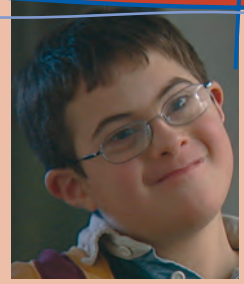




On the front page

"Within you is the source of life and in you we see light"

LIOR LIEBLING



Lior Liebling is 18 years old and has Down syndrome. He is a student at Franklin Towne Charter High School living with his family in Philadelphia (USA). He is the featured person in a film called 'Praying with Lior' (www.prayingwithlior.com), which presents Lior's preparation for his Bar Mitzvah.

My name is Lior. Lior means 'my light' in Hebrew. I think it is cool because in Hebrew we say, "*Within you is the source of life and in you we see light.*" This is the line from the psalm that was on my Bar Mitzvah invitation. I like it because I like to be the light for other people. I like my light because I like being bright. I like to shine my light on other people. I think I have extra responsibilities because my name means 'my light', for example, taking care of my brothers and sisters, my parents, my pets and other people. The sun is an example of light that shines on people. I can encourage people to shine their light on others. This means to love people, be nice to them by being kind and not saying nasty things... to really love! I like doing this because I love being loved and I love loving other people.



Lior with his brother Yoni and Michelle Kwan

A great school

I'm in high school. It's called Franklin Town Charter High School and I'm going into my

junior year and I've only got two years left. It's a great school for people with disabilities. It's a great school that has all kinds of kids in it, and some kids with disabilities. I get to do different projects. In school I get to make new friends, have different subjects, like math and social skills. I also get to do special events, like prom or graduation. There

are no other kids with Down syndrome in my class. The other children treat me well and make me happy. It is not easy to talk to other children. It is hard to make friends. I sometimes feel sad about this. It feels lonely when I do not have someone to talk to. I wish I could talk to people so that I can make new friends.

I love camp!

I do not actually know what Judaism has to say about people with disabilities. I do not know other people with disabilities at Mishkan

Shalom, my synagogue. I do not know anyone with disabilities in my neighbourhood either. That feels lonely. The place where I feel that most people are like me is at camp. I just came back from two months at camp. I love camp! The nice thing about camp is seeing my friends again and being with them. I can name a few friends. It is a great camp, with people with different abilities. At camp, I really like playing sports and making friends. It feels different at camp, being with people like myself. It feels different because when you talk to a person you make eye contact and you get to know that person very well. It is easier at camp, with people like me, to make eye contact and to feel comfortable.

My family

There are things that I like about my family. I like spending time with my brother, Yoni, who is twenty-two. I really like hanging out with him. I love going out with him. I like spending time and playing games with my younger sister, Anna. I like my other sister, Rena. She is fun to be with. I like spending time with my cat, Simba. I like Ben, my older brother. A great thing about my family is going to baseball games and having family time. I like spending time with my family a lot.

Talking to God

I like to pray. I like singing because it is a great thing. I like to pray to God because I really like

talking to him. It is a great thing to do. I tell God how much I love him. It makes a difference to pray because I feel different when I talk to God. Sometimes I feel down and sometimes I do not. When I do not talk to God I feel lonely. If I talk to God, I feel happy and I can enjoy myself. Sometimes I use words from the prayer book. Other times I use my own words. There are so many things to be grateful for. I am thankful for my family and for the things I have in my life. I am thankful for Anna that I have someone I like being with. I am grateful just being here

A place to pray



The synagogue I go to is Mishkan Shalom. Mishkan Shalom is a building people go to and 'daven'. 'Daven' means 'pray'. They are called up to the Torah. Mishkan is a place for people to pray.

Some of my friends there are Rabbi Yael and Rabbi Linda and Gabby (the Youth Director). Gabby is my cooking teacher. I am in the Mishkan Shalom Teenage Youth Group. I do cooking class. Me and my Mishkan friends, we cook food for people sitting 'shiva' (people in mourning for somebody who has died in their family). We also do plays and go on trips. Yeah! I don't know if there are other children with Down syndrome in the Youth Group.

At 13 in the Jewish community, you count as somebody who is part of the community when



you need ten people to pray for a 'minyan' ('minyan' is the quorum required to say certain prayers, Ed.). Do people like when I come to do daven at Mishkan Shalom? Yes! Yes! Yes!

My role at Mishkan Shalom is to continue to 'daven'; continue to be called up to the Torah; continue to carry the Torah; and, mmm, having fun. I think that people treat me as an important and valuable member of the community. People like when I go there. They are very happy when I walk into the room. I am happy when I go into the room.

Becoming an adult

A Bar Mitzvah ceremony is when a 13-year-old gets to read from the Torah. I got to do that. I had a Bar Mitzvah at 13 years old. The Torah is a book or a scroll. I got called up to read from it. It is in Hebrew. It took me a long time to prepare for it: about a year.

What the Bar Mitzvah means to me? That is a good question. I can only say that it is going to be the highlight of my life. It is important to me. I mean, it reminds me of my first mom. It is important to me to have a Bar Mitzvah because other Jewish children my age have one. The best memory of that day was when I got to read from the Torah and I got to do my D'var Torah. It's a speech about the Torah. It was my decision to have a Bar Mitzvah.

When I started making a movie with Ilana I wanted to show people what Bar Mitzvah is like ... having a Bar Mitzvah changed my relationship with Mishkan Shalom because I finally became an adult in Jewish life. Now I'm 18. I'd say it did change a lot because when I was at the age of thirteen I had a Bar Mitzvah and now my Bar Mitzvah is over. It changed a lot because I became a member of Mishkan. Having a Bar Mitzvah, I officially become a member by myself.



A movie about my life

The movie about my Bar Mitzvah was made in 2003 and thousands of people saw it. This was different. It was an experience for me. It was spiritual. The experience was different because I became a celebrity. I am happy that people want to have an autograph. I love it! I enjoy being a celebrity! Now people know about my life. I like people to know that I do have Down syndrome. Having Down syndrome means that I think slowly and that I function slowly.

By making the movie I learned how to speak slowly and naturally. There are some things in the movie that I did not like. I did not like what my sister Anna said because it was embarrassing. Anna said that people will think I am a weirdo when I talk to myself in public. I did not like that in the movie at all! I also did not like when my sister Rena said that I would not be able to drive a car, get married or have chil-

dren. That made me feel really uncomfortable. Sometimes I can agree that I won't be able to drive. However, I disagree with Rena. I will grow and get married. I will move out. I will do that. We will see when!

Community

Being in community means you like talking to people and getting to know the other person well. To be in community is to shine a light and be with other people. I like being with my family and friends a lot. I like making new friends and seeing old friends. I would like to do service programmes.



Lior and Shawn

I like doing projects, like art, for my community and for the world. I like to do recycling, shredding paper and taking out the trash and saving the planet. Save the trees! When we shred more paper, we

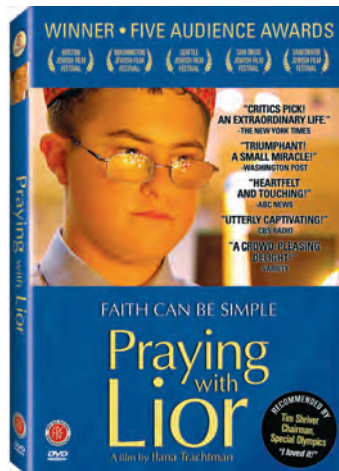
don't cut down trees. When somebody is feeling emotional, I give them a hug. I think this is the right thing to do. I really like to hug people. That is what I do! I think it is a smart thing. When I see other people sad or unhappy, I can feel pain in my heart.

DVD Review

Praying with Lior (2007)

A film by Ilana Trachtman

Winner of multiple awards and acclaimed by audiences around the world, "Praying with Lior" asks whether someone with Down syndrome can be a spiritual genius. Many believe Lior is close to God - at least that's what his family and community believe - though he's also a burden, a best friend, an inspiration and an embarrassment - depending on who is asked and when. As this documentary



moves to its climax, Lior must pass through the gateway to adulthood - his Bar Mitzvah.

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