

2Yemin Orde Young Men's Leadership Program (Mechina) 2025 Educational Activities Update For the Matanel Foundation

Successfully Navigating Uncertainty

This year marked the 25th anniversary of the Yemin Orde Young Men's Leadership Program (Mechina). Despite a year filled with uncertainty, including the escalation in Israel's north and the war with Iran, the Mechina remained a place of stability, growth, and purpose for 59 remarkable young men. These participants came from across Israel's geographic and social periphery, bringing with them diverse backgrounds, strengths, and challenges. Together, they journeyed through a transformative year, building resilience, leadership, and a sense of responsibility to themselves, each other, and Israeli society.

The year started with an intensive opening week at Tzipori, chosen as a safer alternative to the traditional program location at Kibbutz Kfar Blum. "We knew that we would not be able to begin the year as usual, and made alternative plans several months in advance," explains Eldar. In addition, instead of the traditional "going against the current" hike from the Banias to Hatzor Haglilit, the group hiked along an approved route where the participants could travel between communities while remaining in close proximity to protected areas.

Throughout the year, conversations about the war were unavoidable; they permeated daily life, from informal discussions to structured activities and service projects. The broader national debate over evacuation, its necessity, and its consequences became a recurring topic among students, mirroring the divisions present across the country. These discussions, while difficult, provided an essential space for the young men to process, engage, and form their own perspectives on the unfolding reality around them.

Building Resilience and Reclaiming the Spirit

Despite the challenges of the security situation, the Yemin Orde Young Men's Leadership Program has continued to push forward, offering its participants powerful experiences that build resilience, leadership, and a strong sense of purpose. Over the past six months, these young men have taken on a wide range of educational activities—stepping into leadership roles through group elections, exploring their personal and national identity, testing their physical and mental limits on intense treks, and engaging in meaningful cultural and educational experiences. From navigating the streets of Tel Aviv to navigating the mountains of Eilat, from deep conversations to hands-on service, every moment has been an opportunity for growth and learning.

An Empowering Week in Southern Israel

As usual, Southern Week was intensive and emotionally impactful, combining leadership education with historical and cultural exploration. During the course of the week, the group visited a training base for paratroopers, where they met with military commanders and learned about leadership in high-pressure situations, providing them with the opportunity to gain insights into the life and responsibilities of the soldiers in this brigade.

The group also traveled to the Gaza border region, witnessing firsthand the aftermath of the October 7th attacks and paying tribute to those who lost their lives. Participants viewed the display of burned

cars, visited the site of the Nova music festival massacre, and paid their respects at the grave of Sergeant Major Michael Lizmi (z"l), a graduate of the Mechina's 14th cohort and a detective in the Beersheva Police Department, who died defending the residents of Ofakim.

On the third day, the young men were tested by a demanding hike in the Ramon Crater, culminating in a journey of endurance. That evening, there was an inspiring and insightful discussion with graduate, Eliyahu Stolin, who serves as a mental health officer. This incredible week concluded with an introduction to Bedouin culture, where the group was given the opportunity to meet with strong Bedouin women, who open their homes to share their culture and experiences.

Exploring Personal and Cultural Roots

One of the most moving weeks at the Mechina is Identity Week, where our participants are given the opportunity through an array of diverse activities to explore the topic of personal identity. The week began with a walk through the streets of Tel Aviv, asking people questions about their Israeli and Jewish identities. This was followed by Heritage Night – an event prepared two weeks in advance, where each *Emet* (Truth) group, represented a different, specific Jewish community, showcasing its traditions, culture, and cuisine.

(An *Emet* group is team of 13 participants, where each team is accompanied by a staff member who personally guides each youth. Throughout the year, they have regular meetings where they are encouraged to talk about themselves and their lives.)

After spending time learning about various aspects of the concept of identity, these young men spent the latter part of the week delving deeply into and reflect on their own individual identities, discovering the origins and meanings of their names. The week concluded with a thought-provoking play about a person's denial of their past and ethnic identity.

Celebrating the Sigd Holiday

The Sigd holiday is observed fifty days after Yom Kippur, on the 29th of Cheshvan. It is a day of fasting, purification, renewal, and longing for Jerusalem. This year's cohort celebrated Sigd at the Mechina with a meaningful, festive program, organizing a ceremony, dance, and prayers, and also prepared the traditional Injera with the help of several amazing mothers from the cohort.

This year, the young men also welcomed participants from the Galil Elyon Mechina. Our mechina participants led discussion circles on the significance and importance of Sigd, creating a moving and unifying encounter between the two groups.

Later on in the week, the group visited the Memorial for Ethiopian Jews Who Perished on the Journey to Israel, where they led an educational session, sharing the hardships and challenges Ethiopian Jews faced on their way to Israel. This was followed by a trip to Armon HaNatziv in Jerusalem, where they had a discussion with Kess Ephraim, who spoke about the deep meaning and power of Sigd.

The day ended with a special gathering with participants from the IsraElite Young Women's Leadership program (Village Way Educational Initiatives' mechina for women), where they held discussion circles on Sigd and Israeli society as a whole.

Facing Physical and Mental Challenges in the Eilat Mountains

In January, the cohort embarked on a challenging trek and navigation journey through the Eilat Mountains as part of their homeland exploration and preparation for an empowerment week. Each day, the young men hiked 15–20 kilometers across the rugged and demanding terrain of the Eilat Mountains, facing physical and mental challenges, carrying heavy loads on their backs and working together to strengthen traits like perseverance, camaraderie, teamwork under pressure, and resilience. The week concluded with an unforgettable diving experience at the Coral Beach Nature Reserve.

Jerusalem Week

As part of their exploration of Israeli identity and history, participants spent a full week in Jerusalem, engaging with the city's complex past and present. The week included visits to Khan Sha'ar Hagai, the Underground Prisoners Museum, and Ammunition Hill, where they learned about key moments in Israel's fight for independence.

They explored on foot through Mishkenot Sha'ananim, the Jewish Quarter, and Musrara, gaining insight into the city's diverse narratives, and experienced the energy of Mahane Yehuda market. A refreshing swim at Ein Haniya spring provided a change of pace, followed by a meaningful conversation with Israelis of Ethiopian descent about their experiences in Jerusalem.

The week concluded with a visit to Mount Herzl and a memorial ceremony honoring alumnus Binyamin Desta Neguse z"l, offering a moment of reflection and connection to the mechina's legacy.

Strategic Thinking and Building Skills

In addition to preparing participants for the physical rigors of military service, our dedicated staff provides these hardworking young men with tools to help them succeed in the IDF and beyond. As part of these efforts, the Mechina held a weeklong series of activities that included public speaking workshops, cognitive thinking sessions, and discussions about national security. The participants also had the opportunity to attend fascinating lectures given by employees from a local factory and take part in challenging fitness training sessions, and even organized a successful evening of speeches given by the participants themselves! This was followed by navigational exercises in the north capping off a meaningful, memorable week for all.

Keeping Busy in Hatzor HaGlilit

While the participants are on campus, they attend three classroom lessons every weekday, unless there is a special activity. Subjects taught during the year include:

- Community
- Israeli Society
- Preparing for the Military
- Politics
- Personal Narratives
- Public Speaking
- Israel Studies
- Critical Thought
- Navigation
- Man and His World
- Psychology
- Family
- Preparation for Community Involvement

- Economics
- Assertiveness
- Learning How to Command and Become an Officer

Lectures are given regularly throughout the year on subjects that include the Holocaust, volunteering, and other relevant topics like Judaism, Israeli society, and military service.

Thank You

As our society works to process everything that has happened over the past 21 months, we are so grateful for your partnership and your choice to take part in our vision of transforming the lives of Israel's most vulnerable young men. Your support for educational programming at the Yemin Orde Young Men's Leadership Program is not something that we take for granted, as our dedicated staff strives to prepare these hard-working participants to defend the country through meaningful military service and to be productive members of society in civilian life.



Yemin Orde Young Men's Leadership Program - 25th Cohort