



*A Journey for a Lifetime*

# **Ruach Mitzvah**

## **Bringing to Life Jewish Ritual & Observance**

Campers at Ramah are engaged in Jewish living through a summer program of experiential education. Through formal and informal activities they are exposed to Jewish values and practice such as Shabbat observance, t'fillah, tikkun olam and more. The challenge of the summer program is to extend Jewish practice into the year-round communities in which they live.

**Ruach Mitzvah** is an initiative to address the importance of year-round Jewish practice through the artistic exploration and creation of Jewish ritual objects used throughout the year. The program centers on the work of Israeli artist Noah Greenberg and brings campers closer to ritual observance by introducing them to the beauty of the objects used to celebrate Judaism. Noah serves as an artist-in-residence for five days, bringing his energy, creativity and spirituality.

### **KESHER TEFFILIN**

Tefillin are a manifestation of a Jew's physical connection to God – a spiritual conduit linking them powerfully yet intangibly. Tefillin are almost a distillation of the entire Torah, so much so that they often represent the Torah in the liturgy. And yet, they are such an esoteric mitzvah, obscure and mysterious – unexplainable and incomprehensible. To a young Jew becoming a bar or bat mitzvah, the tefillin should be an object of intense spiritual excitement. Sadly, in the modern world they are often viewed as archaic remnants of a previous age, no longer relevant in the high-speed world of computers and video games.

***Kesher Tefillin*** is a project created to help give a budding Jew spiritual ownership of a mitzvah that might otherwise be alien. As a Jew approaches adulthood, ***Kesher Tefillin*** facilitates and empowers their understanding of this beautiful mitzvah with a fusion of "hands on" creativity, learning and tangible results – a pair of kosher Tefillin!

Tefillin today are made with very sophisticated equipment and technology. Heavy leather is formed in hydraulic presses and then sophisticated computer-controlled machinery is used to shape, mold and color the tefillin. The results are, of course, beautiful. But Moshe himself did not have hydraulic presses nor was there sophisticated machinery in the Sinai desert. Yet Moshe put on tefillin – as have Jews for untold generations since then.



Through ***Kesher Tefillin***, up to 18 campers entering the 8<sup>th</sup> grade will handcraft their own tefillin in a way that Moshe might have done, while learning the Halacha involved in creating and wearing them. Taking a raw piece of parchment, each camper will cut, mold, fold, emboss and color it, creating their very own tefillin. They then select and insert the parchment scrolls, attach and tie the straps. Throughout the process, campers will study sources reviewing the holiness of the tefillin and

the Halacha of making and using them. Upon completion, they will don the new tefillin with the appropriate kavanot (intentions) and blessings.

Ramah campers who have participated in this project have been positively impacted by the experience. A parent of a camper who participated in 2009 shared:

*Ever since Ben came home from camp last summer and presented me with the Tefillin he made in Noah Greenberg's camp workshop, I've been in contact with Noah. I first wrote to tell him how blown away I was with not only the Tefillin but with Ben's overwhelming sense of pride over having made them.*

*In all of Ben's years of Jewish school and camp, this one activity "flipped a switch" in him and he has never been more serious about - or respectful of - his Jewish roots. Ben has proudly worn his Tefillin not just at our Reform synagogue but at Chabad services and at home, as well. This from a kid who previously fought us all the way when came to having him put on a yarmulke on Friday nights!*

*Something magical happened in Noah's class...*

One camp director reported:

*For two hours each morning, twelve campers of varying backgrounds and interests gathered to work with Noah. By the end of the first session, one camper who had expressed misgivings about having to miss basketball came up to Noah and said, "This is SO cool! I am so glad that I signed up for this!" His sentiments were unanimous. Our expectations were not only met but were wildly exceeded by this incredible group of campers. And as we hoped, they were incredibly excited about truly owning the mitzvah of Tefillin. They could not wait to put them on and when they did, the feeling was electric.*

The success has been so great since we first started this project in 2008 that we are looking to continue to work with Noah Greenberg!

### **ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS**

Beyond the select individuals who will participate in Keshet Tefillin, many others will benefit from Noah's talent through one of two additional programs:

#### ***1) Tree of Life Shtender***

*Shtender (shten'der): a stand used to support books as an aid to prayer and study while standing upright. Traditionally used in the Jewish home, study hall or house of prayer. [Yiddish, f. G dial. stand - upright]*

The Shtender is the traditional accessory of both prayer (the spiritual and emotional aspect of Judaism - the service of the heart) and study (the great intellectual tradition of Talmud Torah - service of the mind). A special kind of Shtender was envisioned by artists Noah Greenberg and David Moss which would appear quite ordinary from the outside, but would in fact be a compartmentalized treasure chest for all the ritual objects of daily, weekly and yearly use in the hands-on practice of Judaism. The decorative motif for the Shtender is the trees and plants of Israel, including, the seven species by which the Land of Israel is praised. Each Shtender object incorporates a plant appropriate to its particular mitzvah. The 'Tree of Life' theme unites the whole work, reflecting the living Torah that informs and animates every aspect of Jewish religious devotion. Enclosed in the Shtender are objects such as a tzedakah box, Shabbat candlesticks, a kiddush set, etrog box and seder plate.

**"Wow! This is so cool,"** was the reaction commonly heard from campers who have viewed the Shtender at Ramah. Through an interactive presentation, Greenberg introduces each object to

campers and discusses with them its purpose and use. He asks incredible questions, engaging them in the presentation. They are figuratively (and almost literally) climbing all over him. Over the course of five days campers entering grades 3 to 8 are split into groups to meet with Noah and to view the Shtender. Campers are inspired both as practicing Jews and, particularly appropriate to the camp setting, as artists.

The Tree of Life Shtender has already been widely received across over 40 Jewish communal and educational settings, including, including Camp Ramah in California in 2008, other Jewish summer camps and the Skirball Museum. After Greenberg visited one school, an administrator exclaimed:

*Your presentations to all of our children elicited an overwhelming sense of interest and enthusiasm from our young charges. The attention to detail and wide breadth of topics that you weaved into the fabric of your presentations were a wonderful didactic tool; your artistry was sheer genius...*

## ***2) The Development of a Work of Art: Living Through the Creative Process***

A brilliant idea is just that – an idea! How does it turn into a work of art? How do we make it happen?

This seminar will explore the process of taking an idea and making it into a work of art; perhaps even an edition of works of art. Since the Tree of Life Shtender is Noah Greenberg's "signature", the seminar will begin by exploring that very project briefly. It will then visit a new project which is now in process, following it through the stages between the "concept" and the "reality" with visuals, anecdotes and discussion.

Some of the topics that will be addressed are:

- How do we get an idea for a work of art – both conceptually and artistically?
- What are we trying to accomplish with our work?
- What will the piece look like?
- How can we assess if it will be 'any good' – both before and after it is created?
- "How do we get there from here?"
- Do we want to make multiples of your work? How do we do that?
- What about economics?

The participants will see a complex, three-dimensional Jewish art project from beginning to end. They will follow the footsteps of an artist through the process: from conception to design to creation of an original piece, to the production of an edition of facsimiles.

***Gifts totaling \$13,000 will allow Camp Ramah in California to bring Noah Greenberg from Israel for five days, during which he will run Kesher Tefillin and one additional project.***

# Photo Album

## Camp Ramah in California Ruach Mitzvah Initiative



Noah Greenberg Pulls a Seder Plate out of the Shtender



Two 8<sup>th</sup> grade campers craft their own tefillin



Camper tries on her new tefillin



Noah Greenberg helps campers make their own tefillin



Camper hard at work



The finished product – kosher tefillin