

Shalom Ramah Families,

It was a cold, damp, rainy, windy, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday! Is this really summer? It is a bit reminiscent of the old Alan Sherman parody, "Hello Mudda, Hello Fadda, here I am at Camp Granada. Camp is very entertaining and they say we'll have some fun when it stops raining." The Israeli staff have asked if we could send just one week's worth of rain to the Galilee to help raise the level of Lake Kinneret! The good news is that by Thursday it had stopped raining and we have sunny skies and 70's in the forecast.

Fortunately we have ample indoor space both for athletics and the arts. There are play rehearsals, fitness groups, basketball, painting hugim and Hebrew ulpanim. We were able to squeeze in an outdoor inter-edah (division) basketball game between Solelim and Shoafim when the rain took a late afternoon break on Tuesday. Oh yes - the new lawns have never looked greener!

We dedicated our opening Music Festival Sunday evening to the 100th anniversary of the founding of Tel Aviv. Campers in every edah learned songs from Tel Aviv's past and present and sang them in front of the camp population. It was great to unleash the energy of the entire camp in an evening of singing and dancing. Camp-wide events like the Zimriah song festival, the Rekudiah dance festival and the edah musical productions are unique camp happenings. They provide moments that both campers and staff recall all during the year and provide memories for years to come. As a matter of fact, when we welcomed the Nivonim 1996 reunion last Shabbat, they laughed as they remembered their Nivonim play. It was an "experimental" production which they wrote and choreographed. With just a bit of prompting they broke into song, remembering most of the words.

On Tuesday morning, we had 32 staff members and campers who joined our optional early morning fitness workout! There were campers and first year staff. There were "old timers" and "first timers." There were rabbis and swim staff, Hebrew faculty and cabin counselors. People came dressed to work out, brought their towels, and amidst some healthy skepticism joined the opening exercise of a mile jog around the camp. The session is overseen by our head fitness coach, Shimrit Gigi. She leads the session in Hebrew but demonstrates each exercise so that everyone knows what to do. We use stabilization balls and Bosu platform balls, tension tubes and ankle tubes. Everyone does stretching and push ups and of course the favorite, abdominal crunches or as Shimrit calls them, "crunchim." Josh Gleicher, who heads our sports department, incorporates our fitness program into activities throughout the day for all the age groups. It is a ton of fun.

On Monday and Tuesday we hosted Chancellor Arnie Eisen of the Jewish Theological Seminary. JTS is the academic parent for all the Ramah camps. Seven JTS graduate students, numerous JTS undergraduate students and several JTS faculty are members of our Ramah Wisconsin staff. National Ramah Director Rabbi Mitch Cohen accompanied Chancellor Eisen to camp. Our camp works closely year round with the professional and lay leadership of all the Ramah camps across North America and Israel. We are part of a

Ramah movement that serves over 9,000 campers and staff each summer, affiliating together under the umbrella of the National Ramah Commission. Each camp operates independently, being responsible for our own budgets and capital fund raising. Dr. Jeff Kopin, president of Ramah Wisconsin along with Mort Steinberg, past president of Ramah Wisconsin and the National Ramah Commission, also joined the visit.

Professor Eisen met with hundreds of our campers and staff to share his vision for a renewed Jewish community. He discussed the landscape of the denominations, the possibilities for new synergisms between our shuls, schools, camps and JTS. He also listened carefully as staff members had opportunities to share their thoughts about how Ramah has impacted their lives. He taught material from Abraham Joshua Heschel and Mordechai Kaplan and engaged many folks in discussions.

Ramah Wisconsin is a place where kids can do “crunchim,” meet international Jewish scholars and leaders, experiment with ways to engage in daily davening, shoot hoops, and roast potatoes around a campfire. On Tuesday, after some explanations and short discussions, everyone from the oldest to the youngest campers wore a yellow ribbon to call attention to the third anniversary of the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

In the morning tefillot the opening blessings include a series of Berachot about the physical acts of waking up and starting the day. One blessing states, “Praised are You, Lord our God, who releases the bound.”

Camp is so much about releasing the bonds that bind us physically, spiritually, and socially. Spending time outdoors, stretching and playing, releases the bonds that sometimes tie us in knots during the year. Meeting new friends, exploring new ideas and discovering new interests releases other bonds that sometimes can hold each of us back. All this is happening every day in a fun Jewish neighborhood called Ramah Wisconsin.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi David Soloff, Director