

Dear Rabbi Benny and Sharrone,

While I am writing this, there are so many warm memories passing through my mind.

I will start with when I first met R Benny, when I arrived at an Aftercare program in Utah. I was new there, and my Dad had driven me to the program and helped me get set up, and I was starting to adjust to life after Wilderness. As to be expected, it wasn't such an easy time to get acclimated to life after being in the Wilderness for some time. I was there for a week, when I got notified R Benny would be visiting. I was eager to see a Jewish face. I had spoken to R Benny, but had not met him yet.

I go downstairs, and there is R Benny, greeting me with a big smile and cadence as if I knew him for 15 years!! We talked and he immediately started helping me problem solving, whether it was Kosher, Tfillin or just on how to deal with whatever problem had arisen.

I was blown away with the kindness R Benny exhibited from the get go. Here he is, meeting someone for the first time, yet treating him as if he was a childhood friend!! It made a lasting impression I will not forget.

Aside from the weekly visits R Benny would make, where he would drive over 45 minutes just to get to me and to others to visit, there were so many fun and inspiring events I attended. One was the Chanukah event in downtown Salt Lake City, where there were delicious latkes and donuts, and inspiring speeches.

There was the Purim event, orchestrated beautifully by R Avremi, where I met lots of new people and had a great time.

I would say the Shabbosim I spent in Salt Lake City with the Zippel's were some of the most inspiring Shabbosim of my life. It was a no judgement zone, where there were Jewish people from all walks of life, all there to join to celebrate the Shabbos. It was such an amazing concept, that no matter what was going on in people's lives, whatever their background was, they could meet with the goal of celebrating the Shabbos and to meet other Jewish people. It felt so pure, so right. R Benny is an amazing speaker, with such a great penchant for inspiring. I would witness people leaving different, feeling inspired to change something in their life for the better. Then there was the delicious food made by Sharrone, and the warm hospitality she exhibited. R Benny would thank her, and she would try to not draw attention to herself, but it was evident that her work and dedication helped make these events happen.

These are all events, yet if one wants to understand the greatness and kindness the Zippel's exemplify, one doesn't need to attend an event. What was most emblematic to me was just having a conversation with R Benny, Sharrone or R Avremi. Through what would seem like a simple conversation was often so so much more. With their amazing mix of intelligence, pure kindness and balanced worldview, I would leave a seemingly regular conversation feeling galvanized to do good, to better myself and feeling the warmth of being Jewish even in far out Utah.

I find it so appropriate that the organization is called Project Heart, because what I quickly realized was that what R Benny and the Zippel's were showing is that so much is about the heart. When one met them, they didn't focus on the background, whether someone was struggling with a problem, the message was, any Jewish person has a heart, with a capacity to make a difference, to better themselves and to better others.

With much much gratitude and love,
An Admirer.