

Ben Shapiro

Proud Torah-Observant Jew and Rising Star in America's Conservative Movement



Just 28 years old, he has already accomplished more than politicians many years his senior. At 17, became the youngest nationally syndicated columnist in the US. He is a political commentator, writer, editor, radio talk show host, attorney and media legal consultant. Yet despite his tremendous success in the secular world he maintains his pride in his religion and his yarmulke on his head. Meet Ben Shapiro, a rising star in American politics.

During the recent CPAC convention we had the opportunity to meet and familiarize ourselves with various noteworthy figures, but one who stood out was Ben (Binyamin Aaron) Shapiro, a young and charismatic Orthodox Jew who addressed the convention wearing his *yarmulke*. He participated in the *davening* and *Shabbos seudos* held by the Young Jewish Conservative group in hotel room 2340. He

recited *divrei Torah* and sang the *zemiros* together with everyone else. Shapiro even led some of the *tefillos* from the *amud*.

At 28, Shapiro has already achieved more than many politicians have accomplished at age 60. In fact, he began writing a nationally syndicated column at 17! His columns can be read in major newspapers and on websites throughout the country. He's also been a frequent guest on many national TV and

radio shows and is the author of four widely read books and the ghost writer of another nine.

Whereas others at his age are just beginning their careers, Shapiro has so many prestigious accomplishments under his belt that he has reached celebrity status. And he is very far from done. However, what makes Ben Shapiro particularly unique is that despite his impressive resume in the secular world, he remains devoted to his religion and openly proud of it.

Due to his religious devotion, Shapiro did not initially plan to join the CPAC convention because he did not expect to find proper *Shabbos* arrangements in the hotel. Even when he found out that there would be *Shabbos* arrangements, he thought it better to walk five miles to the nearest Jewish neighborhood for *davening* and the other meals. Later, he revised his plans to remain with the group for the entire *Shabbos*, and it turned out to be one of the most beautiful *Shabbosim* he ever enjoyed.

Shapiro told *Zman* that he is convinced that the Young Jewish Conservatives will make a serious difference in American politics. "I think they are necessary. I think that they are a real grassroots group with outstanding ability to recruit support for the Republican Party among young Jewish Americans."

Proud to Be a Jew

Shapiro was born on January 15, 1984, to parents who worked in Hollywood. Despite their business affiliation, they were staunch conservatives.

"They voted for President Carter in 1976 because everyone voted for Carter in 1976," Shapiro tells us. "But they voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and then for Bush in 1988. They voted for Bill Clinton in 1992 because they were upset that Bush raised taxes and sold AWACs to the Saudis, but that was the last time they voted for a Democrat."

Shapiro's parents became *baalei teshuva* when Ben was 11 years old. They began attending the shul of the Rabbi Daniel Lapin

of Venice, California, and slowly came closer to Torah Judaism. "They started moving toward Yiddishkeit when I was still really young, so technically I was always religious."

In fact, the young Ben played a large role in convincing his parents to become fully observant. They began sending him to Hebrew Day School at age nine. "You know how it goes... once you send your child to a religious school they begin to come home every day with a new question. 'Why don't we do this on *Shabbos*? Why don't we do that on *Yom Tov*?'"

At that young age Shapiro was already very outspoken about his religious beliefs, and he never tried to hide his Jewish identity.

"America is very Jew-friendly," Ben explains. "I have no reason to remove my *yarmulke*. The American Christian Conservatives are unusually pro-Israel and they are very excited to see a conservative who is a proud Jew. The only time wearing my *yarmulke* was an issue was when I was in public middle school. But since then nobody has ever yet said a bad word to me about it."

Wunderkind

Ben's inborn genius became apparent as he was just a few years old. In his early years in public school, he skipped from second grade into fourth because he was already doing math on a fifth grade level and doing English on par with the fourth grade.

For fifth and sixth grades Shapiro was sent to Maimonides Hebrew Academy. Even there he found the pace of learning too slow for him. By the time he completed the fifth grade, Ben was studying *Gemara* on the level of an eighth grader. And in arithmetic he was so competent that the teachers simply handed him the textbooks so he could read them himself. Of course, that's not the best way of teaching mathematics, and as a result Ben's parents enrolled him in a public school program for highly gifted children. There he completed the seventh and eighth grades. Despite transferring back and forth between public school and Jewish schools, he stayed

enthusiastic about his Torah studies.

Shapiro cannot pinpoint when he first became interested in politics. That's because he cannot recall a time when he was *not* interested in politics. In seventh grade, at age 12, he wrote a political essay for class explaining why President Clinton should be impeached. Ben was also always interested in writing and literature. At age six or seven he began writing his first novels.

By the time he graduated eighth grade, Ben was on the level of the average tenth grader. He skipped ninth grade and began high school as a sophomore. At this point he left the public school system entirely and enrolled in Yeshiva University of Los Angeles (YULA), a private Orthodox Jewish high school in Los Angeles. After graduating, his parents enrolled him in University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) where he majored in philosophy.

Like his parents, Ben was politically inclined to the right, but when he encountered extreme anti-Israel and anti-Semitic attitudes on campus, he became an even more staunch and outspoken conservative. (He points out that despite living in Los Angeles, a bastion of liberalism, he was always surrounded by Torah-true Jews, so he never felt entirely out of place with his conservative views.)

"The first day on campus," Shapiro tells us, "I caught a glimpse of the student newspaper, the *Daily Bruin*, and saw an article that compared Arik Sharon to Adolph Eichmann. I thought to myself, 'This is ridiculous.' I went over to the offices of the *Daily Bruin* and demanded that I be allowed to write a counterpoint column against that article. They told me, 'Ok.'"

Shapiro was not yet aware how talented he was, but his first article made such an impression that the editors asked him to write a weekly column for the student newspaper. It fast became the most popular column in the newspaper.

From UCLA, Shapiro went to Harvard Law School. He graduated with high marks in 2007.

Syndicated Columnist—At 17!

Shapiro was already climbing the ladder of secular success at an incredible rate. He practiced law for a while at the Los Angeles office of Goodwin Procter LLP. Today he serves as an independent legal counsel for large media clients, running Benjamin Shapiro Legal Consulting in Los Angeles.

But Shapiro's bright career in law lost the limelight to his writing abilities. The articles and essays Ben authored in university brought him national attention and widespread praise. In particular, Ben's father was one of his biggest fans. His father convinced him that his writing could easily make it into a prestigious national newspaper.



He is only 28 years old, but already a rising star in America's conservative movement. Here: Ben Shapiro talking to *Zman*.