

# **PARENTS' GUIDE TO UNITED SYNAGOGUE YOUTH**

**TZAFON USY AND KADIMA**  
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## **Introduction**

United Synagogue Youth (abbreviated as USY) is the youth arm of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. In 1950, Conservative Rabbis in Minneapolis, Minnesota, realized that they needed to institutionalize activities that would instill strong Jewish values in their synagogue's children and youth. They established the youth group that became the precursor to USY. Today USY is an international organization that includes a middle school branch for grades 6-8 named Kadima.

The general aim of USY is to provide the appropriate educational and social environment for the Jewish teenager to develop within Conservative Judaism. USY seeks to provide experience that hones in on the Jewish ways of living through study, action and fellowship. The activities aim to encourage personal fulfillment and growth through significant contributions to their synagogue, community, and the Jewish people.

USY provides a religious, educational and social environment to Jewish pre-teens with the purpose of strengthening their Jewish identities. USY seeks to provide a nurturing environment and to establish a meaningful relationship with Judaism. It enables age-specific synagogue activities that will strengthen ties and the sense of belonging to the Jewish community.

USY activities encourage pre-teens to pursue their Jewish identity through the establishment of responsibilities to the Jewish community, and through the performance of *mitzvot* that strengthen involvement in the social needs of the community. USY also provides the setting for social, athletic, and recreational activities within a Jewish milieu. While recognizing that home and family are the primary institutions of Jewish life, USY seeks to develop relationships and commitments to the synagogue, which is recognized as the major public institution of the Jewish community.

## Regional Programs and Activities for Tzafon Region USY

Tzafon Region USY encompasses all of New York State (except the Metropolitan New York area), and includes western parts of Vermont and Massachusetts. Any congregation affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism can have a USY chapter. The main office for this region is in Albany, New York. The Region sponsors USY programs throughout the year. *Kinnusim* (conventions) are collaborations between the region and the chapters. Batia Epelbaum is the Director of Youth Activities, for Tzafon Region USY. She coordinates and oversees all USY functions in the Region.

USY members elect a six person regional USY Executive Board at their annual Regional Convention, Kinnus Gadol in the spring of each year. The six officers are President, Religious/Educations Vice President, Israel Affairs Vice President, Social Action/Tikun Olam Vice President, Membership/Programming Vice President, and Communications Vice President. They assist the Regional Youth Director in planning and executing all regional programs, in conjunction with the Regional General Board. The Regional General Board is made up of various committees, appointed by the officers of the Executive Board in the late spring.

The Regional Youth Commission is an adult Committee charged with the responsibility of setting policy for all aspects of the regional youth program. It is comprised of the Youth Chairs from each chapter in the region and is chaired by a regional Youth Commission Chairperson, Lori Karbel. Although they are not voting members, chapter advisors are invited to participate and take part in deliberations and discussions at Youth Commission meetings.

Tzafon Region USY sponsors various regional conventions throughout the year. Chapter advisors are encouraged to attend as many of these conventions as possible, to teach study groups and lead other activities. Continuous participation in these conventions strengthens the bond between chapter advisors and their USY members. The Regional Youth Director sends an annual calendar of events to each chapter advisor and regional staff member. These events and activities include:

- ❖ **Encampment:** Held at Ramah New England in Palmer, MA, usually the second to last week of August. This week of making new friends, learning, and fun is the kick off to the USY year and is a great opportunity for anyone grades 9-12 in Tzafon Region to meet.
- ❖ **USY New Members Institute (NMI)/Leadership Training Institute (LTI):** This combined convention is designed specifically for New Members of USY, and should not be missed. In conjunction, our annual Leadership Training Institute offers chapter officers and regional board members an opportunity to gain skills that they can use as leaders in the Conservative Movement.
- ❖ **USY Fall Kallah:** Usually held in late October or early November. All paid members of USY are eligible to attend. It is the chapter's responsibility to ensure that dues are paid to the International office before this convention.
- ❖ **Sprinter Kallah (Spring/Winter):** Held at some point in late winter or early spring, this second regional convention of the year is open to all paid members of chapters in Tzafon USY.
- ❖ **Kinnus Gadol:** Highlights include elections of regional officers, regional awards, and the discharging and installation of the regional officers.
- ❖ **Kadima Days:** Held in late fall in central but separate locations in the Western and Eastern halves of the state. These days are full of activities for all Kadima members.
- ❖ **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Shabbaton:** A new program for Kadimaniks in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade from Tzafon Region and invitees from other neighboring regions. In 2006 it was hosted by Eastern Canada Region USY in Montreal.

## Tzafon 2006-2007 Calendar

Activity	Dates	Sponsor	Location
USY Encampment	August 21-27, 2006	Tzafon Region	Palmer, MA
USY NMI/LTI*	October 20-22, 2006	Temple Beth-El	Poughkeepsie, NY
USY Fall Kallah	November 10-12, 2006	Temple Beth-El and Temple Shaarey Zedek	Buffalo, NY
Kadima Day West	December 3, 2006	Temple Beth-El	Rochester, NY
Kadima Day East	December 10, 2006	Temple Israel	Albany, NY
USY International Pre-Convention	December 21-24, 2006		Boston, MA
USY International Convention	December 24-28	Boston Marriott	Boston, MA
USY SATO Weekend**	January 15-16	TBA	TBA
USY Sprinter Kallah	February 9-11, 2007	Agudat Achim	Schenectady, NY
USY Kinnus Gadol	April 19-22, 2007	Tzafon Region	Hilton Garden Inn, Ithaca, NY

\*NMI/LTI = USY New Member's Institute combined with Leadership Training Institute

\*\*SATO Weekend= USY Social Action and Tikun Olam Weekend

## Scholarship Resources

The International and Regional USY offices administer or facilitate various scholarship and funding sources that can help members to participate in various programs. The scholarship and funding sources include:

- ❖ *Tikun Olam Scholarships*  
These are scholarships available to USY members participating in a USY summer program. These are need based scholarship and applications are available in the regional office.
- ❖ *Eleanor Bloom Scholarship Fund*  
This is a scholarship fund designed specifically for Encampment and is need based. Applications are available in the regional office.
- ❖ *The Tzafon Region Scholarship Fund*  
Tzafon region has very limited scholarship funds available to USY members attending regional conventions. These scholarships are need based and are **only available once all other scholarship options have been exhausted**; please contact Batia Epelbaum for more information.
- ❖ *Sources for subsidies in the Synagogue*  
There are many outlets that your USY members can access subsidies to Tzafon and International programs. These outlets include sisterhoods, brotherhoods, synagogue Presidents, synagogue Youth Chairs/youth committees, the Rabbi's discretionary fund, etc.

## **International USY**

International USY is the parent organization of all USY and Kadima chapters. The International Office is located at Rapaport House, 155 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010. Telephone Number: 212-533-7800; Fax Number: 212-353-9439.

### **Programs provided by International USY**

USY's summer programs include:

- ❖ *USY on Wheels:*  
Traveling by bus, these young people will discover the scope of America, from Washington, D.C. to the Grand Canyon, while learning to live a Jewish life as they go. Open to USY members entering 10, 11 or 12 grade.
- ❖ *Mission: Mitzvah:*  
This trip will offer the opportunity to interact with various communities across North America through intensive social action and mitzvah projects.
- ❖ *Classic Israel Pilgrimage:*  
The fundamental Israel Experience. Six weeks of exposure to the history and contemporary realities of Judaism and Israel, while experiencing first hand the sights and sounds of the Jewish homeland.
- ❖ *Eastern Europe/Israel Pilgrimage:*  
Two weeks exploring the history and culture of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, followed by four exciting weeks in Israel.
- ❖ *Israel Pilgrimage/Poland Seminar:*  
One week in Poland, visiting cities and concentration camps, followed by five weeks in Israel.
- ❖ *Spain/Israel Pilgrimage:*  
*From the Golden Era to 1492*, allows participants to explore the heritage of Jewish Spain.
- ❖ *Etgar! The Ultimate Israel Challenge:*  
A five week program for those who have already participated in Israel Pilgrimage that goes beyond the souvenir stands to the Israeli side of Israel.
- ❖ *Outdoor Adventure:*  
A four-week camping trip in which you learn how to live a Jewish lifestyle in the great outdoors. Excellent for those who enjoy hiking and sea-kayaking.
- ❖ *Summer in the City:*  
Spend four weeks in New York City in a challenging academic environment while taking courses at the Jewish Theological Seminary.
- ❖ *Outdoor Adventure Costa Rica:*  
A 3-week adventure and Spanish immersion program while hiking, sight-seeing, and exploring the rain forests of Central America.

USY's school year programs include:

- ❖ *USY International Convention:*  
Over 1,000 USY members from all across North America gather together for five non-stop days of programs and fun. Locations around the country change from year to year.
- ❖ *USY High:*  
Spend two months of your junior or senior year of high school studying in Israel.
- ❖ *NATIV:*  
This program is open to any Jewish student for their first year out of high school. On *Nativ* the first year of college is spent at Hebrew University and living on a *kibbutz*. Many colleges give full course credit to this program.

USY members may participate in several clubs or societies including:

- ❖ *The Abraham Joshua Heschel Honor Society*: To encourage USY members to learn more about Judaism and the observance of Mitzvot, USY established the Abraham Joshua Heschel Honor Society in 1979. The society is named after Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), a faculty member of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and one of the most influential Jewish figures of modern times. Through the development of his original philosophy of Judaism and the application of that philosophy to the problems of modern times, Rabbi Heschel became a man to honor and emulate.
- ❖ *HeChalutzim*: In USY, HeChalutzim is the Israel Advocacy specialty club, created so that we too can create the best possible Israel, through Israel programming, advocacy workshops, and fun activities. *HeChalutzim* is the best opportunity for anyone who loves our land, and wants to support her, through knowledge and action.
- ❖ *613 Mitzvah Club*: Each USY member who joins the 613 Club is performing a mitzvah. Members will receive mailings regarding social action projects, G'milut Hasidim and Tikun Olam which helps the member remain informed about the disabled, the homeless, and keeps them up-to-date on Tikun Olam projects taking place in other USY chapters and regions.

## Parent Involvement

There are many ways for parents to be part of their children's lives in USY and Kadima.

- ❖ **Youth Commission:** USY and Kadima in your synagogue operates under the guidance of its Youth Commission. Please check with your congregation as to how you can get involved with your youth commission.
- ❖ **Driving:** Parents are encouraged to provide rides to and from USY functions for their own children, and when possible, for others. Parents are relied upon to transport USY members on time, so that they may participate fully in programs. Car pools are easily formed, to everyone's benefit.
- ❖ **Chaperoning:** An integral part of successful functions is a commitment from parents to help the advisors at events/activities from time to time during the year. Functions might include Temple Events, home services, sport activities, hay rides, dances, etc. Our guidelines to the advisors recommend that there be one chaperone for every ten youngsters attending an event. Former USYers, who are at least 19 years old and who have been out of USY for at least one year, may also be invited to chaperone.
- ❖ **Hosting Programs at Home:** USYer's homes are sometimes used for activities: board meetings, programs, home *Shabbat* services (with accompanying *Oneg Shabbat*), and *Havdalah* services are some of the possibilities. It is expected that for any events where food is to be served, *kashrut* will be observed, and that at least one parent will be present.
- ❖ **Helping to Cook/Serve at Special Events:** When an event requires meals, such as for a chapter event, regional weekend, or a *Shabbat* dinner, parental help is vital. Cooking may involve one or two evenings during the week preceding the event, under direction of the chairperson or advisor.
- ❖ **Substitute as Advisor:** Although the advisor(s) will almost always plan to be in attendance at events, in the case of an emergency, a parent may be asked to fill in.
- ❖ **USY/Kadima Calendar:** Since most major USY and Kadima events are set on the calendar early in the year, parents are encouraged to help their children plan their activities and school assignments carefully so that the youngsters can enjoy an event fully. When travel to another city is required, it may mean missing school on the Friday of a weekend event so that arrival before *Shabbat* is ensured.
- ❖ **Participation:** Your USYer/Kadimanik will get from USY/Kadima what he/she puts into it. Events are successful because of the people involved and their enthusiasm. Let your child/children know that you support and encourage his/her participation in as many of the activities as possible.
- ❖ **Out of Town Events:** Some events include overnight stays at a synagogue or camp, some include home hospitality, some offer a hotel stay, and some include a combination of these. The hosting chapter or the Regional Office sends information as to the type of housing being provided, as well as any required gear, such as sleeping bags, pillows, etc. In addition, there may also be limitations on luggage, due to space constraints when traveling by bus or other transport. It is important that these guidelines be followed for the comfort and convenience of everyone. Remember each USYer must carry all of his or her own luggage. Make sure that he/she can maneuver all that is packed! Departure and arrival times are calculated carefully, but some leeway must be allowed for weather, extra-long good-byes at the end of the event, or other unforeseen delays. When home hospitality is provided, you may choose to send along a small thank you gift for the host family. Suggestions for this gift might be candy (kosher, of course), potholders, candles, notepaper, gourmet tea or coffee. Also appropriate is a donation to the *Tzafon* Youth Scholarship Fund as a thank you to the hosting family. Contact the Regional Office for information about this fund.
- ❖ **Hosting Out of Town USYers:** Beds are not required! USYers are very adaptable and are more interested in being together than in creature comforts. USYers bring sleeping bags with them to convention. Everyone usually welcomes munchies for late night snacks. As hosts, you will be required to pick up and deliver your guests to the designated meeting place on time.

## **Glossary of Terms**

**ACHSHAV:** The International newspaper (literally means "now" in Hebrew)

**ADVISOR:** Staff who works with a USY chapter and supervise chapter and regional events.

**BENCHING:** (See Birkat) The act of saying the prayers recited after meals.

**BIRKAT HAMAZON:** The prayer said after meals.

**CHAPTER BOARD** - the working backbone of the chapter; largely responsible for planning events; elected late in spring to serve one-year term.

**CHOFESH:** The Hebrew word for free time. At a convention Chofesh is a time to have fun with friends, catch up on old times, or just sleep!

**DUGMA:** Hebrew word used to mean "good example".

**KADIMA** - the youth group that precedes USY, for grades 6, 7 & 8.

**KALLAH or KINNUS** - a gathering or convention.

**KOACH** - organization for Conservative college students, most of who had participated in USY while in high school.

**KITA/SICHA:** Literally, kita means class, and sicha means conversation. In USY everything is incorporated in the study groups. At every convention there is a theme, which is then the discussion topic during the study sessions.

**LTI** – Leadership Training Institute

**MACHER:** A big shot USYer or past USYer.

**MAARIV:** The evening Service

**NMI** - New Members Institute.

**MINCHA:** The afternoon service.

**USY REGIONAL BOARD** - elected each year at Regional Convention (Kinnus Gadol); its members are experienced at the local level and help to plan Regional events; members are additionally assigned to serve as resources for two or three chapters.

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF YOUTH ACTIVITIES**- hired by the Region (Empire Region) and International USY to oversee Youth Activities, Batia Epelbaum.

**REGIONAL OFFICE** - located in Congregation Ohav Shalom, 113 Krumkill Road, Albany, NY 12208. (Telephone: 518-438-2052; Fax: 518-438-2053; E-mail: Epelbaum@uscj.org) It is the source of information on Regional and International events and programs.

**RUACH:** Singing dancing and SPIRIT!

**SHABBATON** - A weekend event, that includes Shabbat observances, study sessions, and fun.

**SHACHARIT:** The morning service.

**SHMIRA:** Watchers/guards at convention to make sure that no illegal activity is going on after curfew.

**SHUL IN** - An event that is held in the synagogue, which includes an overnight stay, prayer, study, and enjoyment.

**STANDARDS** - conditions which must be met, may include a minimum number of attendances at Chapter events or religious services, may include study of Judaica and ability to read Hebrew.

**TIKUN OLAM** – USY's own tzadakah project; it means: "building a better world."

**TZAFON** - the name of the region to which we belong.

**WEBSITE:** The regional website is a great place to find out the latest news on Tzafon. To visit the website go to [www.tzafon.org](http://www.tzafon.org)

**YAD B'YAD** – Kadima's own charity; it means "hand in hand."

**USY** - the youth group that follows Kadima, for grades 9, 10, 11, & 12.