



# 613 SECONDS

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## 613 Seconds with Rabbi Hillel Shepard



**Welcome to Baltimore! We understand that this is not your first time around here.**

Correct. The Shepards actually started in Silver Spring, MD, but I commuted to TA in Baltimore as a third grader for an entire year. We then moved to Baltimore and I continued in TA for three great years: from third through fifth grade. For sixth grade through eighth, I switched to TI. My Rabbeim and experiences in both schools were phenomenal. To this day, especially in my current position, I draw from the learning and inspiration that were so much a part of my youth in Baltimore.

**Was that the end of your Baltimore experience?**

Definitely not. I went away to high school in Philadelphia, and then I came back to Baltimore to learn at Ner Israel. Hashem gave me the tremendous privilege to become a very close talmid of Rav Kulefsky. As he was nearly blind, I would help him

read and prepare for his shiur. I spent almost two years in his shiur.

**How did you get into the field of chinuch?**

I began with say some shiurim at Yeshiva Shaarei Torah in Monsey for an older post-beis medrash group of boys. After a brief two year stay in Eretz Yisrael as newlyweds, we moved back, and I began a nine-year stint as the eleventh grade Rebbi at that same yeshiva. That experience was the setting for my growth as an educator. I learned that classrooms are at once structured and dynamic places: both forgiving in terms of learning and growth, and unforgiving for a mechanech who is still learning the skill of classroom management. Fortunately, I had excellent guidance and wonderful talmidim to mitigate the occasional but inevitable “learning it the hard way”. With Hashem’s help, I found my teaching style and worked on improving it through the years.

Just three years ago, we moved to Cincinnati for a rare opportunity to start a new Yeshiva for high school aged boys. After three years in Ohio, we sought to move back to the East Coast. My wife’s family still lives here in Baltimore.

**What drew you to Yeshivas Toras Simcha?**

YTS stands out in its mission of teaching Torah with warmth and joy. At the time, I met the Rabbeim, the board, and the talmidim, and I was impressed with the atmosphere of the school and the direction in which

it had been going since its inception. I therefore accepted the position as Menahel. I continue to be impressed with all the above, and more.

**What kind of students and families are drawn to YTS?**

YTS aims to present and inspire talmidim to embrace Torah and Yiras Shamayim in a context of positivity without undue pressure. Importantly, we seek to cultivate simcha through achievement as well. Success breeds success! Toras Simcha is smaller than many of the other schools in the area. We aim to grow, b’ezras Hashem, but to no more than two parallel classes per grade, so that we can afford to provide close and targeted care for our talmidim.

**In what ways does YTS teach and reach its students?**

Rabbeim, for starters There’s color to their presentations, literally and figuratively. There’s deliberate structure and great preparation mixed with song and joy. Traditional frontal teaching transitions frequently to differentiated lessons, chavrusas and exploration – at many grade levels. Our entire staff – including our secular studies staff – takes their roles and responsibilities seriously, creating an atmosphere of learning, productivity, and most importantly – respect.

Our resource room is another great feature of the yeshiva. They are constantly screening talmidim, advising staff, assisting and tutoring, bringing up any student who might need additional support.

Our many programs and initiatives - thanks to our inimitable Program Director, Rabbi Shai Scherer - capture the motivation, the excitement and the imagination of our talmidim. There’s always something in the air here, bringing out the best of their eager energies to learn.

YTS’s approach for preparing our talmidim for their future lives as B’nei Torah includes a focus on middos and respect coupled with a great appreciation of diligence and effort at the individual talmid’s level. Those reference points guide us as a team and influence the entire school.

**What do you envision for the future growth of the school?**

As I mentioned, we plan to incorporate a second class per grade level. As I entered the school, we further enhanced our Preschool Division. In the very capable hands of Mrs. Hayley Bazelon, that important part of our school has seen tremendous success even in the short few months of this year.

With the support of our Board of Directors and the enthusiastic encouragement of our devoted parent body that the school has enjoyed until this point, and with a great dose of Siyata Dishmaya, we hope to continue providing excellent chinuch to our talmidim - both present and future.

Above all, we look forward to taking whatever steps are necessary to guide the school along our mission’s lines: to teach and inspire a child’s life of Torah with success and simcha!