DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Last week, I wrote about my experience making *aliyah* over 40 years ago and what my parents did to inculcate the idea of the importance of the Land and the places in Eretz Yisrael. Some people wrote to me asking me how my parents were able to pick up and go when it wasn't so easy. To me, part of the answer has to be Bnei Akiva. My father was very involved in Bnei Akiva in America, with the encouragement of his parents, and it was a major influence on his life, spurring him to look into taking the plunge and coming to Israel.

I grew up going to Bnei Akiva in Kedumim and Mitzpeh Navo, Maaleh Adumim for a number of years. When Shabbat Toldot would come around, I would get excited for Shabbat Irgun. I was never really able to get to the bottom of the name of "Shabbat Irgun," but unlike every Shabbat when most of the kids in my class would get together and go to a Peulah on Shabbat afternoon, Parshat Toldot had a month of preparation and hard work preparing a dance, painting a wall with a mural that had to do with the topic of that year and so much more. I was in 4th grade when I started, and I enjoyed the programming so much. I remember some of the lessons my *madrich* taught us, but more than that, I remember clearly the warmth and acceptance that my *madrich* and the other advisors showed me.

I never really stopped being involved in the informal education model. During my youth, I continued in Bnei Akiva as a Madrich, went to Or Etzion which is a Bnei Akiva yeshiva high school, and also went to Ariel which is another youth group. Youth groups succeed because they make sure that they operate beyond the standard educational curriculum. Often, its Shabbat activities take place in the later afternoon of Shabbat, and learning was not done because there would be an exam, but because you wanted to listen to those just a little older and a little wiser than you. It gave us values, and people to look up to.

As an adult, I ran NCSY in Vancouver and the North West of USA and Canada for 5 years and have had the privilege of being involved in Bnei Akiva Givat Ze'ev. I have informal Shabbat / Chag Onegs at my house in Givat Ze'ev

On the 1st yahrtzeit of

Rabbi Meyer Fendel zt"l

We would like to invite the community to an evening of

DIVREI TORAH, SIYUMIM AND REMEMBRANCE

Tuesday, November 25th
(the eve of 6 Kislev) at 7:30pm
Beit Tovei Ha'ir
36 Malchei Yisrael, Yerushalayim

It would be a great zechut to share this iluy neshama with you

Loving children:
Hillel, Raizie (Steinberg),
Duv, Mindy (Marcus) and families

many times a year, where teenagers come over in order to have Torah programming on Friday night. With tons of food, nosh, rugelach, and candy, they are so happy to sit and discuss the parsha, or Jewish ethics, things we could learn from and be inspired by, and how we could become better leaders of the Jewish people.

This is the essence of informal education - being able to learn without having to sit down with a book in a classroom or in a Beit Midrash with structure and time and expectations. And clearly, it works. It's an interesting statistic that the numbers of high ranking officers in the IDF for example, are much higher, proportionally, among those who go to youth groups throughout their elementary school and high school, than those who don't.

Interestingly, only about 20% of the population actually go to youth groups. The vast majority don't. When we opened our OU Israel Youth Centers in twenty two different cities across Israel, we started it with the understanding that we have to create a different type of system, learning from NCSY in North America, and Bnei Akiva, regarding how to reach and have an honest conversation with teenagers today.

When teens feel out of sorts, disconnected from their community, what they're really looking for are friends and role models. For them to change their lives for the better, they need the support in a much closer way than some older teacher telling them what to do. And *madrichim* who help guide and have that ability to be that type of role model, to be that type of person that is going to really guide the next generation, have a tremendous *zechut*. I look at NCSY advisors, I look at our Youth Center advisors, and I am blown away by the realization that they have a real part in shaping the future of the Jewish people.

We opened NCSY in Israel 10 years ago. It has been growing every year since. I continue to be inspired by the incredible team we have running NCSY Israel. They are all role models and remarkable individuals. This past weekend, we had 205 NCSYers from ninth to twelfth grade who got together in Kfar Etzion for an NCSY Shabbaton. I saw the amazing pictures and videos, both before and after Shabbat, and how amazingly it was run. I saw such a beautiful blend of English-speaking teenagers living in Israel, who come to NCSY in Israel and become even more passionate about Israel, the people of Israel, and the Torah of Israel.

The Regional Director of NCSY Israel, Rabbi Yosef Ginsberg, shared with me such a wonderful email that came in from a thankful

לעילוי נשמות

אברהם בן צבי ז"ל

Abraham Rubinstein ז"ל

On his 28th yahrzeit 4 Kislev

Mark & Livia Rottenberg

mother of an attendee:

"I just wanted to take a moment to thank you as well as everyone else who worked so hard to make this NCSY Shabbaton a success. A parent of a teen mentioned that their teen has not stopped talking about it since she got home, and is already chatting with a bunch of kids that she met over the weekend. Aliyah is so hard for these teens and I can't tell you what a difference it makes in their lives for them to have the opportunity to meet other kids in the same boat! Thank you, thank you."

When you hear these stories, you get to understand the impact that NCSY can have on so many different teenagers' lives, and how they're going to make the right choices in becoming the true leaders that they could and should be for the Jewish people. Over the last two years, *Klal Yisrael* has lost too many of its leaders. We need our teens to grow into the leaders of the future, both in the Torah world and in the IDF, as well as many other leadership positions across the country. By encouraging and modeling leadership from a young age, they can believe in themselves and find roles and a way of life that is so meaningful and so purposeful.

So for those of you that are in Bnei Akiva and celebrating Shabbat Irgun this Shabbat, in Ariel, Ezra, NCSY or any other youth group out there, if you're reading this, then I say "*Kol Hakavod*" to you. I hope you enjoy the fun, the games, and the food. But more than that, I hope you make sure to listen to the words of your advisors, listen to their lessons, and you will rise so high. And if you're an advisor or madrich in one of these youth groups, I hope you realize how crucial you are to the Jewish story as a role model for our youth. I hope you understand that you are constantly being looked at by the younger generation that is so desperately looking for people that they could look up to, and that you have that privilege of being in that position. So take advantage of it, and you will see the incredible fruits of your labor for many decades to come.

Hadar Goldin hy"d, whose body was returned this week after 11 years of Hamas captivity, served as an advisor in Bnei Akiva. For the last 11 years, in our OU Israel Teen Centers, we have taught Hadar's *derech* of learning Torah, of love for the Land of Israel, and of being *moser nefesh* for *Klal Yisrael*, to our youth.

His return home and proper burial has granted tremendous consolation to the entire nation, but especially to his family, his incredible parents, Simcha and Leah, who fought so hard on his behalf. I met them a number of times and I saw the endless fire in them to bring their son home. To see how many people came to the *levaya* to give respect and to thank him is really remarkable.

I want to wish you all *B'ezrat Hashem* a healthy winter. I thank *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for the endless blessings He gives us. *B'ezrat Hashem*, we should be able to see the next generation becoming the leaders of tomorrow.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,

Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel

Condolences to
Yossi Amsel and family
on the passing of his mother

Mina Rivka Amsel a"h

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים