

Machon Chana in the Mountains, with a view of the surrounding mountains



Machon Chana in the Mountains

The welcoming smell of the forest greets you on your drive uphill along the slowly winding roads through the Catskill Park Preserve towards Machon Chana. The transmission hesitates as it works to gain momentum against the climb. The road leads you along the curving cliff of the mountain, a rail separating you from the steep drop. Turn your head to the left and you see three mountains that meet in a valley, a view that is just breathtaking. An exquisite waterfall appears suddenly around a sharp bend in the road, followed by an even steeper climb up through the forest. Tannersville, located at the top of this mountain, is not yet even in sight.

The town of Tannersville is made up of rural homes, farm scenes, meadows and lakes near country stores and ski lodges. Remote and

quaint, this picturesque town makes you feel as though you are transported to a different world.

Approaching the hotel, a vulture swoops directly in front of the car, spreading wide its wings, and then alights on the roof of a nearby home and remains, neck curved and head bowed. Here's the place, you think, where brown bears snack on your campsite leftovers and mountain lions hide in the deep reaches of the forest. Later you see a deer in someone's backyard. Afterwards, your child points out another deer to you – only this time it's just a large dog. (That's city kids for you.)

Going over the one-lane bridge and driving another mile, you finally spot Dale Road and turn right. A cozy New England-style inn is on one side of the road, and the charming Machon Chana grounds

and facilities are on the other. Behind the expansive hotel and in all directions around it are the peaks of the surrounding mountains, each of which is about a twenty-minute drive (one is the famous Hunter Mountain, known for its skiing). It's a stunning view.

Some fifteen years ago, Rabbi Zalman and Sara Labkowsky started bringing their family for a respite from the city. Other Chabad families rented homes in the area, including many Machon Chana alumnae, who wanted to use the summer for a *ruchniyusdike* recharge. They set up *shiurim* with their mentor, Mrs. Labkowsky, the founder and principal of Machon Chana. As a natural extension of the twice-yearly week-long Yeshivacation program in Brooklyn and the classes formed in Tannersville, Machon Chana launched a summer program in the

View of the nearby waterfalls in the mountains



mountains five years ago at the instruction of the Rebbe through the *Igros Kodesh*. Housed in various lodges, the program was a rousing success, but was limited by space constraints.

“Career women, middle-aged women, busy mothers – all kinds of people who can’t sit in *yeshiva* – need a chance to learn. We’ve been developing programs to meet the whole spectrum, not just college-age women, which our regular *yeshiva* program primarily serves,” explains Mrs. Labkowski.

“Our dream was to have a place large enough to also accommodate women and families, many who had begun their path in Judaism years ago and have since become involved with Chabad in cities around the world. We wanted to give these women an opportunity to enjoy the

fabulous scenery, to regroup and become emotionally recharged. Their children can run around in the large outdoor area, play on the play equipment, join the camp, and swim in the two outdoor pools. The husbands can learn outdoors without the regular workday pressure to distract them, and there are blocks of time allotted to the men in the pool area. A family experience of rejuvenation and learning can be much more powerful than when a woman comes alone,” the dynamic founder continues.

“We’re just thrilled and grateful to have use of this 60-room hotel, which is on 7 acres. The food is delicious kosher, healthful cuisine. The Gellman Torah Foundation had tremendous generosity and vision to purchase this site and make it available for our program. Our first

summer in our own home is off and running and exceeding all expectations. With exciting classes – and people told me the classes are really spectacular – taught by experts and by skilled and patient *madrichot*, with one day camp on site and another in town, a men’s *kollel*, and the teen girls program, the place is hopping! Over 1,000 guests enjoyed the program this summer – some for a Shabbos, others for a week or a month.”

Some members of this summer’s staff were Rabbi Shlomo Jaffe (Hartford), Rabbi Eli and Chana Silberstein (Ithaca), Rabbi Beryl and Devorah Bell (Montreal), Rabbi Chaim and Yocheved Adelman (Amherst), Mrs. Shimona Tzukernik (Crown Heights), Rabbi Eli Mendel Shusterman (Pittsburgh), Rabbi Pinchas and Sonya Young (Buffalo), and Rabbi Levi and Leah Stern.

There were special intense programs each Shabbos featuring the theme of the weekend – *chinuch*, *shalom bayis*, *yiras Shamayim*, *t’shuva*, and more. Some of the lecturers were Rabbi Kasriel Kastel, Rabbi Yitzchak Hanoka, Rus Devorah Wallen (all from Crown Heights), and Rabbi Zalman Markowitz (Monsey). These Shabbatons, informative and well presented, were designed so that those who can’t come during the week can come for the weekend and get a lot out of a short period of time. There were also night lecturers, such as Dr. Herman Branover.

The diverse student body comes from many lands and many walks of life, and they range in age from college students seeking a summer of inspiration and personal growth to mature women filling the empty nest with meaning. Many have been guided by their *shluchim* to come and grow in this uplifting and nurturing environment. All levels of knowledge and observance are accommodated here. Three generations come – where else can Bubby and Zeide take the grandchildren off Mommy’s hands so she can swim, hike, or learn? *Shluchos* spend time refilling their fuel tank so they’ll return with more to give. Women from the former Communist bloc delight in discovering their heritage.

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As soon as I arrived at Machon Chana I was set up in my room and immediately drove out of the lot to join the others for a cookout at the North-South Lake Campgrounds. We wound around the country roads once again, past meadows, over the quaint one-lane bridge that straddles two banks of a creek, past a country lake and into a hidden street of well kept, old-fashioned country homes. Meandering along the wooded lane, we finally reached

the campgrounds and enjoyed the barbeque. The sun set at dusk over the lake in the middle of two rows of tall trees.

The next day I joined classes outside on the expansive deck overhung with exotic flowers. Shimona was teaching Megillas Rus in the only way she knows how – perceptive. Her learning is steeped with Chassidus, with a clear feel for underlying motivations, permeated with a sense of *tznius*. Participants asked questions, which Shimona answered to the point and with tremendous insight.

“What was so great about the fact that the women did not die in the *midbar* after they left Mitzrayim, when all the men did die? The women survived and entered Eretz Yisroel, but look at their condition – they were elderly widows. Why did Hashem do that to them?” Shimona challenged. “It should have been a wonderful time in their lives, when they saw many miracles, finally escaped harsh slavery, and fulfilled their lifelong dream entering the land they so longed for. Obviously there was a reason, and it had to do with the men. The women, it is true, did not have any participation in the golden calf. They didn’t make it and they didn’t serve it. But they didn’t have the proper influence over their husbands. They should have figured out how to influence their husbands to refrain, and they did not.

“That’s what happened with Naomi and Elimelech. She didn’t want to leave Eretz Yisroel, but he did. And although she knew it was wrong, she didn’t influence him and went along with him. When her money was lost and her family had died, she understood right away what Hashem’s message was, because she really had known it all along. And that is why after her sons died and she finished sitting Shiva, that day she picked herself up and

started walking to Eretz Yisroel.”

After this class was finished, I wandered over to the class at the edge of the property, where Rabbi Jaffe was teaching, encircled by chairs, and I found myself in a wonderland of clarity. Shimona and Rabbi Jaffe explain spiritual ideas so clearly that the ideas feel tangible. Rabbi Jaffe’s words hit and explained my experience and I knew right away – he and Shimona – these are truly great teachers.

“What is the difference between a holy experience and a pseudo-holy experience? How can you tell if you are experiencing something holy, or if you are just fooling yourself?” Rabbi Jaffe begins. “The Mitteler Rebbe tells you in the *maamer* that if you become part of a greater whole – that is a holy experience. Feeling high, or feeling yourself – if you are able to focus on the fact that *you* are involved, that *you* are having feelings about it – then you are not involved in an experience that is holy,” Rabbi Jaffe explains. “People of all walks of life and of all religions who have had near-death experiences all report the same phenomenon – they are drawn towards a light greater than themselves. When a person approaches the Rebbe, all cares and worries in the pettiness of life melt away as you feel drawn toward what is greater than you. Something else entirely is experienced at that moment and it unites you with what is greater. You become part of that. That is holy.”

A morning stroll around the Machon Chana campus reveals intense involvement:

Men huddled around a picnic table at the end of the sunny field debate the fine points of Jewish law.

A group of women sitting in the flower-bedecked gazebo near the edge of the lawn take in a mystical

Chassidic discourse.

Plush, inviting loveseats near the fireplace in the wood-paneled lounge create a cozy country ambience. Today the seats are filled with girls building skills with their vocabulary sheets, learning the daily Torah portion, or getting help from one of the dedicated and knowledgeable *madrichot*.

Teens get a chance to ask those burning questions no one seems to have the time or know-how to answer. Around the picnic table, the quiet girls are drawn out, the cynical are drawn in, as the rabbi good-naturedly asks, “C’mon, what’s on your mind? Let’s go!” and listens and responds with humor and sensitivity.

Animated questions, laughter, and discussion are an integral part of the Jewish Home class, where students bombard the instructor – an experienced mother and educator – with questions about dating, marriage, bearing and raising children, and the unique role

of the Jewish woman.

Detailed analysis of the Torah and its commentaries, *halacha* and its development, *Pirkei Avos* – you name it – if it’s part of Torah scholarship, it’s studied here at Machon Chana, along with the Alef-Beis and the fundamental beginnings of Jewish belief and life.

On Friday evening, as the sun sets over the mountains, the women and girls gather to light candles, which shine (along with the faces) to cast a glow reflecting off the walls of the warmly-paneled dining room. The tables are invitingly set with a gold charger centerpiece set with homemade wholewheat *challa*, covered with a lovely flowered *challa deckel*. The intense *davening*, the singing, the camaraderie, poignant stories, *divrei Torah* and *hisorerus*, and the delicious bountiful food help the *seudos* take on a higher dimension. Following the afternoon *seuda*, children play on the equipment outdoors while mothers schmooze or nap on the lounge chairs nearby. Returning

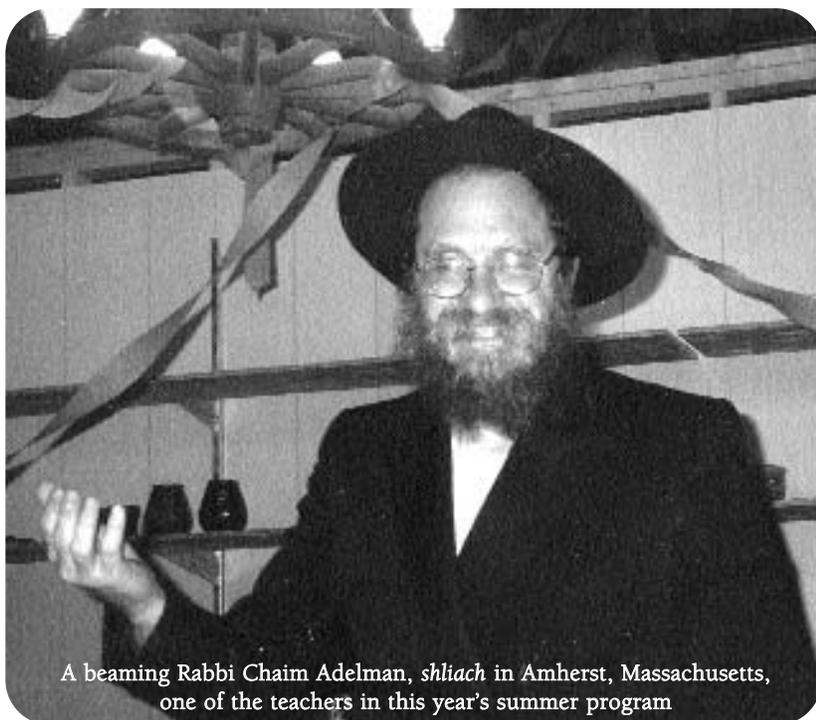
indoors for *Shalosh Seudos*, there are more sessions, with speakers about Moshiach, *chinuch*, or inspiring stories of return to *Yiddishkeit*. By the time everyone gathers for *Havdala*, Shabbos in the mountain home has bound one to another into an extended family.

Nightlife in a *yeshiva*? The word *yeshiva* conjures up images of quiet and constraint – right? WRONG!

Whoever thinks Torah is one-dimensional or limited hasn’t experienced Machon Chana nightlife. The night brings with it a smorgasbord of lectures and workshops on diverse and timely topics: handwriting analysis, comparative judicial systems, Jewish art history, medieval Jewish history, spiritual growth through movement, art workshops, medical ethics, and so much more.

After a full day of swimming, hiking, etc., and then the evening lecture, the place is just warming up! Wee hours of the morning find teachers and students alike sharing the special intimate warmth of a *farbrengen*, a Chassidic gathering of personal inspiration and schmoozing.

Yocheved Adelman stressed that the programs at Machon Chana are a must for *shluchim* to recommend to their *mushpaos*. “For those women who can take a year to learn in *yeshiva*, nothing can compare. But for those who cannot, everyone can spend a week or a weekend with others who want to experience *Yiddishkeit* in the fullest sense of the word and grow. This can have a tremendous effect in a positive sense. We personally sent women to the program. They were inspired by what they saw and participated in, and being in that atmosphere helped them grow so much.



A beaming Rabbi Chaim Adelman, *shliach* in Amherst, Massachusetts, one of the teachers in this year’s summer program

“One university student spent part of the summer there, and when she returned she became completely *shomer Shabbos* and began to keep kosher in her dorm room. Another who attended the summer program for a week decided to live in a kosher living situation, which she wasn’t necessarily going to do before. A family who also spent a week there came back much more dedicated in the *mitzvos* they were already doing and in increasing their *mitzva* observance. Their daughter, who had been apprehensive about going to a Jewish school, spent time in the day camp, and because of the *davening* and the other activities she experienced, she felt comfortable agreeing to attend the day school. I had a good time, too!”

Helen Schwimmer (free-lance writer, publicist, and special events coordinator for MATCKH [Mothers Against Teaching Children to Kill and Hate]), had this to say about her stay at Machon Chana in the Mountains:

“This program provides an invaluable resource for women of all backgrounds, all age groups, who want to learn. Huge groups of middle-aged women are becoming *baalei t’shuva*, and Machon Chana provides a much-needed learning program for women like myself, as well as for men.

“There’s a sense of community because there are husbands, teenagers – everyone. I like being immersed in a whole learning environment, experiencing the full spectrum of Judaism, including *Shabbos*.”

Beth Salzberg, from the Hartford area, went to the summer program for 5 days and said, “As soon as I came home I walked in the door and I said, ‘I found out that I knew nothing!’ There’s just so much you

can study! What I really enjoyed was the high level of the learning. I also enjoyed the *davening*; the counselors there helped those of us who didn’t know how to *daven*. I found it inspiring to talk to other women from the same background as myself. One of them told me that she says *T’hillim* every day for her children and that she finds it inspiring. When I came back home I went out and bought myself a *T’hillim*, and now I say *T’hillim* every day; I feel it’s especially relevant in such troubled times.

“I loved the resort-like grounds – it’s beautiful there. I definitely plan to go back next summer, but for a longer time.”

An associate professor of education at a university in Maryland said, “My husband and I went to the Machon Chana in the Mountains program. We had no idea what to expect. I was swept away by

the teachers and the classes – the *rebbeim* were brilliant and fabulous! They presented the material they were teaching in a meaningful way. There were also seminary graduates, girls who would teach *sichos* and *maamarim*, or Hebrew or Yiddish – whatever extra learning you might want in individual *chevrusa*.

“In the evenings there were small classes run by the seminary girls. I participated in some of these classes, which were taught using casual and creative ways to learn Yiddish or Hebrew, sometimes by singing songs or other fun ways. Whoever wants to stay up late to *farbreng* all night with the *rebbeim* and with guest speakers has an opportunity almost every night. I just couldn’t stay up late, but women told me they found these sessions quite inspiring.

“We were impressed at how obliging the staff was – two *rebbeim*

QUOTES FROM FOUR PARTICIPANTS

“I recently took the opportunity to go to Machon Chana in the Mountains. I liked the slower *davening*, the *shiurim*, the welcoming, all-encompassing environment, and the people who were from all over. It was quite inspiring. I didn’t realize how much I needed the classes, how much I needed to be in an environment where the emphasis was all on *ruchnius*. It was a wonderful shot in the arm, a wonderful oasis. I’m in awe of the power of Machon Chana – truly.”

“A woman from our *shul* took her daughter and went to Machon Chana in the Mountains with my husband and myself. My friend never had any contact with Machon Chana before. Being there was a profound experience for both of them. My friend was uplifted when she came back home. The experience had a tremendous effect on her whole family, and her daughter is now considering in a very serious way getting a Jewish education.”

“I had a positive learning experience. I feel I gained what I came for: a deep spirituality, answers to my questions, a beautiful philosophy... I’ve learned in other circles and I know I could only get this from Chabad – joy and life in the *mitzvos*.”

“What gives the taste to all the classes is the Chassidus. As far as the accommodations, the food is excellent, very healthy. The atmosphere is wonderful. The view is green! The trees, the smell – nature gives you much more strength. It fulfills your soul.”

gave up their free time in order to learn *Gemara* and *Tanya* with my husband and another man.

“We had the chance to go hiking in the afternoon. Rabbi Bell told us that nature is there to enjoy, helping us to appreciate Hashem in all His glory; we should not ignore it, but rather take the time to appreciate it.

“Another aspect of Machon Chana that should not be overlooked is the sense of camaraderie with the other participants in the program. Although I only went to the Yeshivacation and summer programs, I feel a closeness to all the other women who went to Machon Chana, even to those I never met. This is one of the



Rabbi Eli Silberstein, *shliach* in Ithaca, NY, one of the teachers in the program

benefits of the type of school Machon Chana is – because everything at Machon Chana comes from the heart and enters the heart.”

As this participant put it, “If you’re a skeptic and don’t know if this program is for you, come, because your questions will be welcome. If you think you’ve gone as far as you can because your situation isn’t easy, come and you will be encouraged. Whoever needs new inspiration, new uplifting, or new advice will find what they need at Machon Chana in the Mountains. If you think you’ve heard it all, come, and you’ll be surprised at what new elements will enrich your understanding of Judaism. It will enhance your life.”

SUMMER L.I.F.T. (LIVING INSPIRATION FOR TEENS) PROGRAM

“As a teen, I wish the program would have been around for me. The program has a lot of potential for girls to grow and learn.”

“We asked questions you’d never ask in school.”

“I was *frum* for 15-16 years. I did what the Torah said to do, but I never loved it. Now I love *Yiddishkeit!*”

“LIFT helped me see what goals and priorities should be in my life and helped me get them straight.”

“Everything I do now is because I decided to and I want to, not because I’ve been told all my life that I have to.”

“I was off the *derah*.. Now I have decided to keep all of the *mitzvos*.”

These are the kinds of comments heard directly from participants of a very special and unique program designed specifically for teenage girls 9th through 12th grade. The Machon Chana in the Mountains LIFT program for girls from frum homes ran twice in the summer in three-week shifts, with

16 girls in each session. This was in addition to the other programs run consecutively at Machon Chana in the Mountains: the Women’s Kollel (for women of all ages), Men’s Kollel (for husbands), Yeshivacation (for college-age women), and the day camp for children.

The LIFT program offered 3-4 hours of classes every day, afterwards allowing girls to discuss any topic in *Yiddishkeit* that was on their minds. These topics included (but were not limited to) issues in modern life that were on the minds of the girls, such as parents, women in *Yiddishkeit*, *tznius*, the purpose of life and Creation, the Rebbe-Chassid relationship, and more. All questions were handled in a sensitive and appropriate manner. In addition to the learning, there were many *farbrengens*, and there was group *davening*, singing, and trips.

“When the girls came and found out that classes were going to be 3-4 hours, they moaned, ‘Oh, no!’ But they loved the classes – they looked forward to them!” said Sara Labkowsky, director of

Machon Chana. “The girls weren’t learning for tests like they do in school. They were learning for its own sake, and they discovered that they were learning about themselves in the process. One girl said that in her three years of high school she hadn’t learned as much as she learned in two weeks at the LIFT program.

“The most important result of the LIFT program evidenced itself at the end of each of the sessions. The girls had become excited about *Yiddishkeit*. In fact, the program got the girls to love Torah!”

Mrs. Labkowsky commented, “Out of all the Lubavitch programs that have been created, I don’t know if any are geared to kids who were *frum* all their lives in order to inculcate them with the love for *Yiddishkeit*. This is what the LIFT program does – and it’s very clear that the program is successful – not just from the comments the girls have made, but from the results their parents have seen since the girls returned home.”

Mrs. Labkowsky told about one girl who came who had been kicked out of

school after school. Her uncle voiced his skepticism that a mere three weeks at the LIFT program could have any effect on this girl. Unforeseen

circumstances forced her to leave the program after having been at LIFT for only four days. The day after this girl returned home, the same uncle called

Sara and said, “After only FOUR days, I see a difference – she’s a completely changed girl!”

Some of the teachers of the LIFT

PROFILE OF A YESHIVACATION STUDENT AT MACHON CHANA IN THE MOUNTAINS

Lieba Masha Tsalik comes from the city of Sevastopol, in Crimea, Ukraine. She knew nothing whatsoever of Judaism before the age of 15, at which point she attended a Jewish “modern orthodox” camp in Sevastopol. Some campers were not Jewish, and they were among the friends she made there. One of her non-Jewish friends decided as a result of her camp experience that she wanted to convert to Judaism. She asked Lieba Masha to go with her to the rabbi as a translator, and that’s how they met Rabbi Lipszyc, head *shliach* in Crimea, who lives in Simferopol. After speaking to Rabbi Lipszyc, the gentile girl expressed her desire to become Jewish. The rabbi explained that Judaism is a religion of action, and therefore, in order to prepare for conversion, she would have to keep kosher, dress modestly, and keep Shabbos staying at his house every single week without missing one Shabbos.

The girl agreed, and each week she dragged a reluctant Lieba Masha along with her to Rabbi Lipszyc’s house, a 2½ hour train ride. More friends started to go with them, and soon there was a group of about 10 Jewish and gentile teenagers going to Rabbi Lipszyc’s house each week!

Lieba Masha began to keep Shabbos at the rabbi’s house, and after two months the rabbi told her she could now begin to keep Shabbos in her own home, which she did to the best of her ability.

A car accident critically injured Lieba Masha, and the doctors told her that the fact that she remained alive was a small miracle. Rabbi Lipszyc’s son brought her kosher food every day of the 3 weeks she was in the hospital. Then they sent a driver to pick her up and bring her to their home for Shabbos during the entire 8 months she had to spend recuperating outside of Simferopol. She said that it was the Lipszyc’s who helped her survive the whole ordeal.

After Lieba Masha could walk again she worked for the Lipszyc’s for a few months and then went to Machon Alte, where she stayed for 5 months. It was there that she felt that at some point she would become a Lubavitcher.

In June 2000, Lieba Masha and her mother, Ilana,

moved to San Francisco, where she convinced her mother to begin to keep a kosher kitchen. They hooked up with the *shluchim*, the Langers, who suggested that they attend the Machon Chana Yeshivacation program in Crown Heights. Lieba Masha also started teaching preschool in the Langer’s Shalom School.

Both women loved the program. This past summer, she attended the Yeshivacation program at Machon Chana in the Mountains.

“I had a great time! The trips were fun and the food was good. The *madrichot* were examples of *ahavas Yisroel*. Their actions showed me how to have *ahavas Yisroel* and how to be kind to everyone. The ‘Ask the Rabbi’ classes were really helpful because we could ask anything we wanted and get an answer, and Rabbi Silberstein’s classes gave me the feeling that the *Geula* is really happening now.”

“Rabbi Bell held a session in which he challenged us to come up with an alternative explanation of the event of *mattan Torah*.

“People came up with all kinds of ideas. For example, one girl said that because of the hot desert conditions and the food, the people had an experience of mass hysteria and thought G-d gave the Torah. Another person said aliens came from outer space and gave us the Torah. Another said Moshe Rabbeinu wrote the whole Torah himself and the people believed whatever he said.

“Rabbi Bell knocked down each and every one of these ideas. He pointed out that it’s obvious that 3 million people cannot have the same hallucination. He also said (in greater detail and with many more reasons than I remember) that if any of these things had happened, someone along the line many years before our time would have protested that all the things in the Torah are not true – Judaism just couldn’t have lasted all these thousands of years under those conditions. He made us see clearly that *mattan Torah* could only have happened to the 3 million Jews the way it’s understood from the Torah. Because of Machon Chana in the Mountains I have no more questions about whether or not the Torah is true.”

Lieba Masha is presently attending Machon Chana in Crown Heights.

program were Rabbi and Mrs. Chaim Adelman from Amherst, Massachusetts, Rabbi and Chana Silberstein from Ithaca, New York, and Sara Labkowski. The teachers stayed up until all hours to *farbreng* with the girls. The counselors played priority games with them, allowing them the opportunity to realize what priorities should be important in their lives, such as *yiras Shamayim* and resisting peer pressure.

“This knowledge was really in the girls the whole time, but was brought out in the sessions,” explained Chani Kalmanson, 20, from New Haven, Connecticut, who was a *madricha* for a week. “They began to want *Chassidishkeit* and *yiras Shamayim* to take a higher priority in their lives. This program helped them understand what they already knew somewhere inside.”

“I loved being at Machon Chana in the Mountains. I would have liked to spend more of the summer there than I did. Everyone was there for the purpose of learning and growing, and this made the whole atmosphere of the place,” Chani added. “As a teen, I wish the program would have been around for me. The program has a lot of potential for girls to grow and learn.”

The girls in each session bonded with each other, felt understood, and understood and identified with *Yiddishkeit* in a completely different way than before. One girl said that before she attended the program, she was apprehensive that no one would befriend her, that they wouldn’t understand her broken English and her accent, and that she would feel like an outsider. “But you’ve all become my sisters,” she told the girls with feeling at the end of the first session, “and I’m going to miss you a lot.” This girl returned for part of the second session.

Yocheved Adelman, one of the teachers, noted, “LIFT is a program for girls who are looking to deepen their

understanding of who they are and where they are going. It’s not exclusively learning, but it’s much more learning-oriented than camp. You could see that people were definitely growing and changing, and they looked at the direction their life was taking in a more mature way. They would decide to act a certain way because this is the reality of life, because they realized that it’s for real.

“Someone said she realized that learning is important not just for grades and tests, but simply for her own growth. Plus, the warmth and intensity of the program led the girls to make more *Chassidische* recreational choices, for example, in music or in literature.



Girls from the LIFT (see latter part of article) program enjoy going mountain biking

They felt their old choices just had no place in their lives anymore.

“The need for this program is evidenced by the amount of applications for it. If we want our girls to be the *shluchos* of tomorrow, we have to offer them opportunities to find that growth and to be ready for the challenges of *shlichus* – the questions and responses people are looking for.”

One participant had this to say about her experience in the LIFT program:

“I was off the *derech*, and my parents decided to send me to Crown Heights. At first I didn’t want to learn, but I

started to listen and I learned. They do it in such a good way – you can ask questions and they’ll answer you. I used to wonder why I have to keep Shabbos; I started to understand why I shouldn’t watch movies, why I should keep kosher and Shabbos – everything. I decided to keep all of the *mitzvos*. This program taught me that a Jew is a Jew – you can’t just keep whatever you want, whatever is comfortable for you. My parents are happy that I keep the *mitzvos* now.”

One of the girls at the LIFT program related:

“There were 16 girls in our group, ranging in age from 14-17. We got to know each other well, which was very special. There were girls from all over – California, New York, Chicago, Eretz Yisroel, and Massachusetts.

“We had our first class at 9:45 a.m., which was *Chassidus*. Mrs. Labkowski did the *Tanya shiur* with us. We had about 4 hours of classes, but everyone loved it. Rabbi Adelman had a question and answer class, and when Mrs. Adelman came to teach us, we asked her questions you’d never ask in school. The girls asked questions about women in Judaism, careers, and why we dress in a *tzniusdik* way, etc.

“We had Rabbi Silberstein, who spoke about different topics, like dreams, or stories about the *Baal Shem Tov* and other *tzaddikim* that brought out important points. He spoke about how to understand difficult topics in the Torah, and questions you encounter on *shlichus* like intermarriage. We also had a skills class in Yiddish, Hebrew, or Rashi, taught by our counselors.

“Molly Resnick spoke about her introduction to Judaism and how she became *frum* after that. It was so interesting. We also had the *Korns* speak to us. Rabbi Korn told us how he became *frum* when he was a hippie – he used to wear dreadlocks! His wife also

spoke, but unfortunately I missed her talk. Sue Thalheim, the founder of the Israel Emergency Solidarity Fund, also spoke about the situation in the Holy Land and how we can help. We had other interesting speakers whose names I can't remember.

"We had our learning schedule, but we also went mountain biking, boating, camping, we had bonfires and roasted marshmallows, we went to a country fair. We went tubing in a river with rapid water. It was a blast! We took a guided tour through a small cave that had water in it. We also went go-carting and blueberry picking. Rabbi Adelman went with us on all of our trips.

"The atmosphere at the program opened my mind. Now I understand why going away in the summer can have such a big influence on you. Away from home, all of your actions come from within you because your parents are not there to monitor your behavior. Everything I do now that I'm back home is because I decided to and I want to, not because I've been told all my life that I have to.

"Now if I would go on *shlichus* I would be able to speak from my heart to the people I would meet. I wouldn't just be spitting back whatever I've been

SAMPLE OF CLASSES AT THE LIFT PROGRAM

Rabbi Silberstein spoke about what having *ahavas Yisroel* for everyone means. If you do the *mitzvos* and you meet someone who is a low-life, a delinquent, you naturally would feel superior to him because you are doing what Hashem wants and he isn't. In fact, he is doing the opposite. But when this person overcomes his *yetzer ha'ra* and does the right thing even once, the connection that he has with Hashem is the same that you have when you do a *mitzva*. You have to respect the connection to Hashem that he has when he makes the right decision. That's how the Rebbe can love and respect every person, even though he is so much higher than everyone. Because each person has that same connection to Hashem.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev once saw a wagon driver greasing his wheel in *tallis* and *t'fillin* while he was *davening*. This is a terrible disgrace to Hashem and to the *davening*. But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak said, "Hashem, look at this man who loves You so much that while he is greasing his wheels, he's *davening*." Why was Rabbi Levi Yitzchak making a good point out of such a disgraceful action?

The reason is because this man could have just started out his day by greasing the wheels of his wagon without *davening*. Though he was a simple man, he knew of the obligation to *daven* – so he *davened*. Even though his behavior was compromising, at least he knew the importance of *davening*; he didn't just throw it out. That was the point Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was trying to bring out, showing how deep *ahavas Yisroel* has to be.

told. What I do now comes from within me – my actions are how I choose to live as a result of this program. After I returned home, I realized that everything I learned at the LIFT program had affected me, even if I

hadn't realized it then.

"I'm a real person like you. I'm not just a story in a magazine – this really happened to me! If you had been there, it would have affected you, too..."