



The Campus Rabbi's Message

Dvar Torah

Our great sage Hillel said in Pirkei Avot (1:14) “ וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אֵימָתַי ” - And if not now, when? While we have always known this to be true, in recent times we are living it. Who knows what the next day will bring? Will we be allowed to travel, what time can we travel? Will businesses need to shut down? If we become Covid positive (G-d forbid) how will our bodies react? We don't know what the future holds in store for us. Hillel's message though is positive, you have the present! Use every moment.

There is no better place to live this lesson than in a school. As Rabbeinu Yonah explains, Hillel is referring to learning and growing when you are young. We know that it's never too late to learn, yet, the older one is, the longer it takes for lessons to sink in. We need to make the most of our student's time, laying foundations in Torah, Mitzvot and a strong General Studies education.

We are fortunate at Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School that we have the ability to use many teachable moments. With our special care for each individual child and the openness of our teachers, we are able to make the most of a situation that arises in class to teach the children. As I heard from the Grade One teacher last week, she walked into class ready to teach a lesson on the aleph bet. As she walked into the classroom a student asked her a question about the lines and dots under the Hebrew letters (as they had just received their first siddurim). The teacher seized the opportunity to be led by the interest of the class and gave an introduction into the Hebrew vowels. This happened to be the Grade One teacher but it could have been any one of our teachers. This is what the Mishna is referring to: if not now, when?

Often in life we may have lessons that we have learned or plans that we want to implement but we don't get around to putting it into action, the Mishna is telling us to act without delay. Someone who lived this mantra is Yitro, Moshe's father in law. The Torah tells us that Yitro heard all that Hashem had done for the Jewish people (the splitting of the Sea, the battle with Amalek) and he came to join the Jewish people. Surely there were many people who heard of the wonders performed in Egypt, yet, how many acted on what they heard. They were probably inspired and thought how lucky the Jewish people were, but it didn't move them into action. Yitro was different, he heard the incredible news and decided “if not now, when?” and changed his life around to join the Jewish people.

As a school we have learned many lessons from 2020 and we certainly don't want those experiences to go to waste.

This year we have two very exciting online Kodesh programs that we are piloting in the intermediate phase. We have a Mishna course which is being run by an organisation called Kitah and a Navi online programme designed by the renowned Lookstein Center. The Hebrew online curriculum, Ulpan Or, is being used for a second year. These programs are not being used just for the sake of using technology, we have invested in these curriculums based on the lessons and reflections from online learning in 2020. These programs do not take away from the presence of the teacher, it only enhances and enriches the classes and content.

This is one example of how we are looking back at what we have learned and being moved into action now. Bezrat Hashem (with the help of Hashem) throughout the year we will continue to live and teach by this principle of utilising every teachable moment and learning from our experiences, because if we don't do that now, when will we?

- Rabbi Gavi Ziegler