

SPOTLIGHT

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a CommunityCoverage by
Devorah KleinYeshiva Toras Chaim Toras Emes' DACHS *Talmidim*
Partake in a Unique and
Unprecedented *Kiddush Hashem*

In response to the growing awareness of the dangers of technology and smartphone usage, particularly with teens, Yeshiva Toras Chaim Toras Emes decided to undertake a bold initiative to stop and hopefully reverse the tide. YTCTE founded a TAG office for the South Florida community and simultaneously launched a program aimed at educating the Dr. Abe Chames High School (DACHS) *talmidim* and working with them to help fight this cultural and addictive smartphone trend. As Rabbi Yaakov Dreyfuss, Assistant Principal of DACHS, explained, "It's not just about smartphones, it's about how we view ourselves in relation to the pressures and temptations of the world around us. We wanted to create an environment where people feel comfortable removing themselves from technology. It becomes the 'in' thing."

As a culmination of many weeks of discussions with the *talmidim*, more than half of the DACHS *talmidim* either completely gave up their smartphones or committed to not purchase one at all. One eleventh-grade *talmid*, Sammy Saka, described the change he saw immediately in his carpool when two boys gave up their phones. "We see how it's a more active carpool, and we learn, we talk, and relax. It's much better than kids glued to their phones. Carpool is a whole different experience."

In celebration of their impressive accomplishment, the yeshivah rewarded these *talmidim* with a weekend skiing trip and *Shabbaton* in Tennessee. Over 60 boys took part in this historic and unforgettable trip, accompanied by several *Rebbeim* and members of the *hanhalah*. The boys flew out early Thursday morning to Tennessee, where some

went snow tubing, while others traveled on to Cataloochie Ski Resort in North Carolina for a skiing trip which lasted until late into the night. They returned to Skyview Mansion, located high up in the Smoky Mountains, where they would be spending Shabbos in luxury accommodations with breathtaking balcony views of the mountains.

Friday began with an exciting morning *shivur* followed by a day of ice-skating, mountain coaster riding and many other activities. For Shabbos, the group was joined by special guest Rabbi Bentzion Chait, the founding *Rosh Yeshivah* of YTCTE, and currently the director of the National Torah Initiative of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim. Rabbi Chait gave several powerful *shmuessen* and *divrei chizuk* to the boys over Shabbos.

Shabbos was truly "me'ein olam haba," with *leibedig zemiros*, delicious food and *menuchah*. To top off the trip, Motzoei Shabbos featured a BBQ *melaveh malkah* and an extraordinary *siyum*, as the boys completed the entire *Mishnayos Seder Moed* over the trip. Following spirited dancing, Rabbi Chait led an inspiring *kumzitz* on the guitar until late into the night.

The trip was an incredible experience both in *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus* and the boys left with tremendous *chizuk* and a feeling of pride in their commitments. It was meaningful for them to know that their perseverance may very well lay the groundwork for others to follow. Many boys shared how this decision has had such a positive impact on their learning and overall growth. Shabatai Levy, ninth-grader, shared how his family encouraged him to take this big step, and he subsequently encouraged his older brother to do the same. He



Talmidim from Yeshiva Torah Chaim Toras Emes of North Miami Beach DACHS high school enjoyed a beautiful Shabbos in Skyview Mansion in the Smoky Mountains, in celebration of having given up their smartphones. (Bottom): *Bachurim* gathered together with *hanhalah* members after Shabbos; (top R): *Bachurim* enjoying a skiing trip on Thursday; (top L): Rabbi Bentzion Chait, founding *Rosh Yeshivah* of YTCTE, and currently the director of the National Torah Initiative of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim, leading *Havdalah* and a *kumzitz*.

fervently declared, "People said I would regret it, but I don't regret it. I feel happy. I am closer to my brother now and play ball with him instead of just spending time on our phones. After giving up my phone, I know I can do anything. This program can change people's lives." As the yeshivah expresses great pride in these *talmidim*, as well as all the *talmidim* who are rising to the occasion each in his own personal way, there is a sense of optimism permeating the overall environment as a result of this unique celebration.

The sun rising up slowly from behind the majestic mountains provided the perfect metaphor for the positivity and hope that pervaded this special occasion. The impact of this great *kiddush Hashem* will surely resonate for many years to come.

It is with feelings of pride that we can say that life is truly changing in the Torah community of South

Florida and all are welcome to come be a part of it! This *Shabbaton* has jump-started a real movement to fight the addictive and dangerous trend of smartphone usage and enable our *bnei Torah* to truly be able to *shteig* and reach their full potential without the strong distractions of the world around us. DACHS is proud to have taken the lead in working to change what has become the unfortunate societal norm for pre-teens and teens. Reality has shown that they could and should be smartphone-free, and *baruch Hashem*, this initiative has garnered tremendous support and positive feedback from parents, mental health professionals, *Rebbeim* and even students.

To encourage others to join this movement, YTCTE is producing a video about this unique initiative and is happy to share it with others.

Please contact office@ytcte.org for more information.