



## DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

**RABBI AVI BERMAN**  
Executive Director, OU Israel

At the start of every summer I find myself eagerly awaiting the arrival of thousands of Jews who fill Israel's streets as they reconnect with their heritage. Among them include 17 NCSY Summer programs, five of which are brand new programs catering to the evolving needs and interests of today's teenagers. I had the privilege of spending time with many of the groups and am eager to share with you some of the elements that left me feeling inspired and hopeful about the future of *Am Yisrael*.

Back in 1998, NCSY created The Jerusalem Journey (TJJ) led by Rabbi Bentzion (Barry) Goldfisher. The program, known today as the Anne Samson Jerusalem Journey, which offered public school kids the opportunity to tour Israel, was heavily sponsored by donors to offset costs. During the years of the Intifada, the program came to a halt.

Once I began my role in Vancouver, British Columbia, serving as the Northwest Regional Director of NCSY in 2001, I began working with public school teens and quickly saw the overwhelming needs of igniting the spark of *yiddishkeit* in them. Unlike in the *yeshiva* day school system where NCSY and the OU were relatively known, public schools were an entirely

different ballgame. We focused on getting these public school teens to attend regular NCSY programming which included Latte and Learnings, *Shabbatonim*, holiday programs and frequent conversations, including calling each teen every *erev Shabbat*. Yet, there was still something missing. *Yeshiva* day school teens had summer programs that brought Judaism

to life, but there were no such programs available for public school teens.

In 2004, the OU/NCSY held a conference during which we discussed Jewish public school programming and the

need to bring back TJJ. I worked together with my good friend Rabbi Steve Burg, who served as the West Coast Regional Director, to relaunch the program that very summer for North American teens. We celebrated with every registration, and then rushed to secure sponsorships for each participant.

In TJJ's first year returning from the Intifada hiatus, Rabbi Burg and I led buses filled with students from across North America. We began the trip in Prague and visited the Terezín Concentration Camp to give them a taste of what we lost. We taught the students about the influence of the Maharal, showed them many old



*synagogues* and the school yards bustling with life once more. The start of the trip set the tone for the students. Seeing the elation on their faces as our plane touched the holy ground of Israel, the ultimate proof of our triumph, was deeply moving.

Once we began touring *Eretz Yisrael*, I found myself experiencing the Land in a new way as I watched the students uncover its wonders. Moreover, many of the students on the trip were ones who previously joined me on NCSY *Shabbatons* to Seattle, Los Angeles and Edmonton. While each of those *Shabbatons* proved impactful, spending four weeks with them touring Israel together allowed us to create strong bonds which reinforced Jewish ideals.

Following its successful first year, TJJ quickly became an ambitious NCSY Summer program, with applications growing by the year. This past Sunday night, I attended a gathering of NCSY Summer programs which was segmented by boys programs, girls programs and TJJ. The size of the TJJ group, which totaled 1,000 participants, was incredible. Reflecting on my experience recruiting teenagers to join TJJ, I have a tremendous amount of respect for the rabbis, mentors, advisors and staff members who continue to pound the pavement in public school hallways across the United States in an effort to bring Jewish children Home. To reach 1,000 participants and bring them to Israel - a number which

I have no doubt will grow even more next summer - must have taken countless hours and dedication. I wish a tremendous *kol HaKavod* to the dedicated staff members and advisors who have given their all to create a meaningful experience for each and every NCSY teen this summer.

Also in attendance were OU Israel President Mitch Aeder, NCSY International Director Rabbi Greenland, Director of NCSY Summer David Cutler, and OU Israel



North American Director of Development, Mimi Jankovits. Watching the crowd we reflected on the growth of TJJ, which now includes TJJ Moms, TJJ Dads and even TJJ Ambassadors. What was clear to us is how many experiences these teenagers would have missed out on without the founding of the OU and the continuous development of

NCSY Summer programs.

Another of the many incredible NCSY Summer programs is Michlelet, a program for teenage girls run by Rebbitzin Rivka Yudin. The program offers intensive learning and *chesed* opportunities while

In loving memory of

**Phyllis Goldman ע"ה**

פי"נע חוה בת אברהם ואסתר ריבה לבית זולר ע"ה  
כ"ג מנחם אב - on her 10th yearzeit

Deeply missed by her family,  
friends and students

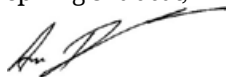
**Wohl, Goldman and Berl families**

exposing participants to the beauty of *Eretz Yisrael*. Beyond its exceptional programming, Michlelet teens engage in an unforgettable act of *chesed* each summer - making a bridal shower and wedding for an Israeli bride whose own family does not have the funds to do so. The wedding is hosted at the Michlelet campus and the girls do everything from preparing the bridal shower, decorating the bride's chair and chuppah, waitressing and serving at the event, and adding a tremendous amount of ruach and simcha for all those attending.

Perhaps what is even more impressive is the fact that wedding guests have no idea that the North American teens dancing for the *kallah* were the very ones who put together the *simcha* from start to finish. With their act of *chesed* these students help support a young couple build their home in Israel. What a *zechut*.

At the OU we are constantly challenged with the mission of fortifying the future of *Am Yisrael*. Seeing the throngs of American teens flood the streets of Israel while engaging in exceptional acts of *chesed* for their brothers and sisters living here, I am inspired by the impact the organization and its donors have had thus far. May we continue to see the impact of our efforts and merit to welcome the *Mashiach* very soon.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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