

Shalom Ramah Families,

On Thursday afternoon I had an opportunity to share some experiences with campers from our Tikvah program. The Rosh Edah, Yael Buechler asked me to share memories from the 1960's. What did I remember from the Civil Rights protest movement? The edah had spent time discussing related topics as part of their Tisha B'Av discussion program.

The request took me back to high school in Toms River, New Jersey, in 1964. I remembered attending the USY International Convention. The delegation from New York had proposed a resolution supporting a Civil Rights platform. A delegate rose from Florida to say that while she supported the resolution she was afraid to vote "yes" for fear of a backlash when she returned home. What would the neighbors say? I remembered feeling smug as a "righteous northerner."

Then two years ago I was visiting friends in New York City and happened upon an exhibit at the NYC museum. A Civil War era cemetery had been uncovered in lower Manhattan. It held the graves of former slaves. I only then learned that slavery was lawful in New York City into the 1820's and that New Jersey was a slave state through the first decades of the 19th century. My New Jersey high school did not include this history when we studied the period. We never spoke about how the races lived on opposite sides of the railway track that ran through our town.

One of the campers asked me a couple of questions that at first seemed off topic. Did I say a prayer to open the school day when I was in public school? Did I sing carols during December holiday pageants?

My description of 1960's high school experiences about Civil Rights triggered a series of questions about dissonance. As a Jew did you conform or stand apart? As a Jew did you have different values than your neighbors? Did you act differently?

This brief encounter with campers is one small example of hundreds of conversations that take place across camp on any given day. Our campers and staff feel so much at home while at camp. They develop strong feelings of trust with each other and with the staff. They ask questions, share ideas, and are comfortable sticking their intellectual necks out. They share their lives and listen to each other's stories and experiences.

Many times campers will ask about how being Jewish makes a difference.

Amidst all the fun, the sports, the arts, and the swimming the kids share their life stories. All ages, all edot, every person finds his or her own way to share stories. What a responsibility we have to both listen and carefully respond! What an opportunity we have to teach about being Jewish.

Many of our kids know about the Madoff scandal and the recent mass arrests in New Jersey. Do these scandals reflect on us as Jews or are they perceived as isolated incidents

by crooked individuals? Does having a grounding in Jewish experience and a strong Jewish education make a difference in the long run about how people will act? At camp we play and we also daven. We run 5K's and also observe Shabbat. We perform musical theater and observe Tisha B'Av. We shoot hoops and we celebrate Tel Aviv's 100 anniversary.

I would like to think that what we do together does make a difference. Acting out of our Jewish perspective we can contribute to making the world a better place.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi David Soloff, Director