treated with more respect and there are more jobs to choose from. Out there, I felt like a star; in New York, I was just a number."

So Rosenblum turned increasingly to his boyhood love of cars as a means of support. "I would work on cars until late at night after school," he recalls. "I used to work right on the street or in people's unheated garages."

In 1989, Rosenblum decided to leave teaching entirely. After a failed attempt to open a garage in Far Rockaway — he and his partner were "less than 100 percent compatible" — Rosenblum opened Danny's Diagnostic Center in 1992. He'd been looking for a garage in "a good Jewish area."

Virtually all of Rosenblum's clients come from the Orthodox community. All of his advertising is by word of mouth. On a "slow" day right after the long month of September holidays, there were a late-model Volvo and two vans on the premises, with several other vehicles parked outside awaiting attention.

Rosenblum believes that "it is the role of the Jews to bring out the latent spirituality in the physical world." Certainly the inner workings of cars are firmly rooted in the grime and frustration of the physical world. □