

CAMP RAMAH IN CALIFORNIA'S YOUNG ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

chevrei ramah

NEWSLETTER

Volume II, Issue I · January, 2007

Tevet, 5767

חברי רמה



A Summer for a Lifetime

Ramah'niks Reunite from Coast to Coast



Sarra Alpert, Lindsey Rosenthal, Kayla Garaway, Betsy Uhrman and Haley Lefkowitz celebrate Hanukah with Ramah'niks in New York

Save the Date!

Chevrei Ramah Alumni Weekend 2007!

If you missed the first Camp Ramah Alumni Weekend, you will have chance to reconnect with Chevrei Ramah'niks during a very special Ramah Alumni Weekend Summer 2007.

Ojai, California
August 17-19, 2007

For more information, email
chevrei@ramah.org

Shabbat, as always, was a meaningful community experience. After Ramah davening and chocolate muffins, weekend participants were invited to relax on the hill, explore the new Salkin Family Tree House, swim, or of course, play a game of Shabbos basketball.

The peulat erev included Israeli dancing, and an energetic round of karaoke. Matt Spooner impressed the crowd with multiple performances, and others took the mike as well.

Over bagels on Sunday morning, alumni of all different ages were exchanging phone numbers and email addresses, and making plans to keep in touch. Not only did the weekend allow members of the same edot to spend time together, it also allowed for cross edah networking and conversation. Overall, the alumni weekend was extremely successful, uniting Ramah'niks who have been shaped by their camp experiences and who are

By Amy Shapiro and Zach Lasker

Chevrei Ramah'niks got a chance to reconnect and schmooze in two different locations throughout the United States over the past few months, and to celebrate Camp Ramah in California's 50th anniversary.

Alumni Weekend, Ojai, CA

The Chevrei Ramah Alumni Weekend brought Ramah'niks together to spend a traditional Shabbat weekend at camp, complete with camp dining, davening, and peulot. Following the culminating days of second session, camp was still pulsing with the energy of another successful and memorable summer.

The weekend began with Kabbalat Shabbat services and dinner, followed by an opportunity to reminisce about

camp memories, and discuss the most pressing topic in summer conversations: the conflict with Hezbollah on Israel's northern front. Rabbi Dan led the group in a discussion regarding the onset of war in Israel, and participants discussed how texts and other Jewish experience could illuminate the current situation.

After the evening activity, alumni had the opportunity to spend time in the Observatory, or go to sleep. As stargazing has always been a memorable part of the camp experience, viewing the constellations from the (relatively) new David Albert Observatory was particularly special. That night, alumni weekend participants slept in A and B Building rooms, while the participants who brought their families along for the weekend took over different bunks. This was a first chance to expose their children to a summer Shabbat at Camp Ramah.

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Director's Corner

Reflections on Camp Ramah's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Shalom Chevrei Ramah:

In Parashat *Vayetzei*, we read that Jacob left his parents' home, lay down in the wilderness and had a dream of angels. Jacob dreamt that God spoke to him and promised to keep him safe – "I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land."

Jacob woke up from his sleep and said, "Surely Adonai is in this place and I, I did not know! And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and the gateway to the heavens."

How many Jewish children have left their parents' homes for this wilderness! How many Jewish children have

dreamt of angels, and have heard God's voice in the wilderness whisper – you may be scared far away from home; we will keep you safe! How many Jewish children have woken up, and felt deep in their souls in a way that, years later they cannot explain nor recapture, Adonai is in this place! My friends, this is none other than the house of God, a gateway to the heavens!

A few weekends ago, a child on one of our Winter Weekends came up to me and asked: "Do you own Camp Ramah?" "No," I said. "I just help take care of it."

Fellow Ramah'niks: I am humbled to stand in your company in this house of God. But I know you will agree that Ramah is far bigger than any one Director, camper or alumnus - far bigger than all of us; Ramah is a precious, precious jewel of the Conservative movement, a gem of the Jewish people, and I feel blessed every day just to take care of it for a while as you did as campers and staff for many years before.

I bless you each to look back at your days at Ramah with joy and *sipuk nefesh* – a deep satisfaction of the soul. May you carry the blessing of the hills and the song of the trees in your hearts, always.

B'Shalom,
Rabbi Daniel Greyber
Executive Director, Camp Ramah in California

Adapted from remarks given at Ramah's 50th anniversary event

The Future is Now

By Aaron Aftergood

As kids growing up in the '70s and '80s, we spent a lot of time thinking about the future: future schools, future jobs, future families, etcetera. I particularly remember pondering the future with camp friends during my summers in Ojai. As campers, we contemplated the peulot we would plan for our future campers. As counselors, many of us dreamed of better days as Rashei Edah. We spoke of synagogues and Jewish communities we planned to build, and devised plans to be able to spend weeks up at camp when our own children started Nitzanim.

My friends: in case you haven't looked around recently, that future is now. Our Giborei bunkmates are now Rabbis, and our fellow Madorniks serve as Ramah board members and Assistant Directors! It is now our turn to begin participating in the leadership and direction of Ramah and other commu-



Aaron Aftergood prepares for a bike ride in Peru

nity organizations we hold dear. In addition to providing fabulous social, professional and educational opportunities, Chevrei Ramah is the perfect way to stay in close contact with camp and maintain involvement with ongoing projects. In merely a year since its inception, Chevrei Ramah built a roster of new members, produced multiple newsletters, and hosted a bunch of great events! Please ask anyone who attended the Chevrei Ramah alumni weekend in August about how beautiful the camp grounds are, and how inspirational the weekend was.

I look forward to joining the Ramah Board of Directors this upcoming year to help make not only Kayitz '07 the "best ever," but also helping to ensure a ruach-filled chadar ochel for decades to come. Please be in touch with me and others on the Chevrei Ramah committee to contribute to the voice of future edot.

Ramah Celebrates 50 Years

What happens when over 800 Ramah campers, alumni, friends, and staff converge on the hills of Ojai? A day-long song and *simcha* fest overflowing with joy, pride and camaraderie, that's what! On December 3rd, Camp Ramah in California culminated its 50th anniversary year by hosting a one day festival up at camp filled with meaningful activities, tributes, reunions, memories and plans for the future. The highlight of the day's events was a song-filled ceremony honoring the camp's directors spanning its 50 years in existence. The event was a poignant commemoration of the profound impact Camp Ramah has made on American Jewry over the past 50 years, and the large crowd in attendance could attest to camp's growing strength.

Honored at the event were past and present camp directors Rabbi Jacob Pressman and Miriam Wise, Dr. David Lieber, Rabbi Zvi Dershowitz, Dr. Ronald Levine, Rabbi Stuart Kelman, Dr. Israel Spiegler, Dr. Sheldon Dorph, Dr. Alvin Mars, Rabbi Glenn Karonsky, Robin Graff, Rabbi Eddie Feinstein, and Brian Greene. Dr. Chaim Potok and Dr. Walter Ackerman zl" were represented by family members. The ceremony, which was emceed by camp alumnus and NBC investigative reporter Joel Grover, included song, video and spoken tributes presented by decade. The ceremony paid homage to those men and women who have been responsible for shaping the Ramah experience and contributing to the Jewish growth, learning and identity of countless Jewish children across the U.S. western region and beyond. Directors enjoyed reuniting with their former colleagues, and responded to the musical tributes with their own light-hearted satirical song led by Rabbi Jacob Pressman.

Alumni reunions were also a major part of the day's excitement. Across the bottom of the hill, Camp Ramah in California alumni from the '50s, '60s, and '70s all the way up to the present could be seen embracing, schmoozing and catching up. Canopies were set up by decade, allowing alumni to gather with their former *edah'niks*, their counselors, and for those



Zach Lasker leads campers in *shira* at Ramah's 50th Anniversary Gala Celebration

who went on to serve as Ramah staff, their campers.

Guests had the opportunity to participate in their favorite *chugim*, including sports, swim, arts and crafts, Israeli dance, and *shira*. They enjoyed a plentiful barbeque lunch and perused a memorabilia exhibit filled with photos, videos and artifacts collected by alumni and staff showcasing 50 years of Ramah history.

The event honored the past, but it also firmly established Camp Ramah in California's goals for the future. In conjunction with Camp Ramah in California's 50th year, the board launched a capital and endowment campaign aimed at reducing camp tuition, improving facilities, and establishing program and scholarship endowments to ensure that the Ramah experience becomes more accessible and remains on the cutting edge of the American Jewish camping world. Julie Platt, Ramah California's board chair, announced that \$2.5 million has already been raised toward Ramah's goals thanks to the generosity of the Stone Family, Dr. David Braun, Janine and Peter Lowy, and everyone connected with camp's 50th anniversary event.

The *ruach* of everyone present at the event left no doubt that Camp's next 50 years will be even better than the last!

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committed to maintaining their connections to Ramah.

Chevrei Ramah Chanukah Party, New York City

The greater New York area shined with the festive lights of a Camp Ramah in California young alumni reunion on December 16, 2007. Over forty alumni gathered at NYU's Bronfman Center to schmooze, eat sufganiyot, light Chanukah candles, snack on candy, fresh veggies, fruit and home-baked treats, take pictures and schmooze some more. Coordinated by a committee of Ramah California East Coast alumni under the leadership of Betsy Uhrman and Lindsay Stricke, this event was the third to take place in New York over the past year.

Not only did the alumni enjoy a festive night of Chanukah together, they also were able to celebrate Ramah's 50th anniversary from a remote location, reminiscing and rejoicing in the past and future vibrancy of the Ramah community.

We look forward to spending more quality time together and keeping the Ramah experience alive at future weekends, dinners and activities planned by our fabulous alumni association.

Ramah Alumni Make an Impact

By Aaron Aftergood

“This one goes out to Jacob and Aaron,” Guster front-man Ryan Miller shouted into the microphone before launching into a sick version of “One Man Wrecking Machine.” Ryan was acknowledging the efforts of Jacob Harris and Aaron Bisman, 1995 Machonies and co-founders of JDub Records which, according to its website, is “a not-for-profit record and event production company for innovative Jewish music and cross cultural dialogue.”

Jacob Harris and Aaron Bisman are recipients of a unique fellowship awarded by the Joshua Venture, a two-year national fellowship program for Jewish American innovators between the ages of 21–35. The fellowship aims to help young Jewish leaders who are developing original programs that promote a more pluralistic, vibrant, just and inclusive Jewish community.



Aaron Bisman and Jacob Harris at camp, circa 1993

shortly followed. I don’t recall whether or not Bisman acted as booking agent for their first BKR performance.

Despite Bisman’s early experimenta-

When not honing their own musical craft, Harris and Bisman made names for themselves as “best in the business” madrichim. Creative and innovative peulot were their forte, successfully blending the recreational with the educational, but always ensuring separation between the kadosh and the unholy. They were never content with whipping up a batch of oobleck and letting the chanichim run wild.

A particularly memorable evening took place during Kayitz ’99 when Bisman, with the help of this writer and Eric Amster, orchestrated the transformation of the hill into the passenger compartment of an El Al jetliner, for a Zimriyah the likes of which will not soon be forgotten. It is easy to see how Harris and Bisman have truly mastered the concept of the communal Jewish music experience, and why thousands of worldwide Golem, Balkan Beat Box and Matisyahu fans owe Camp Ramah in California a debt of gratitude for helping produce this unstoppable duo.

Kayitz ’05 saw the planning and execu-

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As I sat in the front row of the balcony at the Henry Fonda Theater, I thought about the JDub duo’s undeniable talent for planning excellent events and for all things musical, and how their combined 16 or so summers up in Ojai might have contributed in some way to their ever-growing music industry successes.

From their early years as campers, Harris and Bisman always embodied the avant-garde of the music scene at Fairview Road. I recall the initial practice sessions and inaugural performance showcase of “The Greenes,” Harris’ Kayitz ’95 band formed with Adam Cotton, Daniel Reisman and Yonah Binyomin Weiss. The Fall release of The Greenes’ EP of course

tion with the bass guitar, my most vivid memories of the Giovanni Ribisi look-alike are as a vocalist. From pre-Shabbos nigunim in the shetach showers, to post-Kabbalat Shabbat “Lo Yisa Goy” harmonies on the hill, Bisman’s passion for song was clear. His commitment was solidified upon his enrollment in NYU’s undergraduate music business program. I also have fond memories of his two-year stint as co-rosh shira from 1998-1999.

Harris and Bisman’s pursuit of Jewish music often took them off the Zimmer Conference Center grounds; used record stores in Santa Barbara and Phish shows at Ventura County Fairgrounds were always on the summer agenda.



Edah Notes are all about YOU, Camp Ramah alumni! Please keep us informed of your good news, favorite camp memories, employment, etc. by emailing us at chevrei@ramah.org.

Sayeh Farivar was a Ramah camper from 1991 to 1994 and a counselor in 1996. She currently lives in Los Angeles and works as a genetic counselor for Cedars Sinai Medical Center. Her favorite camp memories include hanging out on the hill on Shabbat afternoons and taking sailing as a mini course in Tzofim.

Leora Wien was a Ramah camper from 1988 to 1993, and a Mador counselor in 1995. Leora attended Wesleyan College, where she completed her B.A. in Cultural Studies. Since then, she has worked as a writer and performer – most recently in the Smart Gals fundraiser for the Midnight Mission and the Creative Rites performance series at Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center in Venice. Her performance, writing and art has been shown and reviewed in *Publisher's Weekly*, *LA Weekly*, *Ciudad LA*, *Tikkun Magazine*, *In Dance* and *LA Splash*. By day, Leora works as the Marketing and Art Director for L.A. Theatre Works, a theater and audio publishing company. Leora fondly recalls Israeli dancing by the *chadar ochel* as one of her favorite Camp Ramah memories.

Earl Weinstein was a camper from 1985 to 1989 and a camp guitar teacher in 1997. He recently moved back to Los Angeles from Boston, where he earned his PhD and worked in venture capital doing biotech seed investments. Earl now works at UCLA where he is working on a seed fund



Leora Wien is a writer, artist and performer. Portrait by Lydia Daniller

and putting together startup deals around UCLA technologies, work he considers to be extremely fun and interesting. Earl's lay involvements include joining the board of the Israel Cancer Research Foundation. He is also involved with local high tech trade organizations. Outside of work, Earl spends his time snowboarding, running and cycling. His favorite camp memories include teaching guitar on the hill and exploring the fantastic nature around camp.

Avi Taff was a camper and counselor for many years up to 1998. Since then, Avi has traveled down a remarkable set of paths. He worked as a counselor at Ramah for a few years, graduated from the University of Arizona, made aliyah, served in the Israeli army, has led several teen trips around Israel and spent two summers working in Camp Ramah's Ezra vocational program for young adults with special needs (most recently in 2006). Avi is currently settled in Los Angeles and is studying at the University of Judaism in the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies.

Simon Faber was a Machon counselor in 1995. After receiving his Bachelor of Commerce degree from McGill University in Montreal, Canada, Simon spent three years in investment banking and equity research concentrated in the healthcare and biotechnology sector. At the beginning

of 2006, he returned to Los Angeles where he is currently working at the Endeavor Agency, training for a career as a motion picture literary agent.

Roseanne (Rusiecki) Lesack has a history of positions at Camp Ramah, spanning more than ten years. She was a Machon camper in 1994 (not!), a counselor from 1997 to 1998, a Rosh Edah from 2002 to 2003, Rosh Chinuch in 2005 and a Tikvah educator in 2006. Roseanne is currently living in New York City and is working toward her doctorate in School Psychology at Fordham University. Roseanne married Marshall Lesack in 2004. The couple is expecting their first child sometime in May. Roseanne's favorite camp memory is stargazing from the hill at night.

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tion of quite possibly the two best events these Ramahniks have ever produced. Bisman married Amanda Pogany whom he met at Pardes Institute in Jerusalem, and Harris married Randi Brookman. Both couples now live in Brooklyn.

JDub is certainly on an upward trend, but its co-founders have not let their success go to their heads. In what can only be described as a cruel and cut-throat business, JDub's humility and passion will continue to serve them well throughout the inevitable Grammy parties and Madison Square Garden sell-outs in their future.

Ojai Fun Facts

There is way more to our summer home than Carrows and the 33! See below for some history, fun facts and cool information on the city that has become loved by us all!

The valley of Ojai was originally home to the Chumash Indians who named the city "Ojai" meaning "the nest" or "valley of the moon".
The city of Ojai is approximately 10 miles long and 3 miles wide.
In 1938, Ojai experienced a massive flood after over 7" of rain fell in a 24-hour period. Many of the shops and restaurants that we all know and love today were destroyed and the city had over \$100,000 in damages.
Ojai is safe!! There have been no murders reported in the last 10 years!
According to the latest census information, the population of Ojai is 7,945.

Ojai is (or has been) home to many celebrities including: Tim Burton, Bill Paxton, Ted Danson & Mary Steenburgen, Howard Hughes, Ellen DeGeneres, Noah Wyle & Johnny Cash!
Ojai's average rainfall is 21.7" a year.
Ojai is home to one university- the World University of America.
In the film, *Hard to Kill*, Steven Seagal's character flees to the city of Ojai!
Think Camp Ramah is the only Jewish establishment in Ojai? Think again!
K'hilat Ha'Alonim is Ojai's very own congregation!
Anyone into the new show "Brothers and Sisters"? Well, the family business is based out of Ojai and is called The Ojai Company.
Oranges are Ojai's largest export.
The trolley in Ojai can take you on an hour tour of the city and surrounding



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Towns for only 50 cents!
There are nine high schools within Ojai- seven of which are private.
Signal Street got its name since it was the first (and for a while the only) signal in the downtown area of Ojai.
Many of the restaurants (and our very own kitchen!) in Ojai feature a dish with the name "Topa Topa" in it- named after the famous mountains that serve as a backdrop to the city.
It is rumored that Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball owned the small pink house right off of the 33 as you head into Ojai.



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