

Dearest [REDACTED],

Thank you for all that you have taught me this year and beyond. You have shown perseverance and grit in the face of challenges. You are such a thoughtful person in the way you approach the people in your life and the Torah you learn. The way that you use your creativity, artistry, and other gifts to bring light to others is truly inspiring.

I am so proud of you for all that you have accomplished in 7th grade. It has been a year of real growth and milestones. I cannot believe our year of learning Tanach together is almost at the close. At the outset of this letter, I want to thank Rabbi [REDACTED] for helping me find the words to express the ideas I want share.

In Chumash we did not just learn the text and parshanut of Sefer Bamidbar; we also learned values from the text and parshanut that can guide us throughout our lives, particularly, within an ideal community.

By now I am sure you know that I feel very strongly about values. Our class is sort of like a mini-community. I wanted to share with you some values that are important to me... values that I truly try to emulate in our class.

I would like to start from the inside out-

HaShem created us with both body and soul, our *guf* and our *neshamah*. The *guf* is the vehicle that helps care for the *neshamah*. In our class we make time for physical fitness (by including time for recess in our day), making healthy food choices (no, chocolate is not a meal), and even safety (like fire and lock-down drills). Then of course there is the care for the *neshamah*, the part of us that transcends this world and connects with HaShem. Through *Tefilah* and Torah, we give our *neshamah* exercise. *Tefilah* is when we speak to HaShem and Torah is a way for HaShem to speak with us. We value Hashem's words to us every time we learn together (which I think totals over 225 hours this year alone). We value our talking to Hashem as a class by setting aside every Monday night for *tefillat Maariv*. Instead of a night of yet more homework, it is a meaningful night we devote each week to speaking to Hashem.

Within this context, we have the values of *Anavah*/humility and *Tzniut*/modesty. *Anavah* means that you realize the wonderful talents and skills you have and rather than being arrogant about them, realize they are gifts from HaShem which come along with the responsibility to use them for the good. Not that we think less of ourselves, but that we think of ourselves less. Moshe Rabbeinu himself is described in Bamidbar, perek 12 as "*anav mi'kol adam*." One of the ways we reflect this in our class is by doing everything in a collaborative way, even if it's just working alongside someone in our cluster. Our success in our learning is a group effort and never about one individual. *Tzniut* means that we are modest in all our ways. It is an attitude and an approach to our lives in general, not just our clothing. We are understated and dignified. The more we appreciate how special we are the more we protect it and guard it - like a precious jewel that doesn't get overexposed.

In class, I try to facilitate different opportunities for each talent and skill to shine- whether it's debating, drawing, fashion design, traveling (on the Meraglim's journey), writing how-to-guides, creating invitations, script writing, *devar Torah* writing... and more! While I love hearing you quote ideas from Torah GIANTS (like Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Rabbi Hagler, etc.), my favorite thing is to learn what something means to you, *l'datech*.

I value **מידות טובות**. All of them. I try - though I am not perfect - to speak gently, be patient, be kind with all those I come in contact with. I am grateful & thankful for all that I receive and try model **הכרת הטוב**. I try to say thank you when someone does something for me just also to let them know specifically the impact of the good that they have done.

Then we move those around us: family, community, the Jewish People, and the world.

I take tremendous pride in family. Your family entrusted me with the holy task of teaching you Torah. I work hard every day to bring the love and excellence that I know your parents want for your experience of learning and living Torah. Whenever I communicate with your parents- whether it's an e-mail, conferences, seeing them in the halls, or an anecdotal- I am careful to share your growth in Chumash and Navi in a meaningful way. Sharing *nachat* is, by far, one of the most rewarding things about being a teacher.

A significant way that you contribute to this *nachat* is through the beautiful *divrei Torah* that you write and share with

your family. In particular, the ones that you write on your own, ones that truly speak from the heart about the powerful ideas you have studied, always inspire others.

I even try to model the importance of family by the way I greet members of my family when they come to visit. No matter how busy we are in our lesson, if my sister comes by, for example, I stop what I'm doing and greet her. It's hard to put into words the *nachat* that I feel when I see you interact with my children. When they come to school, and you greet them so warmly... there's just something profoundly special about my students being role models for my kids.

Our class really is a community. I try, as much as possible, to give you opportunities to learn from and with other people. Even the way we sit encourages everyone to learn with each other rather than just to learn for themselves. I try to "let it slide" when people chit-chat a little or call out every now and then because that all contributes to an environment where people are comfortable to speak up and share ideas. Learning from each and every person and situation we encounter can only help us become better versions of ourselves.

We hold ourselves accountable to come to class on time and ready so learn because every person's time is precious and we want to use every second we can in a meaningful way.

I try to model optimism, staying positive even when things get tough. Being optimistic is not to say that I pretend as though bad things never happen or that things never go wrong; I just try to see it all as part of a greater context of something good. We have the power to make the best of any circumstances if we approach it with a positive attitude. Being part of our class community is not something that just happens in room 525. I try to make myself available even outside of school by checking and responding to e-mails as often as possible. While I couldn't join you on the trip to Hershey, I made it a priority to be at your Shabbaton. I would not have missed it for the world. Celebrating Shabbat with you and getting to see you come together as a grade meant so much to me. I wish I could connect more outside of school like going to more of the Noam games, performances, and fairs, but that can't always fit with the rest of life.

And while being a class-community is one of the most important ingredients to grow in Torah learning and living, I also value your growth on your own as an individual. This is why I try to take a step back as your teacher every now and then and let you make mistakes for yourself. As Ms. Frizzle (and Ms. [REDACTED] wall) says, "Take chances! Make mistakes! And get messy!"

Finally, I try to model responsibility to the world at large. I try to be careful about the environment, to recycle and not to litter. I hope I treat everyone as they are created b'tzelem Elokim.

Through all of this, it my sincerest, deepest hope that you have not only learned Torah but experienced Torah. I hope that you see Torah not as its own separate entity, but as something that is very much alive, a part of who we are, and our manual for life. I hope this enables and empowers you to have a constant awareness of *יהוה* throughout every aspect and moment of your existence. By writing your beautiful letter, you have shown that you see learning as a part of life.

These are just some of the values that I have tried to teach you- not just by word, but by example. I have tried to walk the walk even more than talking the talk.

[REDACTED], while I don't always have the opportunity to express it, I am very proud of the way you have begun to embody these values, to connect with HaShem and give to those around you.

Mazal tov on finishing your final!

With so much love and gratitude,
Morah Shira

PS- I hope that you will stay in touch- shira.greenspan@gmail.com
And please come visit [REDACTED]! You are always, always welcome!