

## THE 47TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL BIBLE CONTEST FOR JEWISH YOUTH

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There were many unusual happenings in connection with the 47th annual Hidon contest this year. Never before in the history of the Hidon did it receive so much publicity in all of the media – almost on a daily basis for several weeks – before Yom Ha-Atzma'ut. The Israeli Hidon, which chooses the four participants who will compete against the 12 young people from Diaspora countries, had Avner Netanyahu, the 15-year-old son of the Prime Minister and his wife Sarah, among the top four Israelis with a good chance of him becoming the international Bible champion. Unfortunately, what tripped Avner at the international contest was the last question which usually is composed (though not this year for obvious reasons) and asked by the Prime Minister to the seven contestants with the highest scores. It was a 17-year-girl from the Amana School in Kfar Saba, Or Ashual, who became the international Bible champion followed by Elad Nachshon of the DeShalit high school in Rehovot. The disappointed Avner Netanyahu was number three. What should be noted is that both Elad and Avner come from the Israeli secular high school system. This is a breakthrough which I and the rest of our Hidon Tanakh committee had been hoping for, since in former years nearly all, if not all, the Israeli contestants came from the religious school system. Another difference this year – though not a happy one – was that only 20 Diaspora countries sent contestants to Israel for the Hidon rather than the usual number which hovers between 30 and 35 countries.

The Hidon for Diaspora youths took place several days earlier in Degania Alef, the first kibbutz (often referred to as the mother of all kibbutzim), which was celebrating its one hundredth anniversary. The winner in that contest was Rebecca Friedman of Toronto, Canada followed by Menachem Schindler of the U.S and Gavriel Fliegelman of Mexico who came in third.

The theme of this year's Hidon was the revitalization of the Hebrew language. A stirring personal story was recounted by the new chairman of the

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Jewish Agency, Natan Scharansky, of how he taught himself Hebrew while a prisoner in Soviet Communist prisons. As a further step in making Hebrew and the Bible more familiar to Israeli pupils, the secular Israeli school system will adopt, as of next school year, a list of biblical verses which pupils will have to learn by heart. This is a suggestion long advocated by a former president of Israel, Yitzhak Navon, among others, who also was the presiding judge at the Hidon this year, as well as in several previous years. During the contest Prime Minister Netanyahu also announced that there will be a Bible contest for adults on Hanukah this year, an event which for the past several decades has not taken place.

As in past years, all the young contestants were taken on tours of Israel and special meetings were held with the leaders of our country such as the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Knesset and the IDF Chief-of-Staff. Unfortunately, President Peres was out of the country and therefore the contestants missed this visit.

In order that there should be more countries sending contestants, we urge all communities and schools to prepare some of their pupils to study the 400 chapters of the Bible and to organize local Bible contests from which the winners can then be sent to Israel for the annual Hidon. For more information and a list of the 400 chapters, rabbis and school principals should contact local Jewish Agency representatives or go to the Agency website: [www.jafi.org](http://www.jafi.org) and search for the words "Bible Contest."



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