

The spiritual energy in Kinloss hall was palpable, and the very walls seemed to reverberate with the excitement of “*zeh hayom kivinu lo.*” Last month, over 200 members joined the Avos-A-Thon, a *siyum* that celebrated Torah study, learning and growing in middos, and the start of a life’s journey. That evening, the hall was animated with divrei Torah and *hisorerus*, song, dance, and joy. The stars of the *siyum*? Schoolgirls grades 7-9, hailing from London, Kiev, Moscow, and Pinsk who completed two months of intensive learning of Pirkei Avos.

Darkei Avos, a groundbreaking programme that encourages the study of Pirkei Avos, is the brainchild of Mrs. Esther Reich. When Mrs. Reich was in high school, she was given the opportunity to memorize and learn Pirkei Avos in-depth. The experience proved to be life-changing. “The lessons of Pirkei Avos continue to guide and inspire me as a mother, wife, and businesswoman,” says Mrs. Reich. “I want every Jewish girl to have that same opportunity.”

Students of Bais Aharon of Pinsk-Belarus, Bais Aharon V’Yisrael of Kiev, Bais Yakov Pinsk-Belarus, Bais Yakov-Kiev, Beth Jacob Grammar School, Hasmonean High School, Menorah High School, Tiferes High School for girls, and Reishis Chochma of Moscow celebrated the in-depth learning and memorizing of perakim Aleph and Bais of Pirkei Avos. Students in grades 7 learned perek Aleph, and students in grades 8 and 9 learned perek Bais in this cumulative yearly programme. The girls also raised money for *hachnassas kallah* by getting sponsored for the *mishnayos* they learned.

The program was brilliantly planned to the last detail with the goal of giving the girls a spectacular evening and a well-deserved reward. Euphoric girls were greeted to a tastefully decorated hall with manipulated lighting and sat down to a lavish 3-course dinner. The girls played a challenging Darkei Avos trivia game in which the winning teams received prizes and swayed and clapped along to a live musical and song performance by the talented Kalifa sisters from Israel.

Mrs. Zaltsman led an award ceremony that praised each and every girl for her achievements. She called up every Darkei Avos member to the front stage by name and handed each individual a personalized certificate. Students who learned beyond the minimum and memorized the whole Perek were also gifted with an award and a medal, and the 5 girls who raised the most money for *hachanassas kallah* received an extra prize. Schools in Pinsk, Kiev, and Moscow, whose student bodies had a stunning 100% success rate of translating and memorizing the whole perek, received beautiful plaques with the names of their respective schools engraved on them.

Noted rabbanim, rebbitzens, mechanchim, and mechanchos applauded the girls’ accomplishments at the *siyum*. Rabbi Bixenspanner and Rabbi Weitz spoke words of *chizuk*, and Rebbitzen Ehrentreu, the Rebbetzins of the shuls that Darkei Avos members attend, and the deans of the celebrating schools also attended in a show of support.

In his speech, Rabbi Bixenspanner stressed how important it was for young future yiddishe wives and mothers to learn Pirkei Avos, a *mishnah* which sets a path for a life of growth in middos. Tying in a *kli yakar* from sefer Bereishis, Rabbi Bixenspanner questioned why Avraham Avinu was adamant about finding a wife for Yitzchak from the

house of Besuel, while refusing prospective brides from the families of Cnaan. Wasn't the house of Besuel steeped in wrong ideologies and avodah zarah? "Because", explained Rabbi Bixenspanner, "while the Cnaanim had bad character traits, the family of Besuel had inherently good roots. While one can be educated about correct ideologies once replanted in a good environment, bad middos, which become embedded in one's character, are difficult to uproot". Rabbi Bixenspanner extolled the program for inculcating the young girls with sterling character traits. "No matter where the girls find themselves in the future, their good middos will spread light to all of those around them," said Rabbi Bixenspanner. "Everyone will be able to recognize the girls who learned through the Darkei Avos program."

"When I heard the words of Torah echoing from the Bais Medrash as the girls reviewed their mishnayos, I wept tears of joy", Rabbi Weitz said in his passionate speech. "I davened to Hashem and said, isn't a generation in which girls spend their free time learning how to interact and live their lives as yidden the generation that should greet the mashiach?"

Rabbi Weitz also related the profound impact one lesson can have on an entire world. Sarah Schenirer started the Bais Yaakov movement after Rav Moshe Flesch issued a kol korei in shul begging someone to take responsibility for the chinuch habanos. "Look at the ripple effect of one speech, how it changed the entire world", said Rabbi Weitz. "Just imagine the impact the learning of Pirkei Avos will have on future generations." ."

Another highlight of the program was the gathering of girls from the UK and Russian-speaking countries. The fact that students from such varied backgrounds and cultures joined together in a momentous celebration was testimony to unifying power of Torah and mesorah. The enthusiasm the Russian-speaking students showed toward Yiddishkeit was infectious, and the English-born Bais Yaakov girls felt privileged to share the evening with those from less-privileged backgrounds. "When our girls saw the Russian (speaking) girls, they realized the enormity of what they were part of", said Debbie Pastor, deputy head of Hasmonean High School.

Mrs. Dina Soloveitchik, a British-born woman who dedicates herself wholly to the chinuch of girls in Pinsk, noted, "It's appropriate that this program is called Darkei Avos—it's helping Jewish girls return back to the path of their grandparents, their *avos*".

Mrs. Perlman then added, "It's such a zechus for all the Yiddishe neshamos to be here with all of you. We were once isolated behind the iron curtain, now we're joining in celebration of Torah learning together.

The positive energy and excitement of the girls throughout the evening was awe-inspiring. "I've coordinated and attended many programs in the past," said Darkei Avos program and executive director Mrs. Baila Ellinsohn. "But there was something extraordinary about the Avos-A-Thon. There was magic in the air." One English student put it simply: "It was the best night of my entire life."

"The girls were on a high," said Mrs. Reich. "There was more than just a physical joy present—there was something deeply meaningful and spiritual about the experience." In many ways, the Avos-A-Thon celebrated more than acquired knowledge. It marked a milestone, the fresh beginnings of a new journey. The girls

began embarking on a path of discovery about the joys of learning, middos development, and living a life of upward growth.

The true *simcha and* pleasure the girls felt throughout the program will serve as a lesson that they'll carry with them for the rest of their lives: Learning and growing is synonymous with joy. "I want the girls to know that you can have fun and enjoy yourself in a pressure-free environment while growing in Yiddishkeit, middos, and spirituality" says Mrs. Reich. There's a genuine sense of satisfaction that accompanies spiritual growth, and Mrs. Reich feels privileged to share it.

Mrs Reich concluded the evening by giving thanks to the Darkei Avos team, which included the board members and the Avos-a-Thon dinner committee led by Mrs. Zaltzman and Mrs. Sorotzkin. She also thanked Mrs Cramer, Rebbetzin Lieberman and Mrs Rowe, who directed the learning sessions. Particular mention was given to Mrs Baila Ellinson, executive director of Darkei Avos who flew in from Eretz Yisrael for the event. "Without them, the program could not have been a reality," said Mrs. Reich

In her moving farewell speech, Mrs. Reich encouraged the girls not to let future doubts extinguish their renewed passion for a life of upward growth. The Darkei Avos program and the Avos-A-Thon proved that this worthy life goal can indeed become a reality.