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A Journey for a Lifetime

Camp Ramah in California Northern California Initiative

May 2010
Sivan 5770

How Ramah Summer Camping Builds Strong Jewish Identity, Self-Confidence and Personal Resilience in 12 Ways

When Rabbi Mitch Cohen, National Director of the Camp Ramah movement, visited the Bay Area last month, he met with some of our Northern California leaders and activists and discussed how Camp Ramah makes a difference in the lives of campers and counselors in ways that last long after the summer ends. We thought his thoughts were worth sharing with everyone interested in bringing the Camp Ramah experience to Northern California. We look forward to hearing from you about what you think makes camp work its magic. Just hit your reply button and let us know.

Mitch's Cohen's Top Twelve List

New Peer Groups - Kids get a "new start" at camp, no matter how well adjusted they are in their school peer groups. Kids "remake" themselves and generally rise in self-esteem as Ramah counselors are trained to create a social environment in which each kid is nurtured and accepted.

Time Away From Parents - Whether kids come from stressful or highly functional home environments, it is healthy for children and teens to grow and develop away from parents for periods of time in the summer within the warm and supportive community of Camp Ramah. Parents can relax with so many staff members looking out for their offsprings' health and safety.

Escape from Pressure - The pressure to excel academically and the pressure from extra-curricular activities (team practices, music recitals and art lessons, and test

preparation courses, for example) can play a major role in a child's school-year life. Going away to camp during the summer relieves the pressure.

Time Unplugged - Kids today are connected via smart phones, ipods, and computers 24/7. Summer at Camp Ramah provides a safe space with relief from being "on-line", fostering face-to-face communication and the building of long-lasting, in-person relationships, one-on-one and with groups of peers.

Experience Outside - Campers at Ramah spend significant time outdoors, in nature, learning to appreciate trees, swimming and hiking, the stars, the sunset, and even the occasional sunrise. Spending time in nature is critical to young people's physical and spiritual development. A sense of wonder needs to be nourished by nature.

Something for Everyone - Everyone finds something to excel in at camp, whether it be sports, arts, drama, leading prayer, study of texts, or even making friends. The staff is trained to help campers recognize and value their accomplishments.

Young Adult Guidance - The most effective leadership comes from young, accessible role models, who are closer in age than most teachers and parents. At Camp Ramah, counselors and most specialty area leaders are 17-21, the "coolest" age for our kids to learn from, bond with, and want to emulate. As Jews, these critical role models are indispensable.

Living in Jewish Time - At Camp Ramah, Judaism and Jewish values are part of the natural rhythm of life and not relegated to certain activities of the week or the year. This leads to positive incremental Jewish growth, at times through blatantly Jewish activities (which are fun at camp) and at times through excellent Jewish role modeling. Learning Outside of School - Formal Jewish education is crucial, but not enough to nurture our kids' souls or get them inspired. At Camp Ramah, Jewish life is decoupled from academics, teachers, and time constraints, making it much more enjoyable.

Israel is Real - Outside of a visit to Israel, Camp Ramah is the best setting for inspiring a love for Israel, as our campers get to know many different Israeli staff members, all of whom have been carefully chosen and trained to help present the "real" Israel to our campers and staff in a loving, meaningful way.

You Can't be Too Jewish at Camp Ramah - Many of our campers experience peer pressure in their home communities, even in many Day School communities, not to be "too Jewish". It is simply uncool. At camp, kids get high fives for reading Torah. Even most teen-age boys love folk dancing and singing Hebrew songs. Somehow, it really works at camp.

Camp Ramah is My Second Home - So many campers at Camp Ramah call it their second home. Kids have a feeling of empowerment over their life and their choices at camp and love the independence - there is no better environment for nurturing Jewish growth.



Update on Camp Ramah Northern California

The search for a site continues. We have recruited a fine team of volunteers from throughout Northern California (including Saratoga, Modesto, Tiburon, Palo Alto, Sacramento and Oakland) to be our site scouts, following up on leads generated by Real Estate professionals. We are committed to finding a site that will meet our needs for at least the next 50 years.

We'll keep you posted.

With best wishes,

ellen bob

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Camp Ramah in California

You can always reach me by email, ellenbob@gmail.com, or call me at 650-867-8048.



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