

Chesed Hoops
By: Charles Breitbart

When my Bar Mitzvah was fast approaching, I decided that I wanted to do a service project that no one else had done before. I did not just want to raise money and give it to some organization. I wanted to do something in which I could be actively involved, as well as what was especially meaningful to me. While speaking to one of my rabbis, Rabbi Yamin Levy, who had been very involved in helping Tiberias, we came up with the idea of building a basketball court in Israel. As there were no outdoor basketball courts in Tiberias, I decided that I had to raise money to build one. Since I loved basketball so much, I also thought it would be the perfect project to share my love of basketball with kids in Israel. I couldn't wait to get underway with my service project.

In honor of my Bar Mitzvah, I decided to use much of my Bar Mitzvah present money to pursue this goal. Since Tiberias was also in great need of supervised programs for local children, I wanted to raise additional money to fund a youth director to work with the children. There was just one more obstacle. How would I raise the money for such a big project? I decided to have a widely promoted big basketball tournament after school one day and try to raise the additional money for the youth director in Tiberias.

One of my teachers, Rabbi Sholom Jensen, helped me to organize this basketball tournament after school one day. It was a great success. Not only did we have different tournaments such as a three point contest, a free throw contest and a hot shot contest, Israeli basketball legend Aulcie Perry stopped by. He gave autographs to all the kids and he also played basketball with them for a while. We also gave out prizes such as Knicks autographs and T-shirts. This event was a great fundraiser and we raised over three thousand dollars. The money was enough to pay for sports equipment and a supervisor who could watch over the court and help the children learn how to play.

For my Bar Mitzvah in June of 2004, my family and I went to Israel. My Bar Mitzvah day was unforgettable. In the morning, I lained at the Kotel in Jerusalem, while wearing the tallis of my great grandfather. This was the same tallis that he buried near his home in Poland, before fleeing from the

advancing Nazis during World War II. After the war he returned to his home and unburied the tallis. This tallis remained buried during the Jewish peoples' long and hard journey through the Holocaust.

In the afternoon we drove up to Tiberias for the grand opening of the new basketball court. When I got to the basketball court there were hundreds of kids dancing and singing. The court had been placed on a hill with the beautiful view of the Kinneret. The mayor of Tiberias made a speech and I got to cut the ribbon for the grand opening of the basketball court. The kids were playing various sports, and I got to interact with them in Hebrew. When I got back to Great Neck, the mayor of Great Neck awarded me with a certificate commemorating what I had done in Israel.

Back home, all my friends and teachers asked me about my experience in Israel. I told them how it was such a great project, particularly since I had the opportunity to directly help children in Israel. Since the construction of the new court, many unprivileged kids of Tiberias have played there. The basketball court has been a huge success. Even some of the families in Great Neck went to Tiberias to see it for themselves. Since then, I have raised more money and sent out newsletters about the court, to send to Tiberias for additional basketballs and soccer balls.

The whole experience of helping children in need was a great one. I was so happy that I had an opportunity to help others less fortunate than me. I actually made a difference in other peoples' lives. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to make such a small, but positive impact on helping children in Israel.