

CALIFORNIA · CONNECTICUT NEW ENGLAND · POCONOS

RABBI STUART KELMAN

Founding Rabbi, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, California

Robert Alter, Robert Chazan, Ray Arzt, David Mogilner, z”l, Walter Ackerman, z”l, Gloria (Sussman) Silverman, z”l, Zalman Schachter Shalomi, Zvi Dershowitz, Saul Wachs, Shmuel Leiter, z”l, Gladys Gewirtz, Shalom Schwartz, David Lieber, z”l, Lee Levine, Nat Entin, z”l, Uri Simon—these are some of the people who were my counselors, teachers, camp directors, and mentors at Camp Ramah. Barry Chazan, Jeff Tigay, Ed Bruckner, Dan Ziff, z”l, Gail Zaiman, Shelly Dorph, Elliot Dorff, Joel Rembaum, Robert Goldenberg, Vicky Koltun, Liz Koltun, Judy Narrowe, Alan Mintz (both of them)—memories of those whom I counted as friends, co-workers, and campers all flood back as I sit down to write this reflection.

The above are only a few of the names that now float up to my consciousness. There were others—many, many others who had a profound influence on my thoughts, my actions, and my life. To those who taught me Jewish texts, to those who influenced my passion for music, to those who were able to help me synthesize that love for music with the love of liturgy and probe the deeper meaning to which liturgy was a response, to those who showed me that Judaism’s message was truly revolutionary and not simply evolutionary, to those who by example were constantly striving to improve and change the world we live in, to those who gave me the tools to relate to others, and to those who gave me the hope and courage to choose a career and a life devoted to passing on these teachings and experiences—I owe a debt far greater than words can express. The words from *kaddish derabbanan* echo in my mind: *talmidei talmideihem*—the students of their students. The teachings I garnered from my teachers at Ramah live on in me, in my students, and in the students of my students.

From Ramah in Connecticut to Massachusetts, to the Poconos, and to California—memories of a river and canoe trips, of Warren Edwards the caretaker of Connecticut, the haunted house, the Sukkah, to side Aleph and side Bet, to LTF and Super-LTF, to the *beit am*, the waterfront, *etz hatefillah*, the “new” *sifriyyah*, the *matzevah*, to the “old camp,” the “new camp,” the long road between, Orchidtown, the “townies”—the journey of just one person going from east to west and from external to internal.

Eight messages and meanings that I’ve learned:

1. Judaism is all embracing in terms of how one lives and how one relates to others.

2. Hebrew is a linking mechanism, and one can't really appreciate the depths of Jewish culture without learning *leshon hakodesh*.

3. The self-contained community that Ramah offers can be construed as an ideal, which living in real life can only come close to replicating.

4. The power of the peer group (community) cannot be underestimated.

5. Experimentation is a core fact in education. Ramah encouraged us to create something fresh, not merely repeat.

6. Individuals can change the world—sure, it sounds like a 1960s bumper-sticker—but sometimes those pieces of paper hint at a deep truth.

7. People influence people to change. Modeling works. My list of names above could have started with the phrase: “I want to be like. . . .”

8. Not everything is black or white, or we would not be living in the twenty-first century. Colors and gray and variation is what makes life so interesting—and choices so hard.

I can identify the person (colleague, friend, teacher, student, camper) who passed each of the above teachings on to me. Everyone came from Ramah.

Most important: help those you love to have a comparable Camp Ramah experience but don't expect that they will take away the same things from it that you did. We all found our individual paths to Judaism. Help your community maintain strong Ramah camps for all its children.

May Ramah grow and evolve and flourish while still remaining faithful to its founding vision.