

The Beauty of the Yemin Orde Youth Village in Israel

By Chana Boteach

In Leviticus, 19:2, it is stated, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them, 'Be holy, because I, the Lord your G-d, am holy.'" It is from this ancient passage that we derive the concept of imitatio dei. This theory of imitating G-d and trying to resemble Him, in acts of kindness and compassion that will consequently make us holy, is the very cornerstone of Judaism. One could take this commandment even further and decide that one has to act in place of G-d during His seeming absence. The Chassidic master Rabbi Zusya of Anipoli even concludes that each person should have some doubts of faith. These doubts will lead to him clothing the naked and feeding the hungry, and not turning a blind eye to the needy in the belief that G-d will always tend to the needs of the disadvantaged.

I believe this concept is the foundation for the youth village where I volunteered this summer, Yemin Orde. This village not only provides shelter, food, and clothing, to the five hundred children and teenagers that it houses from all over the world, but it gives them a sense of belonging and trust.

When I first heard about Yemin Orde, I was informed that it was a village that cares for disadvantaged children, children with painful backgrounds. Upon arriving, I was expecting to see a lot of pain, pessimism, and torment. After all, each of the students has a story of their own. Some of them travelled from Ethiopia when they were just young children. Others saw members of families endure tremendous suffering and even death. But an air of misery is far from the reality of Yemin Orde.

Yemin Orde is truly something you have to see to believe. Hundreds of kids, from all corners of the earth, such as Ethiopia, Russia, Brazil, and China, live and learn together. It is a place that is full of life and spirit. "Woe is me," is a line you will never hear uttered in this village.

The staff of Yemin Orde are nothing short of heroes. They sacrifice the luxuries that our society is so dependant on and give up their own time to guide these children and give them hope towards a brighter future. Led by a giant of a man, a true visionary, Dr. Chaim Peri, who has served the needs of these children for over thirty years, the students truly have standards to which they are told constantly they can live up to. While Dr. Peri is an esteemed and renowned figure, he knows every child individually and picks up

pieces of garbage as he walks through the village. The children at the village revere him and know that when they are in his presence, they are in the presence of greatness. All of the directors, counselors, and teachers, are compassionate, warm, funny, and some of the most giving people you will ever encounter.

Even once the students graduate, it is engrained in them that they will never be abandoned again and that Yemin Orde will always welcome them with open arms. Every day, different graduates return to Yemin Orde, dressed in their army uniforms and show the younger students that they too can achieve great things.

I also worked with a house of younger, Russian children who are orphaned. These children are some of the happiest and liveliest kids you will ever encounter. Yemin Orde provides toys and clothing for these children and even the smallest and simplest of things will put a smile on their face.

The beauty of Yemin Orde is that it doesn't neglect the fact that there are issues that have to be dealt with. With five hundred teenagers from all over the world, each of whom has been through their own painful ordeal, there are going to be problems. But, they don't see problems, they see only solutions. They teach the students to respect their parents even if they may not have earned it and to appreciate their culture, even if they don't understand it.

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