

OHOLEI TORAH

# *Intention*

ISSUE № 005

SHARING OUR GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS

SPRING 5784/2024 T"03



Young Jewish Leaders  
Share Mitzvahs



Back to Yeshiva for  
An Unforgettable Day



It all Begins with  
Aleph Beis



A Random Meet  
Touches the Heart



Bringing Light to the World  
Oholei Torah Alumni

## EMPOWERING YOUTH AS LEADERS OF TOMORROW

For most teenage students, the ringing bell on early Friday afternoon signals the beginning of the long-awaited freedom that the weekend brings. However, for hundreds of Oholei Torah students, it means that they are merely shifting to a different aspect of their Jewish education—the development of their leadership capabilities and investment in outreach.

These boys, empowered by the Rebbe's vision that nobody is too young to be a leader, take to the streets as part of Oholei Torah's initiative—Young Jewish Leaders (YJL). This program is based on the long-standing Friday afternoon Mitzvah routes, which began decades before.

The students travel in groups, with younger students being paired with older, more experienced students so that they can “teach them the ropes” and show them how to lead by example. As soon as they are dismissed from school each Friday, they head to



the subway with Jewish brochures, Tefillin, and candle-lighting kits in hand and head to their respective destinations. Most students will visit the same routes each week. A very special connection between them and the thousands of individuals they are visiting

them to enthusiastically return each week—knowing that someone is waiting for them.

While it may seem that the boys are engaging in a program in which they are solely giving, they receive many benefits in return.

begins to form over time.

The goal of the program is to share a Mitzvah with the numerous people they meet. Upon their arrival at each office, the boys offer those present the opportunity to don Tefillin. During their casual conversations, they use the opportunity to share a Torah thought that they have learned in school. At times, the YJL members bring fresh Challah or the relevant items to celebrate an upcoming holiday. Aside from the practical purpose that these packages serve, they also bring back warm childhood memories of Shabbos and holidays. The lively energy that the students radiate is contagious, and they are very warmly received. The positive feedback fuels the students with excitement and encourages

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Contrary to conventional perspective which regards children as potential human beings who do not reach their full worth until maturity, Jewish tradition perceives children as worthy and deserving of our greatest resources of time and energy to create an environment that is both physically and spiritually nurturing, for it is the children who embody the purity of intent, sincerity, faith and enthusiasm for life.

—THE REBBE



LEV FREEDEN, JEM

## Greetings

Dear Friends,

Shortly after I joined Oholei Torah in 2015, an urgent need became apparent. I realized that the students could benefit from hands-on opportunities to build character and develop their self-esteem and leadership abilities. This led to the founding of the division called Young Jewish Leaders—a program that empowers the students to take an active role as young Rabbis and leaders as they interact with individuals beyond the neighborhood in which many of them have spent their entire childhoods.

The Rebbe was an outspoken proponent of the idea that youth have an innate desire to be outspoken leaders, but also pointed out that the role of educators is to guide them and teach them how to express this quality positively and bring about good in the world.

This has become my mission statement and driving force as the director of YJL.

Oholei Torah is a school that values the importance of channeling the positive and healthy potential of all its students. They are taught the importance of loving every Jew and treating everyone with respect, no matter who they are or what their religious affiliation is. Their role models are their educators who are devoted, life and limb, to their students and the thousands of Oholei Torah

alumni who have become Chabad Shluchim and community leaders around the globe.

Since the tragic day of October 7th, there has been an increased sensitivity within the Jewish community that has brought along with it a heightened interest in connecting to their Judaism, supporting Israel, and standing in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters around the globe. YJL has proven to be an incredible opportunity for those seeking to tap into their soul and to connect with G-d and His people through a mitzvah or an interaction with other Jews.

In this edition of Intention, you will learn more about the YJL program and the effect that it has had on tens of thousands of people throughout the years.

It is my great honor to be involved in a project that turns young Jewish students into empathetic and compassionate leaders—something that today's world so desperately needs.

With wishes for a joyous Purim, a kosher Pesach, and only good news from Israel and around the world.

Rabbi Mendy Wolf,  
Director, Young Jewish Leaders



**RABBI MENDY WOLF**, '01, raised in Chicago, where his father serves as the director of Chicago Mitzvah Campaign. Jewish outreach and education have always been core values in Rabbi Wolf's life.

Rabbi Wolf's first encounter with Oholei Torah was as a Beis Medrash/Talmudical Seminary student. Following his graduation in 2001, he went on to serve as a student leader, a shliach, in the Chabad Yeshiva in Toronto.

In addition to his role as a member of the Oholei Torah Development Office, Rabbi Wolf gives classes on Chassidic thought in the Bais Rivka Seminary. He has been a featured guest on the podcast *Stump the Rabbi*, and is a sought-after speaker on various Jewish topics.

He and his wife, Chana, and family live in Crown Heights and often host guests from around the world, sharing the beauty of Shabbos and our traditions.

Each issue of Intentions will carry a greeting from various administration and faculty members.



# Oholei Torah Alumni— OUR PRIDE AND JOY

While most would say that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, they would likely find it fair to judge a school by its alumni. The alumni of an institution are a walking testament to the values of the school they attended during the formative years of their education. They showcase the school's goals and aspirations by providing a living example of its teachings.

The recent scrutiny of higher education institutions has revealed a surprising tolerance for less-than-ideal activities and perspectives. Oholei Torah, a school founded in 1956 by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, stands proud of the values that our alumni possess and the significant, positive impact that they have made, and continue to make, on the world. And because of this, Chabad-Lubavitch is the largest and fastest-growing Jewish organization in the world today.

Oholei Torah is unique because the Rebbe established and guided its educational principles and framework. The school's objectives were clear: to instill within every student a pride in their Jewish heritage, to maintain a high level of rigorous study, and most importantly, to inspire a sense of responsibility towards all mankind and to unite Jews from all walks of life. Today, many years later, it is these directives that remain the driving force behind everything that we do and all decisions that are made, both academic and otherwise.

While Oholei Torah graduates have been known to pursue and excel in various professional environments, they also compose the majority of Chabad Shluchim—emissaries around the world. These Shluchim devote their entire lives to building and supporting Jewish communities across the globe and have become the go-to address for Jewish needs everywhere.

You can find Oholei Torah alumni serving as directors and founders of centers in big cities, small towns, college campuses, and even in remote villages found in the four corners of the world. They are constantly on-call. Whether it be for Torah classes, hospital visits, Jewish life-cycle events, or spiritual counseling—no place is too far, and no person is too insignificant, for our graduates.



A billboard proudly showcasing our alumni has been hung at our Eastern Parkway Campus

Even the alumni who are not officially part of the prestigious group of Chabad shluchim maintain strong bonds with their classmates and are staunch supporters of their community endeavors. Many alumni groups have started a new trend of organizing class reunions and weekend get-togethers to celebrate various milestones. These events are often held to commemorate anniversaries such as 25 years since graduation or the year in which their fellow classmates turn 50. This is a testament to the strong connections and bonds that are formed during the school years and the camaraderie that they feel towards each other even years following their graduation.

There are over 2,500 Oholei Torah alumni who are part of the Chabad network that spans across 80 countries around the globe. In fact, it's possible that you may have already come across one of our alumni during your travels and your children or grandchildren might have attended a Chabad on Campus event in their university!



VIEW A COMPREHENSIVE LIST  
OF ALL OUR ALUMNI AND THEIR  
RESPECTIVE POSTS WORLDWIDE





Continued from cover

## Empowering Youth as Leaders of Tomorrow

The YJL program instills confidence in the students, teaches them teamwork and effective communication, and encourages them to develop critical life skills from the “hands-on” experience that their weekly trips provide.

Throughout the years, Rabbi Mendy Wolf, Director of YJL, has fashioned a continuous roster of the students and their assigned routes. He is constantly updating it as the students progress in their studies and their leadership roles.

There are currently 220 Oholei Torah students who engage with over 5,000 Jews in Manhattan alone and many more who travel to the suburbs to reach the Jews living there. The 78 mitzvah routes include office buildings and residential areas as well as visits to the elderly in senior communities. Different neighborhoods are constantly being sought out, and new routes are frequently established “from the ground up”. The program’s goal is to empower as many Oholei Torah students as possible into leaders who will share their Jewish pride and rich tradition with as many Jews as possible.

The idea of building compassionate and selfless leaders is unique to the Oholei Torah education and has proven itself—since the school’s establishment in 1956—to be integral and vital to Jewish communities around the world.

To learn more, please visit  
[www.YJLnyc.com](http://www.YJLnyc.com)







## Meet Mendel, One of our Boys

Mendel Grossbaum, '24



I grew up on shlichus in Folsom, California. My upbringing was centered around setting an example for others and educating them with a smile. This continued throughout my education in Cincinnati and in yeshivas, where we had weekly meetings and routes.

Now, in my senior year at Oholei Torah, I visit various stores and offices in the Sheepshead Bay area of Brooklyn, where we have built mutual relationships. It's always amazing to me to encounter Jewish individuals in random stores or on the street who are searching for something that they didn't even realize they needed. They are so appreciative of our meeting with them. It makes our efforts very rewarding to help a Jew put tefillin on for the first time or since his bar mitzvah! (Anytime too!)

Once, when my buddies and I were at a 7-11 store, a non-Jewish worker began showing off the Hebrew words he knew. We were caught off guard! It turned out that the owner of the store was

Jewish and had taught him some basic terminology. We met the owner, Mark, who had a yeshiva education in his early years but had lost touch with his roots. Through our weekly visits, we rekindled his connection to his youth. Although I've changed routes since, I hear that Mark still welcomes the YJL boys into his store each week eager to put on tefillin and learn about the weekly Torah portion.

Throughout my later years of volunteering for the Friday Mitzvah routes I've taken a few younger students from Oholei Torah with me and am amazed at how well they interact with others. These kids are even before their bar mitzvah! At times, I find myself standing on the side watching while they take the lead.



# IT ALL BEGINS WITH THE ALEPH BEIS







WATCH THE CHILDREN SING AN OLD FOLKLORE SONG IN YIDDISH, CALLED "OIFEN PRIPICHIK."

The formal education of every single Jewish child around the world begins with the Aleph Beis—the Hebrew alphabet. These 22 letters serve as the foundation for our language, our prayer, and our learning of the Torah in its original text. It is for this reason that it is so important for them to be taught in the proper manner.

The Popack Campus, located in East Flatbush, Brooklyn is home to eight out of our sixteen kindergarten classes. The learning that takes place both inside and outside these classrooms will accompany the sweet, young toddlers throughout their scholastic years. It will serve as the key to success in their learning through hours spent in rigorous study of texts, all composed of the 22 letters that they learned and reviewed again and again in their formative years.

Children learn in all different ways—and there is no

single “one size fits all” method to achieving academic excellence. As such, Morah Mushky Sanowicz, the Educational Director of the division, designed a beautiful mural together with the children that incorporates all of the letters of the Aleph Beis. This gave the students the opportunity to explore the shapes of the letters in an artistic, hands-on manner and opened up discussions about the symbolisms that the different letters contain.

As the children pass by the mural every day they beam with pride at the role they played in its creation. Their excitement to show the mural to family and friends who visit the school is evident and displays their thorough knowledge of the letters and their awareness of the holiness that they contain.





# Avi's Story



The Director of Oholei Torah's Young Jewish Leadership program was sitting in his office one day when he received an email containing a picture of a few Oholei Torah students with a middle aged man on whom they had just put Tefillin the previous Friday. The email thanked the boys for the opportunity to put on Tefillin that Friday and was sent by the man in the photo—Mr. Avi Greenblatt.

Rabbi Wolf decided to reach out to Avi to hear more about his experience as it was clear that he was particularly touched by his encounter with the students. Avi then went on to relate that while the yeshiva students who had put Tefillin on him might have thought that they had just helped another random Jew perform a "simple" mitzvah, they have no idea how much the experience meant for them.

"You see," Avi explained, "I have fought many battles in my life. I was an IDF soldier in both the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War and thank G-d I survived both. Now, however, I am in the midst of fighting a very different type of battle, a terrible illness that required me to leave my home in Israel and come to the United States for surgery. The surgery was to take place on Friday in Manhattan and when you offered me to put on Tefillin I was immediately reminded of my parents and my identity."

He continued to describe how he felt the world around him fade away in that moment and as he said the holy words of the Shema prayer, he felt that G-d was blessing him with a successful surgery.

"I needed to capture the moment both so that I could remember it forever and so that I could share it with friends," Avi exclaimed. "You wouldn't believe how inspired everyone who I have shown this picture to has been."

Following the phone call, Rabbi Wolf decided that he must go meet Avi, then in rehab following the success of his major surgery. Of course, he brought along his pair of Tefillin to put on with Avi and his friends who had come to visit him at the same time! One of his friends was so moved by the encounter that he asked Rabbi Wolf where he could buy a pair of Tefillin for himself!

Avi's powerful message to the young boys was, "I want to thank you for those special moments of connection and prayer. After that I was unafraid to face my surgery. I am now recovering but you should know that you are the future of the Jewish people. I salute you, keep up the good work, and thank you to the young Oholei Torah students for making it all possible."



**Must Listen:**  
HEAR AVI TELL HIS STORY.





# Communities Across the Globe Become Students for a Day

Oholei Torah sees hundreds of graduates pass through its doors each year. In the years that follow, many of them will venture out into the world and become rabbis, educators, and community leaders.

A common practice among Chabad Shluchim emissaries is to bring groups of their community members to Crown Heights for a chance to give them a taste of the Chassidic lifestyle up close. In addition to visiting the many Judaica stores, kosher eateries and observing the hustle and bustle of the daily prayers in the renowned Chabad Headquarters, many Oholei Torah alumni choose to bring their community members to the institution where they spent their formative years.

Recently, a visiting group of congregants from Palm Beach Synagogue in Florida, led by Rabbi Schneur Minsky, '17, came to Crown Heights. Rabbi Minsky currently serves as the educational director of the synagogue led by Rabbi Moshe Scheiner, and he also runs the Jewish Business Network. He has a deep appreciation for the education and direction that Oholei Torah has given him that has served and continues to serve as a guiding light throughout his life. During their visit to the Oholei Torah Campus, the group

had the opportunity to tour the Talmudical Seminary Study Hall, otherwise known as a Beis Medrash. They were invited to sit and join the current students in their learning, getting a glimpse of life as a 'yeshiva bochur'—a student immersed in the study of Jewish Law, Talmud, and other sacred texts. The experience was memorable and enlightening for those who attended, as you can see from their glowing feedback!

Rabbi Menachem Junik, '85, Rabbi of Chabad of Richmond, England and the Jewish Home Network, brought a group of fathers and sons on an organized tour of Crown Heights. Rabbi Junik made a point to include a visit to Oholei Torah in their packed schedule. He proudly gave them a tour of the Eastern Parkway Campus while school was in full swing. The men immensely enjoyed the beautiful building and the vibrant atmosphere. However, the most memorable part for them was the peek into the study hall. It was a sight unlike anything they had ever seen! One 15-year-old visitor was surprised to find his camp counselor from the previous summer in the sea of 450 yeshiva students! They warmly embraced and took a few minutes to catch up before his counselor returned to his study

partner and his open book. The visitors marveled as they saw the students learning different materials side by side, simultaneously, and with absolute focus amongst the vibrant commotion of so many study groups! One college grad needed to know how they are able to concentrate! Rabbi Junik assured him that it most definitely was possible, as he was a product of this style of learning.

"Rabbi, visiting your alma mater—Oholei Torah—was the best part of our Crown Heights tour. Observing the students during their study sessions and getting to know their backgrounds had a great impression on me. I got a glimpse of how you were educated and it's clear that Oholei Torah is a fine institution for raising future rabbis."

—S. Bloom, London, England

Dear Rabbi Lesches and Rabbi Blumes,

Thank you for hosting members of our Palm Beach, FL community, and allowing them to get a "taste" of your study hall and to meet with the boys.

The visit to Oholei Torah was the climax of their trip—as it gave them a better understanding of the boys that they meet when they visit here, and also when they meet them abroad.

—Rabbi Schneur Minsky, Alumnus, '17

P.S. My best years were spent in that study hall! Seeing some of my classmates now as teachers gave me such a sense of pride!



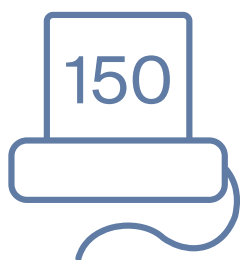


# notes and news

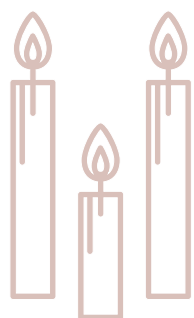
Oholei Torah + YIL in action  
every Friday and before  
Jewish Holidays

220

pairs of students  
trek the NYC  
area



people wrap  
Tefillin



50

sets of Shabbat  
candles distributed



78

routes

Numbers are average per week

## MEET OUR PILLARS

### Reb Yoseph Yitzchok and Penina Batsheva Popack

Students, parents, and visitors who peruse the halls of various Oholei Torah campuses are likely to notice the name Popack displayed on numerous signs and building dedications. This might lead one to wonder, who are the Popacks and what is their connection to Oholei Torah?

Reb Yoseph Yitzchok Popack and his wife Penina Batsheva are residents of Lawrence, New York who have a deep connection with our school that spans over the past 60 years. Rabbi Shmuel Issac and Miriam Popack, Reb Yoseph Yitzchok's parents, were long-time friends and Board Members who supported the school in its infancy. In fact, Reb Yoseph Yitzchok attended Oholei Torah in its early years in one of its first classes. As he grew older, he began to recognize the dedication of the director Rabbi Joseph Rosenfeld, OBM, and the two became close, dear friends. The motivation behind Reb Popack's tremendous support is the profound impact that the school has made throughout Lubavitch, and the world over. He once shared "The future of Klal Yisroel is very important to me. I invest both time and money into it. I've been fortunate enough to donate to many worthy organizations, but, perhaps most importantly towards the future growth of Oholei Torah".

Throughout the years, the Popacks have shown their generosity to our institution in incredible ways. One evening in 2001, the East Flatbush kindergarten building caught fire. The damage was devastating and as a result, the entire location needed to be renovated—an astronomical undertaking. Reb Yoseph Yitzchok and Mrs. Popack, in an expression of unmatched generosity, pledged to rebuild the entire school building, and at the East Flatbush campus dedication, the Popacks were honored. He left the attendees with a message that gave insight into the driving force behind his charitable deeds:

"I like to make a change for the better. It's a pleasure of mine. When I do chessed it gives me the energy to want to do more".

Just a few years later, following a visit to the main Oholei Torah campus on Eastern Parkway, Reb Popack proposed a total upgrade of the old





gymnasium and today, it is known as the Popack Recreation Center. At the grand re-opening in 2016, he shared “My wife and I believe that building this gymnasium will enhance the overall experience of the students of Oholei Torah, to excite and motivate them to come and learn Torah. In addition, it will positively affect them emotionally, mentally, and physically”.

With the constant growth and expansion of the school, and the funds required to fuel it, Reb Yoseph Yitzchok even went against his nature and sold one of his buildings, just so that Oholei Torah could accept more students in their Talmudical Seminary Division.

More recently, when Oholei Torah purchased the high school campus on Remsen Avenue, the Popacks dedicated a Beis Medrash (a study hall and synagogue) for the high school students in memory of his brother, Rabbi Ari Popack, who was the head Shliach, Chabad Emissary, to the state of Colorado.

Every year when summer comes around, the students of Oholei Torah find refuge

from the city heat and humidity in the beautiful Catskill mountains. While our commitment to learning remains the same no matter the season, Oholei Torah’s brand new idyllic campgrounds and sports fields provide the perfect environment for summer learning and recreation. When the time came to purchase the extensive campgrounds, the Popacks once again showed up in solidarity and support as contributors to the purchase of the grounds.

Rabbi Rosenfeld once commented to Rabbi Nosson Blumes, Director of Development, that “Oholei Torah is blessed to have such friends. Friends who don’t wait to be asked to help but who see the need and offer!”

Reb Popack sees firsthand the importance of the education and alumni that Oholei Torah produces. Apart from his philanthropic endeavors at Oholei Torah, he is also involved in many Chabad organizations around the globe, many of whose directors are former students and alumni of Oholei Torah. For example, he has partnered with Colel Chabad in building soup kitchens and

food banks to serve the needy throughout Israel. Rabbi Sholom Duchman, the Director of Colel Chabad is himself an Oholei Torah alumnus (’63).

Mrs. Penina Batsheva Popack shares her husband’s commitment to the greater community. She serves as the Deputy Mayor of the Village of Lawrence, New York, and is the immediate past president of the Lawrence Civic Association. Mrs. Popack is currently running for office of the Mayor of Lawrence.

As can be seen in Reb Popack’s actions and remarks throughout the years, he and his wife are prime examples of those who give tzedakah with a full heart. They serve as role models of graciousness, humility and unlimited dedication to community institutions.



VIDEO PRESENTATION AND  
INTERVIEW WITH REB POPACK



Please enjoy this issue of *Intention*. We welcome your thoughts and comments:  
[development@oholeitorah.com](mailto:development@oholeitorah.com) or call 718-778-0734.

## *intention*

SPRING ISSUE

### CAPTURING MOMENTS OF JOY

through Jewish music,  
art and dance

