

Reflecting on my year as a movement worker

By Charlotte Caplan

I recently discovered a copy of the Dvar Torah I delivered at my Bat Mitzvah over ten years ago. As a shy young girl, standing in the Old Synagogue at New North London, I drew parallels between the leadership styles displayed by Moses and Aaron in the parasha Ki Tisa with those demonstrated by Chaim Weizmann and Emmeline Pankhurst in more recent times. I then concluded my Dvar Torah by declaring my aspiration to become a Noam madricha (leader) who acts as a *dugma* (example) for younger *chanichim* (participants). Reflecting on this aim a decade later, I could not have predicted that I would not only be a madricha, but that Noam would have had such an impact on my life that I chose to spend this year as a Movement Worker.

I started my Noam journey at summer camp in 2007, but it was leading Israel Tour in 2018 that instilled in me the desire to work for the movement this year. This experience was the first time I truly understood the role I could play in creating the supportive community that Noam has been for me and is so known for. I could shape the atmosphere which actively strives to include everyone, challenges young people to engage in social action and teaches valuable skills. Recognising the impact I could have as a leader within Noam over a three-week period demonstrated the magnitude of what I could achieve as a leader of the movement over an entire year.

However, due to the pandemic, the job I began in August is vastly different to what I am doing today. The first half of my year as a movement worker was very much as expected. I spent my time planning Israel Tour, teaching Hebrew and Hadracha (leadership) classes at Haderech on Wednesdays and running Shabbat morning services at NNLS, as well as leading on a variety of residential events. Yet, now with all these activities cancelled and no face to face programming possible, my job is almost unrecognisable, and one could suggest that it no longer exists.

However, the opposite is in fact true: my job is arguably more important than ever. Young people within our community are socially isolated, with some having very little contact with their schools, friends or extended families. Our members are bored at home and crave entertainment. Anxiety levels have increased and

many of the events that they were excited for, such as trips abroad, graduations or internships have been cancelled. Our members need a community who can support them, offering structure, entertainment and connection through this difficult time. That is where my role comes into play.

Over the past two months, Noam has created a host of innovative online and offline programmes for its members, becoming a lifeline for both young people and their parents during lockdown. From daily 'Morning Movement', where all Noam members are invited to join the Movement Workers as we take on Joe Wicks' PE lessons, and lunch & learn sessions, to online murder mysteries, wellbeing check-ins and plenty of quizzes, the movement worker team have produced a rich schedule to engage members of all ages. We have compiled suggestions of offline entertainment activities such as recipes, craft ideas and podcasts as well as setting up our own book clubs. Additionally, we are about to launch activities for years 3 & 4, an age group we are now calling Zeraim (seeds). Personally, I believe Noam has stepped up during this challenging period to support our young people, maintaining its special sense of community and, ultimately, helping the wellbeing of our members.

Despite all this incredible work from the Noam team, life as a movement worker during lockdown is not without its challenges. Endless Zoom calls struggle to provide the same atmosphere that one feels when working in the bustling Masorti office. Similarly, building meaningful relationships with new members is particularly hard through video calls. Furthermore, there are financial concerns for Noam resulting from this coronavirus crisis and, although it has led to much creative thinking, the uncertainty around summer programming can be hard to manage.

However, these struggles are made far easier due to the support provided by my fellow movement workers, Yoni, Georgie, Harry and Tomer, along with the wider Masorti team. Although physically separated, I know my team always has my back. Aside from our daily check-ins, we are constantly messaging each other asking for advice, ideas or a helping hand, as well as maintaining morale through funny articles or memes. Life in lockdown would be far more difficult without this team of compassionate, motivating and supportive friends.

Reflecting on life as a movement worker during this pandemic, I feel immensely proud of the innovative programming that my team has fashioned. We are ensuring that our young people are not neglected and are immersed in a supportive community that is adapting to any challenges that arise. Seeing, and hearing, how beneficial this new Noam programming has been for many of our members' wellbeing makes me feel incredibly honoured to be in this position within our community. At my Bat Mitzvah, I aspired to be a Noam madricha, assuming it meant I would simply run activities on summer camp. However, a decade later, I now have a greater understanding of the term. A leader is someone who shapes their community, providing for the needs of the individual and the group, and stays resilient even in the most uncertain times, yet recognises their limitations and reaches out for support when needed. I believe that is what the Noam movement worker team are doing today – my twelve-year old self would be proud.

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