

Beth Jacob Congregation Partners with Yachad

Ohr Torah Stone is extremely appreciative to Rabbi Kalman Topp and the Beth Jacob community for partnering with our Yachad Program in supporting the work of Chaim Possick, Jewish Cultural Facilitator in Katzrin, the capital of the Golan Heights. Beth Jacob's support of his Jewish identity initiatives makes a direct impact upon a challenged Israeli society, in which an alarming number of Jews are disconnected from their Jewish heritage.

Recent Highlights:

Coming of Age with Meaning

The Bar or Bat Mitzvah represents a major milestone in traditional Jewish life, but since Israeli teens from secular families are, by and large, not connected to any kind of synagogue, the milestone is traditionally marked by a big party or a trip abroad - with little (if any) reflection on its significance.

In order to provide secular children with an opportunity to learn about the pivotal lifecycle event and celebrate it with meaning, Chaim created a seven-week program for the 45 seventh graders at Gamla, the local secular school. It is a testament to his warm and unthreatening approach that the school's administration not only welcomes his program with open arms, but enables him to expand upon it from year to year.



"The program is fun and informative, not at all coercive," explains Dalia Yarkoni, one of the Seventh Grade homeroom teachers. "Chaim provides the students with a connection to their heritage and a sense of themselves as links in the longtime Jewish chain – with ramifications not only for their present lives, but for their future, as well. There is no question that the program helps them develop into proud Jews."

"The program's climax is the Shabbat everyone spends together," says Marcelle Lev, the grade's other homeroom teacher. "Chaim speaks to the synagogue leadership in advance, so when the children arrive in shul, they are warmly welcomed and blessed by the rabbi. Chaim makes sure that the chazzan sings the melodies that the children have just learned. He spares no effort to make sure that the kids internalize that as Jews, they belong to shul and shul belongs to them," she enthuses. "In fact, the entire weekend is characterized by this attitude. Chaim's goal is to make sure that each child feels familiar and at home in his or her heritage."

The Youth Are Our Future

Chaim initiated a Jerusalem Day event in Katzrin which drew 500 people from all over the Golan Heights. Following a festive, flag-waving march across the city,



Chaim exposed the largely secular crowd to a special prayer service, spirited dancing and singing. At the end, the area's teens – from all of the various youth groups, secular and religious – got on stage to present attendees with skits about the Holy City's history and meaning.

“When it came to the youth, I didn't want them to simply attend the event,” relates Chaim. “I wanted them to be an active part of it. To be marshals in

the parade, to learn with me about Jerusalem prior to the event and to prepare activities that would enable them to express their newfound connection to our national and eternal capital. After all,” he says, “If we don't imbue our citizens – especially our youth – to take ownership and celebrate its reunification, then we will have no reason to fault them for never visiting, or for being willing to give it up.”



To Every Thing There is a Season

Just as Chaim runs Saturday night Jewish identity tours of Israel during the winter months, when Shabbat ends early and the night time air is crisp, he also harnesses the long Fridays of summer to run an engaging activity which has now become a tradition: Kabbalat Shabbat.



Chaim launched this year's series this past Friday, July 4th, in a unique community-building manner. "In light of the murder of Gil-Ad, Naftali and Eyal, the community center was questioning if we should cancel the festivities," he reveals. "I maintained that on the contrary, this event must go on. We must give people an outlet to express their emotions through something positive, and also preserve the extraordinary feeling of unity that was achieved during the 18 days that the country searched for the missing boys." For the same reason, Chaim encouraged all participants to consider lighting Shabbat candles – as a gesture toward "*areivut*

hadadit" – the mutual responsibility that all Jews have toward one another.

“What's most important to me is that people engage in an exploration and investigation of their identity, their heritage and their connection to one another.” says Chaim. "I try to inspire in them a desire to define themselves according to what they are and what they do, rather than what they are not and what they do not do. I encourage them to reflect upon what being Jewish means, and then to harness that definition so it serves as a lifelong source of meaning and pride."

We are grateful for the Beth Jacob Community's partnership in enabling Chaim to work toward fulfilling this beautifully articulated mission.