

Shalom Ramah families,

After a full year of preparing for this season – marketing, recruiting, staffing, new construction, training, and program development - the campers are almost here.

Our staff arrived on Tuesday night, and we said a “*shehechyanu*” blessing as we inaugurated the new dining rooms of the Hadar Ochel. Even after a long travel day, it was thrilling to gather in this splendid new space.

This week the staff members are becoming familiar with the amazing human resources that we have gathered together. The staff is primarily comprised of the wonderful young people who have grown up at Ramah Wisconsin and who return in the summer to work with our campers. Added “*pilpel*” or “spice” are those folks whom we gather from across the Jewish world to share their music, art, drama, sports, Hebrew, Judaic, swimming and boating talents. As I write this, a clarinetist is warming up outside my office. We have an amazing group of keyboard and string players too. In other parts of the camp, each edah (age division) staff is reviewing basic child development concepts, programming skills, and group work principles. In the woods, our ropes staff is taking part in a four-day professional training seminar. The sports staff are hanging the nets and getting the softball field game ready.

As a staff we play together, daven together, study education and Judaism together. Staff members who have spent their academic semesters all over the world - Israel, North America, South America, Asia and Europe - are sharing their stories and getting ready to welcome the campers on June 16.

On Friday night, after great *zemirot* singing at dinner we will have a “study slam.” The staff is preparing a potpourri of mini-courses taught by the staff and for the staff. Over 20 mini-courses are already on the roster. It’ll be a wonderful way to share both intellectual and cultural experiences from the past year.

All of us know that it has been a difficult year for many of our families. The staff are talking about the impact of the economy on their universities, their financial aid support, and their own families at home. There is a palpable sense that it feels good for them to be together again here at Ramah. There is an emanating force of inspiration and nurture that flows from this staff coming together. During morning services today, people were singing harmonies and melodies and drawing together (and it wasn’t only because of the cool breeze outside).

The geese fly over camp as they return to the north and pause for a breather at Camp Ramah. Our staff, in the midst of their own Jewish journeys, come home to Ramah to recharge, reconnect and prepare to mentor our campers.

This Shabbat we read Parshat Behalotecha. In Numbers, chapter 9, there is a description of the journey of B’nai Yisrael as they carried the Tabernacle in the desert. A cloud covered the Tabernacle both day and night. Rabbi Eli Garfinkel, writes in *Mikraot Ramah*, our edition of the summer Torah readings:

“Another possibility is that these verses (Numbers 9:17-23) talk about a different kind of a journey. People make physical journeys and spiritual journeys. A person can stay in one place physically but change in the spiritual sense. Perhaps the cloud described here not only regulated how B’nai Yisrael traveled while in the desert, but also the development of their characters and souls.”

Our summer 2009 journey is underway. Our campers and staff travel from north, south, east and west to meet at Ramah Wisconsin. In just a few days, we will greet the campers as they bound off the buses, ready for the fun and adventure of this Jewish spiritual journey called camp. We are so excited to welcome them to their summer home!

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi David Soloff, Director