



# BAIS YAAKOV OF BALTIMORE

## OVER 700 GIRLS AND STILL ONE SMALL FAMILY



Dictionary

Math

English

8 Binyan September 7, 2011/8 Elul 5771

Guess who goes to school even in the summer? That's right — the principal! On a hot summer day, Binyan traveled to Owings Mills, Maryland, where we visited the Bais Yaakov elementary school. We interviewed the principal, Rabbi Mendel Freedman, for a behind-the-scenes peek at Bais Yaakov in the summer. As we entered the auditorium, we heard loud cheers from the auditorium, "Blue is the best," and "Go pink, go!" Girls with painted faces and big smiles emerged from the auditorium, running to their next color-war camp activity. Rabbi Freedman met us, welcoming us to his school.

### RABBI FREEDMAN, BAIS YAAKOV IS CLEARLY A BUSY PLACE ALL YEAR ROUND. CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU GET READY FOR THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR?

There's so much to do; it keeps us busy almost the entire summer! One main job is interviewing and hiring teachers. In fact, later today I am interviewing a young lady for a teaching position. Next week I have another follow-up interview with a different teacher.

Another big summer job is dividing the classes for the next year. Each year students hope to have their friends in class with them. We try to make a class of girls who will work well together. During the summer we also choose our theme for the next year. We have meetings with teachers where we brainstorm and plan our activities around the theme.

We also give summer workshops and hold meetings to further train the teachers. (Yes, teachers have to learn and grow, too!) Another big summer job is meeting new parents and testing and placing their children. We have over 700 girls attending our school, so it is a very big job to get everything settled by the first day of school.

### WOW, SO MUCH IS HAPPENING! WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN MIND WHEN YOU INTERVIEW TEACHERS?

We look for teachers who will set good examples, who

love teaching, who have the skills to teach and who will go the extra mile. For example, *moros* regularly bake for the girls and bring in homemade treats for *siyumim* and special occasions. There are those who invite girls over to their homes after school and on weekends. General studies teachers arrange trips and invite exciting guests to come to school.

One of our teachers was so special she even started a unique program for our school. For thirty-five years our fifth grade has been having lunch with the mayors of Baltimore. We are the only school in town with that privilege! We also visit the governor, and one year, the governor actually came and visited our school for an afternoon.

### WITH OVER 700 GIRLS, HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN SUCH A WARM ENVIRONMENT?

Although it's hard to imagine, we were once a small school. We really make a big effort to maintain that small school environment. We tell the teachers and students they are part of something special. They are part of us, the "Bais Yaakov family."

Each teacher works to build a relationship with her students as well. We also have had some really special programs here, like our math fair. This was a creative way for the girls to showcase their various math skills for their friends and parents. Booths featured practice word problems, geometric patterns and designs, telling time and the like.

The fifth-graders even spearheaded a BY Survey. For five weeks before the math fair they collected data from the entire school. Students were questioned about their birthdates, family information and personal preferences. Everyone was part of the census, with their opinions and information counted! The findings were displayed at the math fair.

### COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL-WIDE THEME? WHAT WAS LAST YEAR'S? WHAT DO YOU PLAN FOR THIS YEAR?

Many Bais Yaakov schools have yearly programs that focus on a *middah* or *mitzvah*. We create our own themes. Theme time is usually scheduled for two and a half months, during the middle of every year.

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Last year, our school-wide program focused on *Shabbos Kodesh*. The girls decorated the school with beautiful Shabbos murals throughout the hallways. Also, the girls from one of the older classes handed out a small white gift box to each girl in the school. The boxes were filled with candies *l'kavod Shabbos Kodesh*. Each student really felt she had received a gift, reminding them of the gift of Shabbos.

The girls also made beautiful Shabbos projects, like napkin rings, challah trays and *hadlakas neiros* cards. Rabbi Moshe Heinemann, head of the Baltimore Vaad Hakashrus, came and taught the girls about the *eruv*. On the last Friday morning of the program, we had an *oneg Shabbos* with *divrei Torah*, *zemiros* and kugel.

This year, our theme will be "*Peelah pascha b'chochmah*," addressing all aspects of speech.

When the girls come to school this year, we will give them all a gift: special journals. We are planning to have the girls list in their journals all the *mitzvos* that can be done using words. Girls might use their journals to list names of *cholim*, for example, or examples of *onaas devarim*, in order to watch their speech.

#### HOW DOES THE SCHOOL CELEBRATE YAMIM TOVIM?

Bais Yaakov is a happy place all year round, and we put extra effort into making all the Yamim Tovim special. I play piano and keyboard, and play for the elementary school on Chanukah and before Purim. Every year our staff gets dressed up with the students before Purim — and it is always a task for me to try to outdo them. I have worn some really funny costumes.

One year I dressed up as Uncle Moishy. I taught myself some songs on the guitar and performed for the school. That evening, a preschooler's mother called me. Apparently, her daughter came home from school and said, "Mommy, I know who Uncle Moishy really is — it's Rabbi Freedman!"

Another year at Purim time, to outwit our *moros*, I got hold of our uniform material and a similar shirt and had a uniform (pants!) specially tailor-made, including the logo and a yarmulke and bow tie to match. Can you imagine seeing the principal dressed in a man's Bais Yaakov uniform?

During Chodesh Elul, Rabbi Yitzchok Sanders, our assistant principal, and I blow the *shofar* for the girls.

For Lag BaOmer the first-graders decorated beautiful bags, the fifth grade enjoyed a special barbeque and the fourth grade attached notes to balloons and watched them drift away. We hope the people who found them caught our happy spirit!

#### ANY FOND MEMORIES YOU CAN LEAVE US WITH, RABBI FREEDMAN?

A number of years ago we had a preschooler who did not want to stay in class and wanted her mommy. I thought I could solve the problem by having her spend a little time with me. As it turned out, she spent a nice part of each day following me around wherever I was going and whatever I was doing. She would join me when I visited classes and sit in on teachers' meetings! One teacher even thought she was my granddaughter!

After about three months of her shadowing me, when I was about to give up and actually called her mother to come pick her up, the little girl said, "Okay, I will go back to class and stay there." She went back to class and stayed there the rest of the year without a problem!

Over the years, through the work of our devoted staff, we have, *b'Siyatta diShmaya*, successfully mainstreamed a number of physically handicapped children. During the past two years, two of those former students, both hearing-impaired, registered their own daughters in Bais Yaakov. Those were unquestionably some of my most moving moments.

Another highlight this year was our live broadcasts of *siddur* parties, *Chumash* presentations and recorder recitals. We devised a way to include everyone who couldn't make it to those special performances, creating a live hookup for family members around the world! You should see the notes of appreciation we received.

I can't end without mentioning my trips to Eretz Yisrael. While there, I called the girls by phone and our staff broadcasted my call over the intercom for the entire school to hear. This past year, my call was in connection with our *Shabbos Kodesh* program. I described the scene in Yerushalayim fifteen minutes before Shabbos began. Another time, I did a live, interactive video broadcast from Yerushalayim with the participation of the entire school.

We have also had our own Bais Yaakov graduates, former Bnos leaders of our students, speak to the girls from Yerushalayim, describing their experiences in seminary and Eretz Yisrael. Then there was the *shemittah* year, when a Torah-observant farmer described life on his *moshav* during *shemittah*. Children never forget these unique activities.

THANK YOU, RABBI FREEDMAN! STUDENTS AT BAIS YAAKOV BALTIMORE ARE VERY LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH A DEVOTED PRINCIPAL. HATZLACHAH THIS YEAR WITH ALL YOUR EXCITING PROGRAMS! 🌟



Bais Yaakov Baltimore strives to make its students feel like family, but staff feel that way, too. From left to right: Mr. Mordechai Zev Margolese, the facility manager; Rabbi Yitzchok Sanders, the vice principal; Rabbi Mendel Freedman, the principal



BY Principal Rabbi Mendel Freedman is involved in all aspects of running the school — including kashering the kitchen!



Rabbi Freedman's got a lot of fun Purim shtick up his sleeve, too, like this man's BY uniform



What a beautiful setting for such a beautiful school



BY's teachers are full of creativity

