

Simchaton at Camp HASC

BY MRS. REEBA OESTRICH

When one thinks of the Yamim Tovim of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, one envisions *hakafos*, the dancing and celebration of the Torah, the *aliyos* that the children get and the little boys standing under the *tallis* for *Kol Hane'arim* — Simchas Torah is the time and season to show an appreciation for our gift of the Torah and express our happiness for being chosen to be its keepers.

For many children and adults with special needs, the picture of Yom Tov is very different. Rather than going to shul and participating in the festivities, they are often left at home. If they do go to shul they are generally left out of the celebrations, standing on the side as observers rather than participants. There is usually little or no excitement and few ways to express happiness and joy during the *Chag*. There are few shuls to which they can go where they can feel a part of the festivities. Many of the families cannot get to shul when their children have behavioral or sensory issues that may be aggravated by an unfamiliar environment or may not be tolerated by others.

Yet, the amazing and dedicated staff of Camp HASC ensured that more than 125 campers, including little children and young adults, were very much a part of Yom Tov celebrations. Starting on Sunday of Hoshana Rabbah morning, campers and staff headed upstate to the beautiful campgrounds of Camp HASC. At the bus stop there was a feeling of excitement as campers reunited with counselors and friends. Parents expressed gratitude that they would have a respite while their children would have a meaningful, enjoyable Yom Tov experience. The enthusiasm of the staff began at the bus stop and continued in full swing up until the campers returned Motzoei Yom Tov.

The bus ride up to camp resonated with songs from campers and counselors alike, building up to the *ruach* that would reign over the next few days.

No sooner did the campers arrive than the magic of Camp HASC was in full force. The campers were back at HASC, where their disabilities faded into the background because everyone focused on their abilities — where each camper was a star. Everyone was busily engaged in a variety of planned activities, and the playgrounds of camp were full. Campers in wheelchairs were back on their adaptive swings, exercising in the fresh autumn air. The campers enjoyed rustling through the leaves, hearing stories and singing songs. Campers walked around camp



Smiles abounded at the Simchaton at Camp HASC.

grounds collecting leaves with which they made collages. Everyone was back “home,” and from the looks on their faces it was obvious that they were thrilled to be back, reliving many of their summer experiences in the beautiful fall setting.

When Yom Tov began, all the campers went to shul. Most of them had not been in shul from the time that camp ended even though they love being there. While in most shuls the sounds that some of the campers make are considered annoying and disruptive, at HASC these very sounds are seen as the campers’ means of communicating with Hashem. Even campers that do not know how to *daven* held *sid-durim* and *machzorim* and “*davened*.” The meaningful *Amen* that they recited was so full of feeling that it probably went straight to the *Kisei Hakavod*. As the singing started they clapped and danced along. There was dancing and true *simchah* throughout the *davening*, and there were *hakafos* during which campers were held on counselors’ shoulders, where they rejoiced in the Torah.

There was yet more singing and dancing during the scrumptious Yom Tov meals, and well into the night, even by campers who were wheelchair bound! A *dvar Torah* was given by one of the campers whose face shone as he was applauded and cheered. He surely felt like a superstar.

On Simchas Torah, *hakafos* were enhanced by the campers and staff dressing up in cheerful costumes. Some of the staff and campers dressed up as *sifrei Torah*, which had the added benefit of giving female campers a chance to “dance

with the Torah.” Everyone was included in the dancing! Campers in wheelchairs were lifted out of their chairs and put on counselors’ shoulders. Some of the campers were given *aliyos*, and said the *brachos* so proudly! Other campers received the *kavod* of holding *sifrei Torah* and “leading” a *hakafah*!

An especial highlight of the Yom Tov was *Kol Hane'arim*. Several *talleisim* were tied together to be able to cover the many campers. Under the *talleisim* were little children, teens and adults, all of these special *neshamos* connecting with Hashem in this special activity that all their peers were involved in all over the world.

Campers and counselors celebrated *ne'ilas hachag* with lots of singing and dancing and plenty of goodies for the campers.

As Yom Tov was coming to an end, one could feel the longing of everyone there to be able to extend this experience a little longer. No one wanted it to be over.

After returning from camp, I realized that Camp HASC is so much more than just a summer home. It is a place that — in the middle of the festive season of the *chagim* — opens itself up to allow individuals with special needs the opportunity to participate wholeheartedly in the Yom Tov experience and feel the magic of HASC.

We are all counting the days until we return to camp so that our campers can benefit and grow from their amazing experiences at HASC.

Yasher koach to the staff of HASC and those who worked tirelessly to ensure that the *Simchaton* was a resounding success!

New Dirshu Program

Do you want to hold onto your *Gemara* learning, but are struggling with how to do it? Oh, yes, and at the same time, you want to maintain a steady pace of learning new *Gemara* each day.

Step into the Kensington Dirshu Kollel Baalei Batim one morning ... and you will find a refreshing approach to accomplishing these goals. In his dynamic and engaging style, Rabbi Eton Cohen is in the middle of weaving together clarity with review. The end result is a clear and reinforced picture of the *Gemara*.

How is he giving a *shiur* on two *dapim* in an hour and a quarter? The first 45 minutes of the *shiur* is review of three *amudim* from the previous three days. The next 30 minutes is learning today's new *amud*. The end result is, you learn every *amud* for four days in a row! You will also notice that at the end of each *sugya*, Rabbi Cohen gives a quick recap.

At the beginning of each week, Rabbi Cohen offers a simple 10-question test on the previous week's *Gemara* (3½ *dapim*).

Dirshu gives monetary incentives for *shiur* attendance, as well as for taking this weekly test — rewarding you for a mark of 80 or better.

Rabbi Cohen is also working in his “lab” on a new “outlining” method, to facilitate continual review of old *Gemaras*.

The *shiur* will begin *masechet Sanhedrin* soon, on Monday, October 29. There are openings for new applicants. Just call the *Rosh Kollel*, Rabbi Shlomo Friedman, at (347) 268-5313. If it goes to voicemail, please be sure to leave a message with name and phone number — he will call back.

The *seudas siyum* on the current *masechta*, *Bava Basra*, will take place on Sunday, October 28, at 6:30 p.m. at the Kensington Dirshu Bais Medrash, Khal Mikaleiv, 577 East 5th Street, between Cortelyou Road and Ditmas Avenue. The program will start at 7 p.m., and will include a presentation by Rabbi Cohen on this approach, as well as inspiring words from other distinguished speakers. Men and women are welcome to attend the *siyum*.

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