

CALIFORNIA NEW ENGLAND · WISCONSIN

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In the course of my junior year at Hebrew University, I met dozens of Ramahniks from across the United States and Canada and was impressed with their common commitment to Jewish life, as well as by their unbridled enthusiasm about Ramah. While completing a degree in Jewish studies and earning a teaching credential in Chicago, I decided to apply to the local Ramah camp—Wisconsin—for a summer position. I was heading to law school at the University of Southern California in the fall, and I saw this as an interesting, one time experience. Little did I know. . . .

I was interviewed for a position as a counselor by the camp director, Rabbi Burton Cohen, in the spring of 1973. The interview, conducted in Hebrew, probed my understanding of the meaning and implications of a camp that defined itself as “*dati, hinnuchi, ivri.*” The depth of the interview was an apt prelude to the experience of being part of a community that thought about the Jewish educational significance of every activity, 24/7. From waking up campers, to seating in the dining hall, to relationships on the sports fields, to *tefillah*, Shabbat, and more—every aspect of life was the subject of deliberate action and reflection. Among the many exceptional educators whom I met that summer was Yosi Gordon, then the associate principal of Los Angeles Hebrew High School. Rabbi Gordon suggested that I join the faculty of L.A. Hebrew High, if only on a part-time basis while attending law school—an offer that I readily accepted.

Over the ensuing three years, while studying and teaching, I spent summers as a *rosh edah* at Camp Ramah, Ojai. The principal of L.A. Hebrew High, Rabbi Sheldon Dorph, was (and remains) a remarkable, educational personality. It was through contact with Rabbi Dorph, and the educational vision that animated him, that I began to think of Jewish education as a full-time calling. It was at L.A. Hebrew High and Ramah that I met Robin and, as Ramah celebrates its sixtieth anniversary, we will be marking our thirtieth.

By the early 1980s, Ramah was, for both of us, a year-round second home. One day, a call came from New York, inquiring about my possible interest in being considered for the position of director of Camp Ramah in New England. Neither Robin nor I had ever visited the area, let alone seen the Palmer camp. However, we did know from experiences at Wisconsin and Ojai, the power of the Ramah experience.

Our years at Camp Ramah in New England were extraordinary. In Palmer, as in Ramah Wisconsin and California, we interacted with outstanding, highly dedicated men and women. Some were accomplished senior educators; others were in the early stages of preparing for leadership roles in Jewish life as active *ba'alei battim*, clergy, and educators.

For the past twenty-plus years, I have served as an executive at the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education. I have no doubt that my choice to engage in such work is due to the ten summers that I spent at Ramah camps. Thank you to all who have created and who help sustain the experience called Ramah.