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**Spotlight on Yeshiva: Poland Seminar 2008**

*By Michael Rosen and Rafi Herskovits, Shana Alef -  
Toronto, ON (Yeshivat Or Chaim)*

Six million. Six million. Six million. No matter how many times you say it, no matter how hard you try thinking about it, it's still just a number. You can read as many books about the Holocaust as you can find, and still you'll never be able to really grasp it. And that is where our Poland Seminar comes in. A personal visit to Poland gave us more than any book could ever hope to accomplish.

Obviously, the Holocaust is quite beyond our comprehension. But a visit to Poland brought us back to a once great Torah centre, where for hundreds of years Judaism flourished amongst the legendary Torah scholars of Lublin, Krakow, Lodz, and many others towns and shtetalach like them. A visit can renew our bonds with our past, and in doing so, strengthen our faith in the future.

The trip was a precisely organized, sleep-deprived whirlwind of visits to the most significant sites across much of Poland. In the company and guidance of four of our Rabbis from Yeshiva, we sang and hummed songs of hope and praise, triumph and glory. We went from places of heartbreak, like Auschwitz-Birkenau, to sites of the ecstatic, like Rav Elimelech of Lijansk's kever. Our travels from site to site was an emotional roller coaster ride. One day in the morning, we went to Majdanek, a truly terrifying visit to a mostly intact death camp, and then in the afternoon we learned Torah at the famous Yeshiva of Chachmei Lublin, whose hallowed halls have seen some of the Torah giants of past.

Nobody who went on the trip came back to Israel with the same feelings about the Holocaust or Eretz Yisrael that they had a week before. Nobody will ever think of 6 million as just a statistic. Nobody who went on the trip will ever

take their Judaism, or their life, for granted ever again.

## **Spotlight on Alumni: Alumni Shabbaton in Woodmere**

### **Serving a Life Sentence**

By Yossi Davis

After a nine hour flight, I was exhausted. As I got through customs, rescued my luggage from baggage claim, and walked outside on to the Netiv Aryeh bus, the warm bus ride lulled me to sleep. Still tired, I awoke to the sound of horns blasting and without even looking out the window, I somehow knew that I was in the Old City of Jerusalem. I do not remember what happened next because it was all a blur: there was mincha at the Kotel, paperwork, pictures, a Gemara test, my first look at the dormitory rooms, and "the speech." For anyone who has ever started Shana Alef as a student at Netiv Aryeh, you know what "the speech" is. Nothing could have prepared me for it. It was the first time that the legendary Rosh Yeshiva, Ha'Rav Bina Shlita, spoke to the entire incoming Shana Alef year.

I will never forget what Rav Bina said to everyone that day. He told us that when we decided to enroll in Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh, we had really just enrolled in a jail. To tell you that I was astounded would be an understatement. What had I gotten myself into!? In case I had not heard him the first time, Rav Bina felt the need to repeat himself: "This place is a jail...but it is a jail with a lot of love." Even though I am a year removed from my stay in Yeshiva, I am still "doing my time."

Judging from the huge turnout at this past Shabbat's Alumni Shabbaton in Woodmere, New York, I think it is safe to say that I am not the only one. It was overwhelming to see over 150 past students, some that I had never seen before, and others that I had not seen in too long a time. It was nice to see Rav Bina, Rav Eisenstien, Rav Ami, and the newly appointed assistant Rabbi of the Old City, Rav Chizkiyahu Nebenzahl, who each came from Israel. It was interesting to see how some people changed while others stayed the same. Although the setting was different, I felt like I was back at Yeshiva. There was learning going on in every corner of the DRS high school beit midrash, shiurim were offered throughout Shabbat, there were some funny alumni stories, the food was good, and the company was great. The one thing that I missed the most from Yeshiva, however, was the incredibly passionate singing that would take place during Friday night onegs with Rav Bina and at Chug. So, when it came time for the oneg last Friday night I was excited.

While the singing at the oneg was great, it was surpassed only by a great speech from Rav Ami. In his talk, Rav Ami gave a parable about a very poor man who could barely feed his family and decided to travel to an island where there were diamonds all over the ground. When he first arrived to the island, the natives looked at him like he was insane for collecting diamonds. Diamonds, they told him, were worthless on the island and that if he wanted to collect something valuable, he should collect chicken fat. After establishing himself as the island's leading chicken fat collector, the now rich man returned home to his family with ships full of chicken fat. Understandably, his family was shocked and upset. Throughout the rest of the Shabbat, Rav Ami and Rav Bina each called the students their diamonds, which they wanted to take with them from the island. While I understand their explanation of the parable, I would like to take this idea of a diamond further: if I, a Netiv Aryeh student am a diamond, then my rebbeim are all diamond cutters.

As Rav Bina has said many times, "The talmidim need Yeshiva and Yeshiva needs the Talmidim." When my friends and I, as well as many other students, arrived at Yeshiva, we were very much like inmates in a jail who had to be improved and perfected. Essentially, we were diamonds in the rough. We went through an entire year (or more) of intensive chiseling, shaping, and shining. By the time we had left Yeshiva, to our rebbeim we had become beautiful diamonds that they had personally crafted. To them, we were pristine.

Diamonds are beautiful when they are new, but they tend to lose some of their sparkle as the years go on. The beautiful thing about the rebbeim at Yeshiva is that whenever a student feels like he needs a quick shine, the rebbeim go back to work. These shabbatonim and alumni events are opportunities for students to continue their polishing, a process that will never end. It really is a life sentence. We must always be striving to improve ourselves and to grow in our torah. We must always be looking for that extra shine.

As a past student, I understand that the rebbeim think I am one of their diamonds. What I hope they understand is that without them, I would still be just another diamond in the rough.

### **Spotlight on Yeshiva: New Zman**

The Yeshiva is happy to welcome back its students from their Pesach break - those who have elected to take advantage of their stay in Eretz Yisrael and fulfill the mitzvah of aliyah l'regel as well as those who spent Pesach with their families in Chutz la'Aretz. We trust that they have all returned from a well-deserved break with renewed vigor and excitement, ready for a new zman as we complete the second week of our countdown towards Kabbalat HaTorah.

In continuing a custom we began last year, the Yeshiva will be switching to a new Massechet, which we hope to finish around the time of Matan Toratenu. This year we have chosen Massechet Makkot. With the skills gained from seven months of studying Massechet Ketubot, our talmidim now have the analytical tools necessary to tackle this challenging massechet. By completing an entire massechet, we hope to have our talmidim leave the year with a sense of true Torah accomplishment. We plan to celebrate the event with a grand siyum during the yeshiva's final trip to the Golan Heights. We wish our talmidim success and growth in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*.

### **The Netiv Aryeh Gala in Montreal**

The entire Netiv Aryeh family would like to extend a much due thank you to Mrs. Guila Ouaknine, mother of David Ouaknine (Shana Alef), whose tremendous efforts led to such a stunning affair. Mr. and Mrs. Ouaknine opened their home to over a hundred members of the Sephardic Community of Montreal in an effort to raise funds for Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh. Their guests were treated to a delicious dinner and wonderful music--all provided by the Ouaknine family.

Plasma television screens positioned all over their lovely home displayed a newly designed multimedia presentation of the Yeshiva. Guests were treated to video messages from Rabbi David Abuhaseira Shlit"a and Rabbi David Pinto Shlit"a. The highlight of the evening was the beautiful speeches. YNA alumnus Jimmy Mishan gave a very heartfelt speech expressing great gratitude to the Yeshiva and Rav Bina. He was followed by Mr. Simon Jacob, a great friend of YNA's and father and uncle of

many alumni, who delivered a rousing speech about the merit of our forefathers and its heavy influence on the lives of donors and their abilities. The sincerity of both speakers was apparent to all in attendance.

HaRav Aharon Bina Shlit"א gave a powerful speech on Hashem's role in our lives. He related a few personal stories involving HaGaon HaMekubal Rabbi David Abuhaseira Shlit"א that left many in the crowd speechless. Mrs. Ouaknine spoke next. Her personal message to the crowd was well received. She encouraged all in attendance to support such an incredible institution. Elie Mishaan then closed the wonderful evening speaking about his return to Yeshiva after college and its effect on his life. Also in attendance were alumni Ovadiah Jacob and Uri Dallal who took questions from the crowd in an informal setting.

It was truly inspiring to see the members of Montreal's Sephardic community, almost all of whom were unfamiliar with Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh, come out to offer their support to the Yeshiva. The audience was impressed by the strong turnout of representatives of YNA, many of who flew into Montreal for just a few hours just to attend the event.

Mrs. Ouaknine produced an impressive and enjoyable evening that will not soon be forgotten. The Yeshiva is incredibly grateful to the entire Ouaknine Family. May Hashem bless them with continued bracha and hatzlacha and may He give them the ability to continue to offer their time and resources to the Yeshiva. The Yeshiva also gives a hakarat hatov to Ilana Scheiner and to alumnus and Montreal resident Morty Stern and his wife for their tireless efforts in coordinating this event.

### **Spotlight on Yeshiva: Yom Hazikaron**

The nation of Israel observed Yom Hazikaron, the memorial day for Israel's fallen soldiers, on Wednesday 2 Iyar. In preparation for this commemoration, the Yeshiva was honored to hear the moving words of Mr. Shlomo Hofert, step-father of Col. Dror Weinberg Hy"d, who was killed in an ambush in Hebron in 5762 while defending his fellow Jews returning from Ma'arat HaMachpela on Friday night. Mr. Hofert showed the captivated audience a video describing Col. Weinberg's life. He was known not only for his leadership on the battlefield, but as a true ben Torah as well. He was slated to become army Chief of Staff. Shortly after his death, his wife, Hadassah, gave birth to a son, their sixth child. May his memory be a source of inspiration to his family, to the Yeshiva and to all of Klal Yisrael.

### **The Yeshiva Celebrates Yom Ha'atzmaut in Lod**

*By Gershon (Gregory) Albert, Shana Bet, Hashmonaim School-Montreal*

The average Israeli citizen celebrates Yom Ha'atzmaut by going to a communal street festival with shaving cream and other assorted pranks in hand, but in Netiv Aryeh we did things differently. After spending the morning in Har Herzl where we saw and experienced the pain of families who have lost fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, we traveled to mercaz ha'aretz to be mechazek the greater Jewish community of Lod, and to celebrate and commemorate with them the 60th birthday of the miracle that is the state of Israel.

We were kindly hosted by the Garin Torani (The Torah core) of Lod. This organization is part of a country wide movement of sending young and dynamic observant families into debilitated Jewish communities to strengthen and reinvigorate them with

renewed Jewish life. In Lod, for example, where the Jewish community has been shrinking due to a hostile and growing Arab population, the local Garin has been making strides in repopulating former Jewish areas and improving the local education system.

We ended Yom Hazikaron by listening to a speech given by two Anglo-representatives of the community, who explained to us the historical and current significance of Lod. They told us how it was most probably one of the walled cities during the time of Yehoshua Ben Nun, which is why they keep two days of Purim, and how it was a city where many Tanaic scholars resided and learned due to its central location in the country. We were then taken on a short bus tour of the city, highlighting some of its significant attractions, and appropriately some of the Mesirut Nefesh of the Jews struggling to keep this city a Jewish one. Shkiah soon approached and with it the bittersweet transition from a day of silent and tear-filled remembrance of those who died BeKiddush Hashem to the exuberant happiness and thanksgiving for the miracle of being able to be a proud Jewish nation in a strong state that has now reached 60. As the sun began to set we attended the communal ceremony which honored all of the heroes of the area who were killed in battle and terror attacks. The ceremony then honored several pillars of the community with the lighting of torches. Afterwards the flag was proudly raised and the festivities began. There were acts from the locals and their children, followed by a festive Maariv service with Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim. After Maariv the dancing began, and we danced enthusiastically in unison with the members of the community in celebration and in thanks of the miracles that happened on this day 60 years ago. We were then treated to a Se'udat Mitzvah in honour of the occasion in the local celebration hall.

The students in Netiv Aryeh are all Zocheh to live in the Old City of Jerusalem for a year or more. To live in such a holy location has many benefits, but one side effect is that it is easy, especially as Chutznikim, to forget the amount of sacrifice that has been and is still being made by those in the Israel Defense Forces and by the normal citizens of Israel to give us the opportunity to learn in the holiest place in the world. As Rav Bina said, "it is only in the Zechut of the sacrifices of these people we remember and the state of Israel that we can live safely anywhere in the world." It was a tremendous honor and learning experience to spend part of these two holy days of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Haatzmaut with our Israeli brethren, and to feel the pain and happiness of these two occasions not as outsiders but while being embedded into one of the many Israeli communities that have given so much just to be able to live normal and safe lives in Medinat Yisrael.

Use this area to provide your subscribers information about your organization.

**Sincerely,**

HaRav Aharon Bina, Netiv Aryeh  
Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh