

## **Remarks for Rabbi Arthur Schneier's 91st Birthday**

By Rosa Marks

Good morning. My name is Rosa Marks and I'm an 8th grader at Rabbi Arthur Schneier Park East Day School. For your birthday, Rabbi Schneier, I'd like to share a few words.

The largest living organism in the world is not some large whale in the ocean, or some exotic creature whose name no one can pronounce; it's a tree. It's called Pando and it's located in Fishlake National Forest in Utah. Contrary to what you might think, this tree isn't your ordinary tree. If you take a look at it, you won't see a big trunk or leaves that touch the clouds. You'd see a forest. Here's why.

Long ago, a seed was planted. Over time, it grew into a tree. It wasn't exceptionally big or tall. However, its *roots* began to branch out and eventually, new trees sprouted from it. Each new tree looks a little bit different and even goes through its own life cycle. Each one is somewhat individual. It's hard to believe that a tree that started out as a small Aspen now weighs over 13 million pounds.

So how does this relate to Rabbi Schneier's Park East Community? Rabbi Schneier came here from Vienna during the Holocaust. He planted a seed at Park East. He nurtured it with his love, kindness, and compassion, and helped it grow into a healthy tree: his Day School. The first time I ever heard Rabbi Schneier speak to the school was on Kristallnacht. He spoke about his experience during the Holocaust. And although I don't remember everything he said, I do recall something that I know I will never forget. He said that after leaving Vienna, he genuinely believed that he was the last Jewish child in the world. To know that Rabbi Schneier came here after all that he

had been through made me realize that I owe it to him and everything he started to reach my potential as a member of his community, and as a student at his school.

I came to Park East Day School at the beginning of last year from Hunter College High School: a public school. I grew up in a religious home: I kept Shabbos, I learned Torah with my father on Friday night, and I enjoyed going to shul and celebrating the holidays with my friends. But recently, Mrs. Etra asked me what the most important thing I've taken away from Park East. This is what I said.

Over the past year and a half, I've learned so much about Limudei Kodesh that, even to me, it's unbelievable. But what has been most important to me is not what I've learned, but how I learned it and who I learned it with. Coming here, I knew that I had a lot to learn, but I also got something that I didn't know I was missing. I learned Tanakh in a way that taught me lessons and morals that I will take with me for the rest of my life. Learning these important lessons in a community has made me feel so connected to each and every student, teacher, and faculty member at Park East. Being here has made me realize that although I am an individual, I am a part of something bigger than myself. When I graduate in June, I *know* that I will take with me all of the values that I have learned from Rabbi Schneier and take inspiration from him as I strive to make this world a better place.

Thank you, Rabbi Schneier, for giving me, and so many others, this opportunity to experience what it is like to be a part of this amazing community that you have gathered. You planted a seed and it has grown into a magnificent forest. Happy birthday. Thank you.