



Shevet Yuval

How are we so "different"?
If "different" is just a thing.
If we all have certain features,
What does "different" bring?

People filled with hatred,
Can't possibly see,
That there's not really "differences"
Between you and me.

Looks can't show "difference",
If they're just there to be seen.
If you don't look like someone else,
Why are they so mean?

If being "different" is what is wrong,
I'd rather not be right.
And I'd want to finish living,
Doing the "different" fight.

by Vincen Tabatha



Join us and become a partner in the success of the Bnei Akiva Movement

Yuval Chapters throughout the country: Katzrin, Beit She'an, Hoshaya, Kiryat Atta, Carmel-Haifa, Natanya, Melabes-Petach-Tikva, Elkana, Kfar Ganim, Hadar Ganim, Ra'anana, Givat Shmuel, Shoam, Ramat Hanasi, Kirayt Hertzog, Yavne, Ashdod, Be'er-Sheva, Yerucham, Efrat, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Ma'ale Edomim, Merkaz-Jerusalem, Ramot-Jerusalem, Shunra-Jerusalem, Givat Ze'ev, Pisgat Ze'ev, Afula, Kfar-Saba, Rama-Chen, Modi'in



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"Hi! My name is Nirit and I'm fourteen and a half years...

I am a member of Shevet Yuval of Bnei Akiva...it makes me feel really proud."

The **Bnei Akiva** Youth Movement provides all its members with a sense of Jewish Identity, belonging and acceptance. For Nirit this is "pride".

The **Yuval shvatim** (chapters) for children with special needs are an integral part of the **Bnei Akiva** Youth Movement. Yuval members participate in all the ongoing activities of the 'snif' (branch) during the week and on Shabbat including general **Bnei Akiva** activities; camps, tree planting, Chodesh Irgun, volunteering within the community, etc.

There are some 200,000 special needs children in Israel, most of whom are in Schools for Special Education. **Bnei Akiva** provides them with a social life outside of school.

The birth of a 'challenged' child changes the dynamics of the entire family. Parents find themselves investing more time in the care of the special child - the 'otherness', oftentimes the rejection, and the challenges children with special needs face can lead to low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence.

Batya from Ra'anana:

For me, Bnei Akiva is the best
and most important thing
in the whole world!





"We immigrated to Israel a few years ago. Eitan had never had any friends. I never imagined I would see him on a stage! Today I see how you have helped him open up to people...and to me! Now I believe he can be friends with others and be like others...."





The Goals of Shevet Yuval are:

- **Respond to a social need in the community.**

Most special education students find themselves isolated and lonely after school. Members of **Shevet Yuval** not only have social contact with each other, but they also mix with all the children in the snif, with their 'madrichim' (counselors) helping the special needs children interact appropriately.

- **Facilitate social attitude changes among members of the snif and the community at large.**

Negative stigmas and prejudice heighten the aversion to and fear of encounters with those who are 'different'. **Shevet Yuval** is an integral, natural part of the 'snif' and thus normalizes contact between children with special needs and others. This is further promoted by assigning **Shevet Yuval** with a twin chapter in each 'snif' with which to enjoy joint activities.



Shevet Yuval was established in 1997 in Ra'anana together with the municipal social services in response to a request by parents of special needs children who had no appropriate social framework.

The children

The children of **Shevet Yuval** – from ages 10-21 – have basic communication skills (including alternate communication) and lower than average IQ's with generally unimpaired behavior and judgment. All attend special education schools and have no history of violent behavior or severely impaired impulse control.

Among those participating in **Yuval** are young people with Down's syndrome, mild-moderate developmental delays, mild ASD (autism spectrum disorder), and other disabilities.





- **Provide assistance to the special needs child and his/her family.**

Activities within **Bnei Akiva** provide parents of special needs children much needed time to relax knowing their child is 'in good hands'. In addition, **Yuval** enables siblings to see their brother/sister in a different light, as someone like them who goes to **Bnei Akiva**, and who warrants the respect, attention and warmth of the 'madrachim' and other all members.

- **Improve self-confidence and self-image among Shevet Yuval members.**

Shevet Yuval is a haven for its members that strengthens their sense of self and confidence. Sometimes, children who have learned how the 'snif' operates, how to interact appropriately and how to be part of a group through **Yuval** are then able to integrate into a 'regular snif'.

Shevet Yuval works in small groups that make it possible to give each member individual attention and reinforce the strengths and positive attributes of each member.



"Ever since Rotem started Bnei Akiva I feel the sun is shining on me again. Now, people we meet on the street know her, smile at her and ask how she is doing! I'm no longer the mother of a disabled child, but the mother of Rotem of Bnei Akiva."

Dan from Petach Tikva: I have lots of friends, they respect me, and we help each other. If you come to our Bnei Akiva snif, you won't want to leave, ever!

Activities

Activities of the chapters are modified as needed so that all the members can participate and the activity as a whole fits into the **Bnei Akiva** program.

The belonging and pride of being a member of a Bnei Akiva snif, the requests for more and the growing interest in established Yuval shvatim are all testimony to the great success of Yuval.

Common Statistics about Shevet Yuval:

- 30 chapters throughout Israel
- 150 members
- 70 counselors



The counselors

Shevet Yuval counselors are part of the general **Bnei Akiva** 'Chevraya-Bet' (high school aged) who receive training as part of the counselors seminars and special training including supervision throughout the year, customized to the needs of their members; for example, learning sign language; aiding the physically disable child "get around" etc.

Yuval counselors invariably see themselves as fulfilling a special mission and are active in promoting inclusion of the disabled in all areas.

"Shai is autistic. Three years ago I was with him on a bus when one of the kids from the snif got on. I couldn't believe what happened: the boy turned to Shai and asked him how he was doing, and Shai easily answered "OK." I had never heard Shai say a word before!"

(Told by Shai's mother at a JDC conference.)





"Of course the congregation has to welcome them [children with special needs] when they come to the synagogue, even those who don't want to learn with them. And everyone should make sure they say "Amen" and "Kedusha" so they participate as much possible. Even walking with them to synagogue or giving them the Torah to kiss is a mitzva."

(Rabbi Moshe Feinstein z"l n Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Da'at 4, 20:9)

Bar/Bat Mitzva Project

The Bar/Bat Mitzva Project for youth with special needs is a new initiative of the **Bnei Akiva** Youth Movement via extension of the **Shevet Yuval** program.

Families of special needs children frequently come up against barriers in both the community and synagogue when seeking a venue in which to celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzva for their child. **Bnei Akiva** serves as a natural address for these families thanks to our experience and success with the national **Shevet Yuval** program.

We have developed a year-long program that includes both students of special education and other **Bnei Akiva** members of Bar/Bat Mitzva age, as well as peers from overseas communities.

One of the central goals of the project is to foster change in attitude towards special needs children, many of whom are not afforded a framework within the orthodox community that will allow them to celebrate their Bar/Bat Mitzva, including being called up to the Torah (for boys).

The study program

The study program is based on exploration of the child's "circle": 'Me and My Family', 'Me and my Community', 'Me and my Country'. Emphasis is placed on the concept of a just society that embodies equality and inclusiveness.

Bar/Bat Mitzva youth from Israel and the Diaspora will maintain ongoing contact via the internet and video conferencing. Each group will take upon itself a project that will be shared with a group from the other community; a project developed in Israel will be sent overseas, and visa versa, to be displayed in the 'twin snif'.

The Ceremony

Bar Mitzvah – Aliya to the Torah

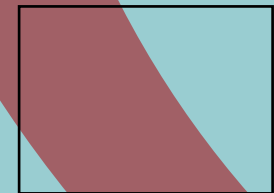
Each special education child will be given an aliya to the Torah on his Bar Mitzva. The aliya will be on Shabbat at the synagogue the family attends and the **Bnei Akiva** members will also attend.

Bat Mitzva

Each girl in special education will be entitled to celebrate her Bat Mitzva together with the other (girls) Bnei Akiva members as part of a "Girls' Night" that will include preparing, separating (hafrasha) and baking Challah and a study program on Shabbat candle lighting for women.



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