

CANADA

BENNY GAMLIELI

Former *mishlahat* member

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

Camp Ramah has had a major impact on my family. From a social perspective, my two sons Omer and Itai developed many close friendships at camp and have kept many of those friendships well beyond their camper years. When their North American friends from camp came to Israel, they always called and often visited, which was great for my sons and also helped to connect their American and Canadian friends to real life in Israel.

But the biggest influence that Ramah had upon my sons was in the area of religious development, particularly prayer. Omer and Itai had one set of grandparents from Yemen and one set from Romania. Each summer when we traveled to Camp Ramah, my boys would get excited about the Conservative prayers, which were more understandable to them than the liturgy they were used to. They enjoyed praying with boys and girls together, and they particularly loved all of the camp melodies. When we'd return to Eilat after the summer, we would return home from our Yemenite synagogue, and they would sing with all their hearts—*birkat hamazon*, *havdalah*, and other prayers that they had learned at camp—using the tunes that reminded them of the summer.

To this day my sons, who are now grown up and living in New York, make me extraordinarily happy and proud because they put on tefillin each morning, even though I do not. And every Friday and Saturday, they go to *beit keneset*. This is all because of the influence of Camp Ramah in Canada. I have no doubt that the “window” that was opened for them on their souls at Camp Ramah in Canada helps them to this day and maintains within them a strong sense of their religious roots, even though they are living far from home. And I have no doubt that Ramah continues to have a very strong impact on Israelis of all ages who come to camp.

60