



# OU ISRAEL'S YOUTH CENTERS

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## OU Israel Around the Country: Spotlight on OU Youth Centers Annual National Staff Conference

“We’ve built up complete trust with the youth and we must not lose it”

– Rabbi Avi Berman, OU Israel Executive Director

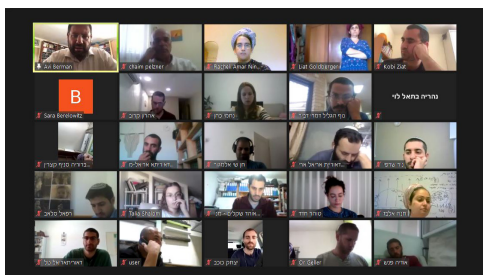
Every year, the OU Israel Youth Centers directors and youth counselors meet at an Annual National Conference. The conference focuses on staff development, planning and idea sharing. This year the conference took place on Zoom. Miriam Peretz who addressed the conference said, “And who knows if you didn’t come to the OU’s Youth Centers for this time” (a play on words from what Mordechai tells Esther in Megillat Esther).

Due to Corona, this year’s conference took place online and included sessions discuss-

ing the challenges of working with youth in the Corona era. Both OU staff and external professionals shared practical tools that can be used in the educational work.

Speaking to the youth counselors, Rabbi Avi Berman, OU Israel Executive Director, recalled the first days of Covid-19. “After Purim we sat and talked about what to do. With one ear we were listening to the press conference by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health, and at the same time we were wondering what to do. However, we knew one thing: whatever happens our youth work must continue. We’ve built up complete trust with the youth and we must not lose it. In the end, the youth who come to our centers watch us to see how we behave. That is the only way we can show them that what we are doing is really important”.

Rabbi Berman continued, “When we hear what goes on in the branches, in the Zula of Chetzroni, and with the other OU programs, we feel moved because it is really touching. Now, we need to pass it forward and we will succeed in doing



this only if we understand that we are a floodlight and that everyone is watching us. I am proud and happy to see our directors and the holy work they are doing; how they worry about every boy and girl, especially in these incredibly challenging times that the Israel is experiencing”.

One of the topics discussed was the professional and financial management of our OU Israel Youth Centers. Other topics addressed the ongoing activities of the program. Several public figures also attended the conference, including MK Bezalel Smotrich, Beit Shemesh mayor, Dr. Aliza Bloch, and Miriam Peretz, who offered the staff various tools for this challenging year.

“The OU’s Youth Centers show the kind of leadership that involves responsibility and leading. The first concern of the organization is to help young people believe in themselves, know their own strengths, and then to connect them with their own community so that from there they will can reach society at large. That’s how you build a society, how you build a country, and the OU is taking this responsible and spreading [this example] to the rest of Israeli society,” said Knesset Member Bezalel Smotrich.

“Life is challenging and each day we move up a level and this is a time when you need to demonstrate your strength when working with youth. They need you more than ever,” said Peretz. “When young people are in lockdown they need contact and love. They need to feel your presence, and you need to learn the right way to do it. I pray that Hashem will open your hearts so you

can do your work the best way possible”.

Beit Shemesh Mayor Dr. Aliza Bloch said, “In every stage in life you must ask yourself where can I contribute most. Whether you are older or a 15 year old madrich. Everyone can find a place where they can help others and you need to find that place for yourself. Everyone can tell if they are doing their best at this point in their lives. The cooperation with the OU’s youth centers is helping to advance education in the city and I am delighted we are working together.” OU Israel’s Makom Balev Youth Center has operated in Beit Shemesh for twenty years.

Chaim Pelzner, OU Israel Director of Programs, added, “If we want to create a routine during a difficult period like this one, we need to continue doing things that may look small, but are actually important. That’s why we decided to hold our conferences, just like every year, so we can receive tools that can help us continue our youth center activities both when things are normal and during this challenging period”. ■

*OU Israel operates a network of youth centers in 20 cities in Israel, which cultivate young community leadership and provide a social, experiential, value-based environment where youth can grow and develop. OU Israel does this by employing professional youth counselors who organize a wide range of activities including, experiential and value-based activities, growth and personal strengths workshops, field trips, bar/bat-mitzvah programs, volunteering, chag preparations, and more.*