

Shalom Ramah Families,

The first few days of camp have a unique rhythm: traveling, unpacking, meeting new people, transitioning, exploring, and playing. Every age plays. Kids make up games, bring games from home and teach friends. Some kids put on funny clothes for an opening cabin game. Many of the youngest campers enjoy rolling down the grassy hill in front of the new Hadar Ochel (dining hall). The older kids want to be part of the fun so they join in too!

On Monday we were an empty camp in the woods. Within a day we became a Jewish neighborhood.

Over the course of the first day and a half, each of the campers picked their activities for the first month, started their Hebrew and Judaica learning, began their swimming classes, learned new repertoire for an opening music festival, auditioned for shows, and played a lot of sports.

Yesterday, a group of middle school girls were waiting for an activity to begin and they organized themselves into a large circle. A counselor taught them a routine that she had learned somewhere along the way and suddenly 40 girls were preparing a skit for their entire edah (division). On the basketball court an entire edah of the younger boys was playing a game with their counselors that combined soccer and basketball. A group of girls were playing catch.

A young girl was walking across the lawn with her earphones firmly in place. She passed directly in front of me. I said, "Shalom," or at least tried to as she was deeply absorbed in her listening. I waved and got her attention and started to remind her that we ask folks not to wear earphones around camp. Before I said two words she said, "Oh - Shalom - sorry - I know - no earphones outside but I am trying to remember the words to the song I want to sing for my audition. Would it be ok if I wear them while I practice?" I smiled and replied, "Sure, it's fine - see you later."

On Wednesday I went for a run late in the afternoon. It was a hot day but it started to ease off by late afternoon. Running at Ramah Wisconsin is a delight. It is about a kilometer around the campus. Each curve has different views- the lake, the fields, the woods. Many campers and staff love to walk or run around the perimeter of the camp. It is not for a race although we will have races. It is just for the fun of it. If one were to pick a spot late afternoon and watch walkers and runners go by you would see all ages, campers and staff, girls and guys. Almost no one is alone. It is like sailing together on the lake or a study *hevruta* in our Beit Midrash. They circle the camp in twos threes and fours almost always talking as they go.

That special place called the Kikar, our village square, has been refreshed. It has new grass, a little steeper slope and beautiful lake views. With all the new construction and landscaping we have altered some of the paths connecting the different areas of camp.

We explained this to each age group. I was sitting on the side of the grass and I saw a camper determined to climb the split rail fence and take a short cut. I went over and introduced myself and asked if he had heard the explanation. He sheepishly grinned and then I asked him how he would suggest setting shared rules of the road. I think I got his “buy-in” but we will see.

So much of the first week is all about basic community building, accepting and sharing some responsibilities and making connections with each other. How we play, eat, observe Shabbat, set up our cabins and share resources are the threads that we weave together to form this wonderful quilt we call our Ramah Wisconsin community.

Kol Hakavod (Congratulations) to the campers and staff. The first week of camp is filled with fun but it is also hard work. Early in the season some of our first-time campers have those moments where they feel a bit sad or miss home. Step by step they figure it out and make room for camp in their lives. Before long camp becomes a special place, offering so many opportunities. It is not that they love home less but that they add a new dimension to how they envision their world.

In Pirkei Avot, Chapter 2, Mishneh 21, Rabbi Tarfon taught, “You are not obliged to finish the task, but neither are you free to neglect it.”

We are honored to be partners with you in the sacred task of working with your children.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi David Soloff, Director