

Ohr Somayach/Mentor Missions; Mission IsPossible!

“If all you take back is inspiration, we’ll have failed,” were the powerful words delivered by Rebbe Y. L. Hill at the *Ohr Somayach/Mentor Missions* closing banquet to over 100 college students. These students came from all over North America to learn *Torah*, see what it’s like to live as a *Torah* Jew in a *Torah* community and yes, to be inspired. But Rebbe Hill was encouraging the boys to take immediate action and do something tangible before going home.

The weekend began Thursday night with a buffet dinner at the home of R’ Y. Teichman. Opening remarks were delivered by Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz of. He explained how the study of *Torah* breeds the *avodah* and *gemillas chassadim* that are so evident in Lakewood. He also explained that *Torah* is the key to inter-generational Jewish continuity. After an uplifting *kumzitz*, some of the boys talked a little bit about themselves and that they came to Lakewood to learn *Torah*!

Friday morning, the students split into two groups. One group went to the *Bais Aaron* building of *Beth Medrash Govoha* to learn with mentors while the other group heard from Rabbi Nota Schiller and Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb at *K’hal Ateres Yeshaya*. The unquenchable thirst that the students displayed for learning was remarkable. After a powerful tour at The Living Torah Museum and football/batting cages, everyone returned to their gracious hosts to get ready for *shabbos*.

R’ Moshe Brodt led *kabbolas shabbos* at the *K’hal Ateres Yeshaya simcha* hall. When the singing and dancing first started, many students were apprehensive about joining in but with each passing moment, the delusional barriers of polarization slowly began to melt away from the *varmkeit* and *ahavas yisroel* that filled the air. Soon everyone had joined together in spirited song and dance. How apropos were the remarks of the *Rosh Hayeshiva* of *Ohr Somayach* Horav Nota Schiller at the *motzei shabbos melava malka* when he thundered the words “welcome to reality!” referring to the misconceptions many have of the “black hat world”. Throughout the weekend one could sense the “reality” settling in for the students and the misconceptions floating away as the apparent *ahavas yisroel* penetrated deep into the recesses of “*yiddishe hertzer*.”

Before *Mussaf* on *shabbos* morning, R’ Harry Rothenberg told a moving story of how a pair of *tzitzis* helped save a clients life from dying of gun wounds. R’ Harry encouraged everyone to “hear the messages” that *Hashem* sends us. After *Kiddush*, mentors and students learnt the *sugya* of *eidim zoimemim* on *daf vav* in *Makkos*. The *kol torah* in the hall was awesome.

Early afternoon concurrent presentations were delivered by R’ Zecharia Fruchthandler at the home of R’ Isaac Deutsch and by R’ Daniel Roth at his own home. R’ Zecharia, who has connected deeply with many students, spoke about “Harnessing current spiritual growth for future growth.” R’ Daniel Roth spoke about the “Meaning in *Yiddishkeit*.” After *mincha*, Rabbi D. Gottlieb brought out six lessons of *na’aseh v’nishma*. The members of *K’hal Ateres Yeshaya* joined the students for *shalosh seudos* where Rabbi Shmuel Bloom and Rabbi Y. Breitowitz of *Ohr Somayach* both spoke about how events like the Lakewood Shabbaton remove polarization, dissension and barriers from within the Jewish nation. After

maariv, Rabbi Elimelech Adler, a campus rabbi from Arizona, led everyone with a stirring *havdalah* rendition.

A gala *melava malka* for mentors and students took place at Lake Terrace Hall catered by Greenwald Caterers. Many mentors from the tri-state area who couldn't make it for *shabbos* drove in especially for this event. The Community Achievement Award was presented to Mentor Mayor Menashe Miller, who noted that from all the M's associated with himself, the "M" of mentors has a very special place in his heart. R' Menashe was a mentor on an *Eretz Yisroel* mission. At the end of R' Menashe's address, he surprised everyone by presenting *Ohr Somayach*/Mentor Missions Founder and CEO R' Danny Lemberg and Chairman of the Board R' Yaakov Kaplan with awards from the Township for their tremendous dedication to so many people.

The Student Achievement Award was given to Gavin Shields, a student of U.C.L.A. who has shown tremendous dedication to *yiddishkeit*. After the buffet dinner the *Rosh Hayeshiva* Harav N. Schiller noted that many people have asked where the *kiruv* movement was 40 years ago. He said that the seeds and saplings of *Torah* had to first dot the landscape to provide a framework and launching pad for outreach efforts. Lakewood bears testimony to this fact as the *Torah* town has provided so many successful *kiruv* programs and initiatives.

After the formal program ended, the Yehuda Green Orchestra entertained the crowd deep into the night. The elevated spirits were a sight to behold! Everyone went back to their hosts inspired and uplifted. At 2:30 am at the home of mentor R' Binyomin Hoffman, one of the students told R' Binyomin that he is so inspired that he is being mekabel right now to get a *bris milah*!

Sunday morning learning took place in the B.M.G. *bais medrash hayoshon ezras noshim*. At 11 am, the *Rosh Hayeshiva* Harav Yeruchem Olshin, who has gone on a mission to *Eretz Yisroel*, spoke movingly about the ability to attain spiritual heights if the desire and yearning is there.

He mentioned how in one of Rav Chaim Stein's writings on *Hilchos Chanukah*, he writes the circumstances under which that particular *shtickel* was written. In 1942, Rav Chaim and some friends were on a train to Siberia. It was *Chanukah* and the *bochurim* had no means with which to kindle the *Chanukah* lights. One *bochur* devised a method of scraping oil from the wheels on the train. One rainy night it was impossible to kindle a flame due to the dampness. Rav Chaim convinced a friend to stay up with him to learn the *halachos* of *Chanukah* together, for the *gemara* says that if one learns the laws of an *olah* offering, it is as if he brought the offering itself. So too said Rav Chaim, if we learn the *halachos* of *Chanukah*, it will be as if we actually lit the *neiros*.

The train made a stop at a small town and all of a sudden a peddler knocked on the window selling candles! The *bochurim* bought the candles and were able to light the *menorah*! From here Rav Chaim said, we see that if someone really wants to attain something spiritually, *Hashem* will enable him to do so. So too said Rav Yeruchem, everyone needs to know that no matter how daunting *torah* and *mitzvos* may seem to them, if a person really wants to attain spirituality, *Hashem* will enable the person to do so.

After the *drasha*, the boys each received a brachah from the *Rosh Hayeshiva* and left to the final banquet at the home of R' Gedaliah Weinberger who spoke to the students about being in the business world and maintaining *yiddishkeit* as your top priority. Rebbe Hill enthralled the audience with the story of how his father R' Steven Hill went from being a famous actor to a *frum yid*.

As Rebbe Hill mesmerized the crowd, tears could be seen on the cheeks of many students as they were inspired to do more and realize that it's never too late to achieve higher spirituality. After the speech, a student who mentioned to me at the opening banquet that he was going to be furthering his Yoga commitment this summer and it's about time Judaism embraces physicality, accepted on himself to go learn in *Ohr Samayach Yerushalayim* for 3 months instead!

"If all they took back is inspiration, we'll have failed". *Boruch hashem* many students are *shteiging* in their *yiddishkeit*! *Ohr Somayach*/Mentors Missions has not failed...