

BERKSHIRES NEW ENGLAND - POCONOS

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A camper at Ramah Berkshires (1966–1971), a counselor at Berkshires and Poconos (1973–1976), and then a *yo'etz* and educator at New England (1993–2000), my memories of Ramah span three phases of my life: childhood, young adulthood, and fatherhood. Ramah enhanced each of those three distinctive times.

As a camper at Ramah, I was happily surprised to find an observant Conservative Jewish community. I had been familiar with two different kinds of marginalization: a Conservative kid in an Orthodox *yeshivah ketannah* in Paterson, New Jersey, where the principal made it a point to tell the children not to attend worship services in my father's synagogue, and the rabbi's son in that congregation, where the other children and their parents expected my family to be vicariously observant for the entire membership. Ramah was a delightful glimpse of what an elite, yet real and functioning, Jewish community could be like. Kashruth, Shabbat, *tefillah*, and *talmud torah* were norms of life, along with swimming, baseball, drama, nature, and hospital corners. No wonder that I made the most intense friendships of my young life in those summers. Forty years later, I still keep up with some of my peers from camp.

As a counselor, I learned critical lessons about responsibility, about education, and about functioning in loco parentis, at just the period in my life when I was committing to a career as a Jewish educator. To this day, I consider the education class I took with Rabbi David Mogilner, *z"l*, as the most effective, single course that shaped my subsequent professional work.

As a *yo'etz*, and one of the “old men on campus” in a community staffed predominantly by eighteen- to twenty-three-year-olds, I gained a unique appreciation of the chain of generations upon which Jewish continuity depends. Acutely aware of both the limitations and the immense promise of the apprentice adults to whom we entrust the summertime education and care of our children,

I found it powerfully satisfying to guide them, from behind the scenes whenever possible, to grow into their own careers as shapers of the next generation.

