

My dear תלמידים – Ari, Akiva, Sorin, Jamie, David, Elliot, Akiva, Avidan, and Yonah,

- Every morning, we make the blessing אשר קדשנו במצותיו וציונו לעסוק בדברי תורה, that You have sanctified us with Your mitzvot and commanded us to be עוסק – involved – in the learning of Torah.
- Our obligation is not just ללמוד - to learn and to know, but to be עוסק – to be engaged in a pursuit that is ongoing. Learning never ends, and your lives will be ones of continued growth and striving in תורה and עבודת ה'. As you leave the walls of the yeshiva to begin lives as rabbis, as communal leaders, and as teachers of Torah, you will bring an ongoing עוסקים בצרכי ציבור באמונה to your עוסקים בתלמוד תורה.
- Most importantly, to be עוסק בתלמוד תורה, is to be on a path and to struggle, not to arrive at a destination which concludes with dogmatic truths. It is about the process of learning, and how this cultivates critical thinking and reflectiveness, how this opens us up to new ideas and to new experiences, and how this allows us to grow, intellectually, spiritually, and personally.
- Arguing with our chavruta and our rebbeim, struggling with texts and teachings, challenging and allowing ourselves to be challenged, - allow us to grow in our understanding of Torah, to be awed by its beauty, to be inspired by its profundity, and ultimately to connect with the גותן התורה, with the Giver of Torah.
- From the dialectic dissections of רמב"ן, תוס', to the rough and tumble שמים לשם שמים of מחלוקת לשם שמים, of רשב"א and ר"א, of ר"א and ר"ב, of ר"א and ר"ב; from the encyclopedic erudition of Rav Ovadya Yosef to the creativity and compassion of Rav Moshe Feinstein, you have challenged your mind, deepened your knowledge, and learned that Torah – as life – is full of gray areas and of conflicting voices.
- From the narratives of the neviem to the mussar of mesilat yesharim, from the rationalism of Rambam to the mysticism of the kabbalists, from the poetry of Rav Kook to the philosophy of the Rav, you have nourished your souls, you have learned the lessons of חסד and צדק, and you have appreciated that God and meaning must interweave a life of מצות and observance.
- And from the fields of history and economic, of theology and philosophy, of psychology and sociology, and of medicine and biology you have learned that the Torah grows richer and deeper the more it attends to a wide range of voices and perspectives.
- Rebbe tells us in the Gemara Makkot: הרבה תורה ל-מדתי מרבתי ומחבירי יותר מהם ומתלמידי יותר - Much Torah have I learned from my teachers, even more from my peers, but from my students, I have learned the most of all.
- During your years in Chovevei you have learned much from your rebbeim and your teachers. But you have learned more from your peers – from listening to the divergent ideas that permeate the culture, from interactions and debates, you have broadened your interests and have learned to listen and to be critically reflective.
- As new rabbis and leaders, you are now about to bring your distinctive Torah to Klal Yisrael, and you will begin the most profound growth of מתלמידי יותר מכולם. You leave YCT knowing that your goal as leaders and as teachers, will be to be עוסקים בתלמוד תורה. Not to be dictating a static, rigid, dogmatic Torah, but to be teaching a process of Torah. You will teach others and you will learn from them – their life experiences, their perspectives, their insights. You will teach others that to learn Torah is to engage in a discussion with Torah, it is to listen to what the Torah has to say, but it is also to talk, and to be listened to as well. It will be for them, and for you, a תורה חיים, a Torah that gives life, but also a Torah that lives, that grows, that expands.

- The Gemara in Baba Kama teaches - וילכו שלשת ימים במדבר ולא מצאו מים אין מים אלא תורה - כיון שהלכו שלשת ימים בלא תורה נלאו. “They went three days and did not find water – this is Torah – as soon as they went three days without Torah, they immediately thirsted and wearied.
- So many of our people’s souls are parched with thirst, thirst for meaning, for a connection to God and tradition, for a תורה that can be a תורת חיים. Many are taught Torah as children or as adults, but it is a Torah that stifles their souls, not one that nourishes it. And many have never engaged Torah at all, convinced that it has nothing to say to them.
- Ari, Akiva, Sorin, Jamie, David, Elliot, Akiva, Avidan, and Yonah - as rabbinical students – now rabbis – you who understand the true meaning of what it means to be עוסק בתלמוד תורה – you will be able to teach what it means to *engage* Torah. That the Torah does not only talk, but it also listens. That a person can challenge and can allow him or herself to be challenged. That Torah embraces their perspective and grows by their participation. That through a process of learning, through being עוסק בתורה, they will discover Torah and they will discover themselves. This is the Torah you will bring to Klal Yisrael.
- Blessed are You, God, who has commanded us to be עוסק בתורה, and Who has given us such rabbis, such leaders, such teachers of Torah as these outstanding men. Mazel Tov!