

Fun and Fitness on the Trail

Moving through the air on a 1,000 pound animal without feeling the ground under your feet is daunting for any new rider, and perhaps the blind approach horseback riding with trepidation. Once astride the horse, however, there is quite a freedom in riding — the breeze ruffling your hair and a feeling of power and strength, explains Regina, one of the trainers that assists the students of the Jewish Institute for the Blind as they participate in horseback riding classes at the Amir Stables in northern Jerusalem. “The Institute students are improving muscle tone, balance and posture while learning the care and grooming of a horse,” she adds. “As many of the students have serious motor problems in addition to visual impairment, therapeutic riding helps them to strengthen trunk muscles and improve posture.”

Oftentimes the blind do not stand up straight, perhaps instinctively trying to protect their bodies. Riding reminds them of the importance of holding themselves erect. Not only do the students love their forays to the stables where they ride, but they are also taught to groom and care for the horses. Some of the students are helped to mount the horses with a



Horseback riding is fun and therapeutic

ramp or even an automated device that lifts them, but once they are astride, they are closely attuned with the horse and their self confidence soars. An incredible educational tool for the students, therapeutic riding is also a lot of fun!

One of the Institute’s Most Outstanding Employees

“Why should a blind person ask a neighbor to hang a picture or tighten a screw in the kitchen cabinet?” asks Maimon Biton, carpentry instructor at the Jewish Institute for the Blind. According to Biton, a blind or partially sighted student can learn to use basic tools and even excel in carpentry or woodwork if that is his field of interest. “The students at the JIB learn simple skills in the carpentry class, and later they even work on the electric saw or lathe, using tools that can simplify their daily lives.



Maimon Biton

Biton has been teaching carpentry at the Institute for over two decades, and he is proud of the accomplishments of his students. Organization is an important key to success, and the students know where the tools are kept, and they come into

class and begin working on a project. Perhaps it is surprising at first to see a blind student operating an electric saw, but Biton thinks his students develop very meticulous work habits. “Despite the noise and the dust, the students are organized and develop good skills and habits,” he says. “The carpentry shop helps them build self esteem, and it is a source of creativity and excellence at the Institute.” Although Biton works in other locations, teaching both young and old, his work with the blind is an endeavor that brings him a great deal of satisfaction. “I have one student,

an older blind man, who is just completing a coffee table to give to his son and new daughter-in-law as a wedding gift,” Biton adds. “What could give me more satisfaction than to help him realize this dream?”