



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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It seems like almost every year, around Chanukah time, my wife and I find ourselves sitting with at least one of our children to talk about their decision of what comes next for them. Where will they go next year? Which path should they take? These are not small questions. My wife and I know that as parents, our goal is not to choose *for* our children, but to help them think about what they want and how best to succeed in their lives. Chazal teach us, *"Ein adam lomed ela b'makom she-libo chafetz."* A person can only truly flourish spiritually in a place where their heart is invested. If we want our children to succeed, to excel, and to thrive, then we need to help them find the place that is truly right *for them*.

This year, we have been talking to our bar mitzvah boy, Mordechai Tzemach, who is deciding where he wants to go for high school. We *daven* to HaKadosh Baruch Hu that He grant us the wisdom to guide Mordechai properly, and that Mordechai will, *b'ezrat Hashem*, find himself in the most appropriate and meaningful place possible.

I know our family is far from alone in this

- the same process is happening in countless homes across the Jewish world. Just this past week, while visiting Miami Beach, Hollywood, and Boca Raton, I spoke to many twelfth grade seniors trying to decide where they will spend next year in Israel. They asked me about this yeshiva and that yeshiva, this seminary and that seminary, looking for my experience and familiarity with the different institutions, and trying to understand which place might be best for them.

At OU Israel Teen Centers and NCSY Israel, we see it as our responsibility to support teens through this process. Many children of *olim* in Israel naturally lack parents or older siblings with a deep familiarity with the system and the educational opportunities in Israel. That's why giving these young men and women a connection to others in the same situation and with amazing advisors is so essential.

Each year, NCSY hosts a major event focused on "what comes next." Advisors share their own journeys, whether in going straight to the army, or in choosing *sherut leumi*, but especially those who learned in yeshiva, midrasha, yeshivot gevohot, yeshivot hesder, or attended a mechina. Panels and one-on-one conversations take place to allow each teen to explore the full range of possibilities and to come to understand the right path *for them*.

We run similar programming through our OU Israel Teen Centers across the country. Each year we host dedicated Shabbatonim focused on life after twelfth grade - one for

**Condolences to my mother
Mrs. Rachel Leah Berman
on the passing of her sister,
my dear aunt**

Donna Sandberg a"h
in New York

המקום ינחם אותך בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

Avi Berman

boys and one for girls - where teens sit down with staff members who have known them for many years. Together, they talk seriously about readiness, maturity, responsibility, and growth: whether to go straight to the IDF, to *sherut leumi*, to yeshiva, or to another framework. We always emphasize the value of spending some time learning Torah. It's worth noting that many times even the IDF itself encourages those finishing twelfth grade to take at least a year of post-high school experience - of learning, maturing, and deepening their understanding of their beliefs, their heritage, their people, and their Land - before enlisting. Teens who arrive after such a year often do so with greater clarity, confidence, and strength.

This year's Shabbaton is taking place at Moreshet Yaakov, the Yeshivat Hesder in Rehovot, who are graciously hosting us. Our staff will be sitting with teenagers they've accompanied for years, ensuring that each decision is thoughtful and grounded. We believe that this decision of where to go in the year following high school is really a determining factor of what their life is going to look like.

I want to take a moment to thank those who make this work possible. Thank you to NCSY Executive Director Rabbi Michael Kahn and Regional Director Rabbi Yosef Ginsberg, for organizing and leading this incredible initiative. Thank you as well to the OU Israel Teen Center teams, to Chaim Pelzner, to Kobi Ziat, and to all the dedicated staff members who work tirelessly to ensure that these Shabbatonim and guidance evenings take place and are run so well. A special thank you as well



to Nefesh B'Nefesh for hosting and helping sponsor the NCSY event.

It was deeply moving to hear that nearly 50% of our NCSY Israel seniors participated in the evening. That level of engagement reflects something so important: trust. These teens want to hear from the advisors who have invested countless hours, days, and months into their lives. Guidance coming from people who truly know them is what they care about.

The combination of divine help and our own personal efforts are all over this week's parsha. In the span of just a few chapters, Yosef HaTzaddik moves from sitting alone in a pit, to being in prison, to becoming second-in-command over all of Egypt. Such a journey defies human logic. It happens only through *siyata d'Shmaya*. Yosef does his *hishtadlut*. He works hard and puts in his effort, but ultimately, there is no doubt through the story that it is HaKadosh Baruch Hu who guides the process.

That balance is what we strive to teach our children and our students. We put in effort. We ask questions. We seek wise counsel. And

at the same time, we *daven*, recognizing that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is the One who truly leads each person to the place they need to be.

We are in the midst of Chanukah, a *chag* so deeply connected to education (since Chanukah shares the same root as the word *chinuch*), this message is especially timely. When we see that over 96% of Jews in Israel light Chanukah candles, we understand that something powerful is being transmitted. It's that even when the future is uncertain, we can look at the light of the Chanukah candles and remember that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is holding our hand. We might not know yet where we'll be next year, or how our decisions will unfold, but our task is to reach upward, to do our part, and to trust that with sincere *hishtadlut* and heartfelt *tefillah*, *b'ezrat Hashem*, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will guide our children, and all of us, to reach the most incredible heights.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat and a Chanukah Sameach,



Rabbi Avi Berman
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