

BERKSHIRES · NYACK · WISCONSIN

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I was always interested in Jewish tradition from the time I was very young although I didn't grow up in a halachically observant home. I was thrilled to go to Israel on the Ramah Community Program (part of Ramah Seminar) in 1970. There I met Rabbi Al Thaler and soon-to-be-Rabbi Herb Kavon, who later co-officiated at my wedding. But I still hadn't imbibed the kind of Ramah experience that made such an impression on me later.

During my senior year in high school, my teacher in Hebrew high school at Marathon Jewish Community Center in Little Neck, Queens, was Sandy Goldstein. She told me I *must* go to Ramah. She said the Mador program was for me. And so I applied, was accepted, and went that summer to Ramah in the Berkshires. I owe a lot to Sandy!

That first summer I was on staff in the youngest *edah*, Nitzanim. I didn't know much about daily prayer, Shabbat, and so forth. I remember that Phil Warmflash, one of the counselors in my *edah*, gave many of the *divrei torah* during *shaharit*. I probably learned more about daily prayer that summer than at any other time in my life. The same is true regarding Shabbat and *zemiroth*. Later on, I made those elements mine by intense study and teaching about them. But in the summer of 1973, my soul was almost a clean slate at the perfect time to have deep Jewish experiences etched upon it.

I studied Talmud for the first time that summer. I remember sitting in the *sifriyyah* with our teacher, Ranon Katzoff. We studied part of *massechet Berachot* in the Hebrew Steinsaltz edition. I didn't follow most of it, but I fell in love with it. There was a serious-looking fellow who used to walk around with no kids to look after, and I wondered who he was. I found out he was Rabbi Neil Gillman, the professor-in-residence. Later Rabbi Gillman became a teacher of mine, then a colleague, mentor, and friend.

Among the friends I met that summer were Paul Saposh, z"l, Bill David, and Laurie Mark. Paul and Bill became lifelong friends. Laurie became my wife. We're proud to have a plaque up on the couples' wall at Ramah in the Berkshires.

I later served on staff at Ramah Nyack for two years. (Little did I know then that I would be the rabbi at the Conservative synagogue in Nyack from 1984 to 2004!) I transferred to Wisconsin Ramah because my girlfriend Laurie was from Minnesota, and Wisconsin was her home camp. I spent several summers on staff at Wisconsin. My love for *kabbalat shabbat* services deepened

as the entire camp community gathered on Friday nights in front of Lake Buckatabon in Wisconsin.

It was at Ramah Wisconsin that Rabbi Bezalel “Buzzy” Porten provided me with a background in literary analysis of prayer and Bible that is still the basis for what I teach. Buzzy shared the beginnings of a translation and commentary on the siddur that he had written. He also exposed me to Cassuto’s commentary on the Torah.

I want to say “Thank you!” to Camp Ramah. I owe a great deal of my love for Torah to you!