

DAROM

MAYA AVIV

Former *mishlachat* member

[Translated from the Hebrew by Rabbi Mitchell Cohen, National Ramah Director.]

Before I arrived at Ramah Darom, I was very disconnected from the world of religion. Although my mother grew up in a religious home, I never personally related to the religious aspects of Judaism. Kashrut, Friday-night kiddush, and fasting on Yom Kippur were not part of my life. During our training for Camp Ramah, we learned about Conservative Judaism. This created a great conflict for me as I struggled with the notion of attending *tefillot* and observing Shabbat during the two months of camp. After observing a Shabbat during the training seminar, I called my father, crying hysterically, and asked “How am I going to do this?”

Amazingly, during the two months of camp, my perspective changed radically. I quickly adjusted to the routine of attending morning services,

reciting *birkat hamazon* after each meal, observing Shabbat, saying the *Shema*, and so on. I recall waiting with great anticipation for the beginning of Shabbat and for the beautiful *havdalah* service. These activities that were so foreign to me at first became an integral part of who I am and ever since, have added beauty and meaning to my life. Camp Ramah awakened within me my Jewish soul.

When I returned to Israel after camp, I reentered the world of “Maya the secular Israeli.” Slowly, over time, I found myself being drawn closer and closer to Shabbat observance, daily prayer, and other Jewish rituals. . . .

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Camp Ramah for the religious inspiration that has changed my life so powerfully.