

CALIFORNIA - NEW ENGLAND - NYACK

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My life's journey took me down a path of no return when I spent my first summer as a camper at Ramah in Palmer, Massachusetts, in 1968. From that point on, I felt the only time I matured each year and learned about life and

friendships was during the eight weeks I was at Camp Ramah. At age twelve, I was buddies with a camper in the Tikvah program. Although I thought that I needed to help her do or learn things, it was she who taught me to look at what someone with special needs can do. I was blessed with the opportunity to dance with Tirza Hodes, who was among the pioneers of Israeli dance and was a member of the Palmer *mishlahat*. She shared her love of dance, of Israel, of children, and of life. She had a strong personality coupled with a smile that could make anyone dance. Tirza became my first Israeli dance mentor, teaching me Israeli dances while teaching me about our culture and our people.

I had another life-changing experience when I went to Israel for the first time with Ramah Seminar in 1973. Seeing Israel with close friends with whom I had already shared such intense experiences at camp, meeting relatives for the first time and being proud to tell them I was traveling for six weeks with other American teenagers, and meeting Israelis who shared their passion for the land and its people—all contributed to creating my strong connection with Israel.

I can honestly say that the choices I made as a teenager and later in my adult life have largely been the result of my experiences with Ramah. I have dedicated my life to giving back to Ramah, the Jewish community, and to Israel. I became a counselor at Ramah Nyack in the summer of 1974 and went on to be a *seganit rosh edah* for one year. Shulamit Kivel (also my Israeli dance mentor) supported and encouraged me to be *rosh rikkud*, a position I held for six years.

After living in Israel, where I taught pre-school children with special needs and received an Israeli Dance Instructor's Certification from the Ministry of Education, I returned to the United States to earn my Master's degree in Special Education and Creative Movement. Then I accepted a teaching job in California, where I met and married Rami Gilboa. Early in our relationship, it was clear to Rami that Ramah was going to be a part of our lives. In 1990 I became rosh rikkud at Ramah in Ojai, California for the summer camp program, as well as the yearly Family Camp. Our children's early years were spent in the loving arms of campers and staff at Ramah. After seven years of being a camper, Talia went on Ramah Seminar 2005 and Aviv went on Seminar 2007. (I must say that receiving daily e-mails is quite different than the communication system we had when I was on Seminar in 1973.) Following their summers on Seminar, without hesitation, both Talia and Aviv applied to be counselors. They would say that it was not only important to their parents but that it was also important to them to give back to Ramah, and that the best way to give back was to give other kids the kinds of experiences that they had when they were campers.

I'm proud to be a Jewish educator who has had the opportunity for the past thirty-five years to teach and share the love of Israeli dance with hundreds and hundreds of Jewish children and adults.

The influence of my family, the synagogue where I grew up, and my rabbi, Albert Thaler, who first suggested that I go to Ramah and later was director of Ramah Nyack, cannot be understated in my choice of career. As a Jewish educator, the passion and love I have when teaching Israeli dance, along with my desire to create and direct programs for children with special needs, comes directly from my earliest experiences at Camp Ramah.