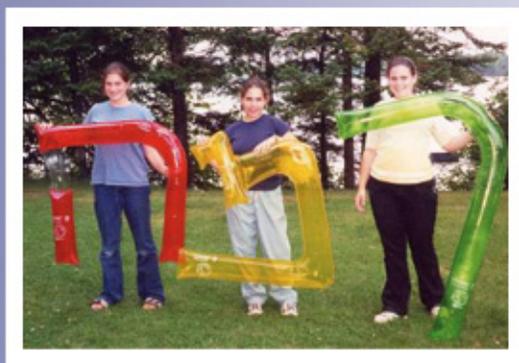


# *The Camping Experience 1995-1999*

The Impact of Jewish Summer Camping on the  
Conservative High School Seniors of the "Four Up" Study

*by Ariela Keysar and Barry A. Kosmin*



*Reflections and  
Policy Implications  
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*Reflections and Policy*  
*Implications for Ramah*  
*by Sheldon Dorph*



*A Report for the National Ramah Commission*  
*of the Jewish Theological Seminary*

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Camp Ramah was founded by a group of Chicago rabbis and volunteer leaders in 1947. It has grown from a single camp in Wisconsin into a network of summer sleep-away camps, day camps, family camps, and year-round programs that operates in North America, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Israel under the educational and religious supervision of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Its mission statement, which was revised for the 1990s, makes it clear that its primary purpose is educational and aims to encourage Conservative Judaism, mold the movement's leaders and enrich the lives of staff and campers in all aspects of Judaism. It also has Zionist aspirations and Hebrew is the public language of the camps.

The goal of this report is to examine how far Ramah succeeds in achieving its aims of imparting the practices and values of Conservative Judaism to its campers. The methodology is a comparative analysis of young people exposed to the influence of Ramah and those not so exposed. It asks crucial questions about the impact of summer camps on a representative sample of one annual cohort of teenagers raised in Conservative congregations, the B'nai Mitzvah class of 5755/1995. A unique aspect of this evaluation is that the respondents are part of the JTS Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism's longitudinal "Four Up" study and have been interviewed on two occasions, first in 1995 and then again in 1999.

The most comprehensive assessment of the impact of Ramah Camps on teenage religious behavior to date was Sheldon Dorph's 1976 study of Hebrew High School students in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. He compared the behavior of teens who attended Ramah for at least one month during the previous two summers to students who had attended other Jewish sleep-away camps during these years. Dorph found that although at the descriptive level Ramah correlated with greater religiosity, once controls were introduced into the analysis for family background and location, Ramah had only a selective relationship to teenage religious behavior (Dorph, 1976, p.303).

Ramah has changed as an organization since 1976. It has become responsive to the more egalitarian and co-educational religious culture of Conservative Judaism and it has operated in a more conducive American social environment with a greater receptivity to religion and multi-culturalism. It has also become a more sophisticated educational institution that has incorporated much of the latest pedagogy and social science insights into its practice.

The respondents in this longitudinal study consist of panels of young people who were B'nai Mitzvah in Conservative synagogues across North America in 5755/1995. They were first interviewed by telephone in 1995 when they were 13 or 14 years old during the year following their bar/bat mitzvah, a period of intense religious training and close contact with the rabbi, synagogue and Jewish peers. In total 1,466 teenagers and 1,412 parents were interviewed by telephone in Phase I. They were chosen from a stratified sample of 115 synagogues across North America. In Phase II, the High School Survey, the young Jews were re-contacted in the summer and fall of 1999 when most were entering their senior year in high school. The survey instrument was largely a replica of the 1995 questionnaire in order to ensure comparability, track students' answers and identify changes in attitudes. By the end of Phase II we had re-interviewed 1,295: 89% of the 1995 respondents. This is a very high level of cooperation and response by teenagers to a survey that offered no incentives for participation.

It is very important to remember that all the respondents in this study are a sample of young people raised in homes where parents were members of synagogues associated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. All the parents were synagogue members in 1995 and 93% had maintained their membership through 1999. In addition, this is a select and homogeneous cohort not only in terms of age but also in terms of religious education and socialization, since 90% had received five years or more of Jewish education prior to 1995. Thus we are effectively testing for differences within a group which represented the youth of Conservative Judaism at age 13. Specifically we are interested in studying the effect of summer camping as an independent variable in shaping the Jewish identity of these youngsters as they graduate high school.

## *Attendance at Jewish Summer Camp*

Table 1 shows that 71% of today’s Conservative Jewish teenagers, attended a Jewish summer camp at least once during their youth. Already at ages 13-14, over 60% of B’nai and B’not Mitzvah had experienced about three years of summer camp. Most of them went to day camps: about one-third attended a Y or JCC summer camp, around a quarter attended Camp Ramah. Who are these teenagers? How different are their Jewish attitudes and behavior from those of teenagers who never attended Jewish summer camps? Are there any correlations between the particular Jewish summer camp experience and their Jewish behavior or attitudes?

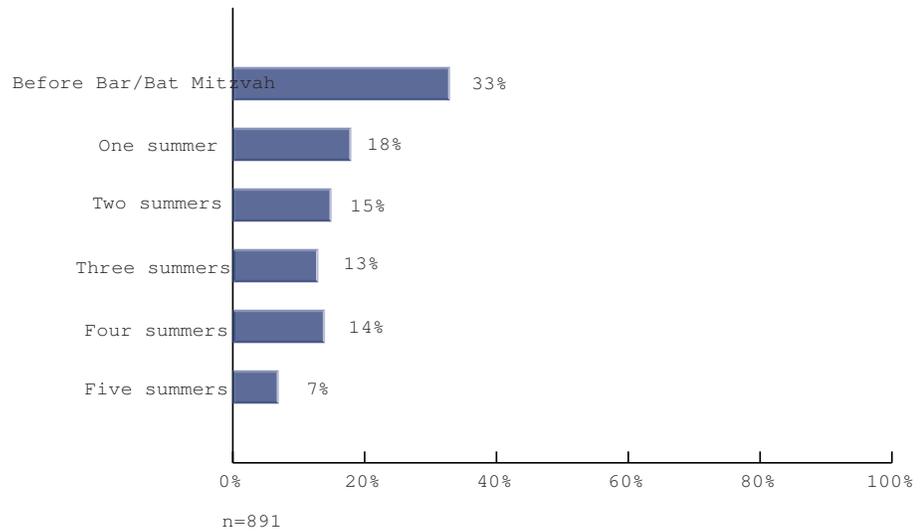
**Table 1: Attendance at Jewish Summer Camp**

<b>Attended Summer Camp</b>		<b>Total %</b>
Attended Jewish summer camp	914	71
Never attended Jewish summer camp	381	29
<b>Total Sample</b>	1295	100

In terms of the overall cumulative pattern of attendance in Jewish summer camps shown in Chart 1, we find that one-third of campers drop out of regular attendance after their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, but that one-fifth attend four or five summers during their high school years, by which time they become counselors or counselors in training.

The pattern of attendance for Ramah campers is very similar to that for Jewish summer camps in general. Over one-third of Ramah campers at age 13 dropped out of Ramah after their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Of course, a considerable number of these respondents later attended other Jewish summer camps. One-quarter of high school Ramah campers attended four or five summers during their high school years. This latter group represents the most committed Ramah cohort with the most intense Jewish summer experience. We will test to find out whether this high level of Ramah exposure is also translated into a higher level of Jewish commitments.

**Chart 1: Frequency of Attendance at Jewish Summer Camps Before and Since Bar/Bat Mitzvah**



## *Characteristics of Jewish Summer Campers*

### **A. Gender**

In general, camping is a co-educational activity, 74% of girls and 68% of boys in our sample attended Jewish summer camps at some time. Among Ramah campers there is also a balance of the sexes (91 boys and 85 girls). Table 2 below represents the gender composition of teenagers who attended Jewish summer camps versus those who never did, showing that the latter group has a higher percentage of boys.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 2: Percentage of Summer Camp Attendees and Non-attendees by Gender**

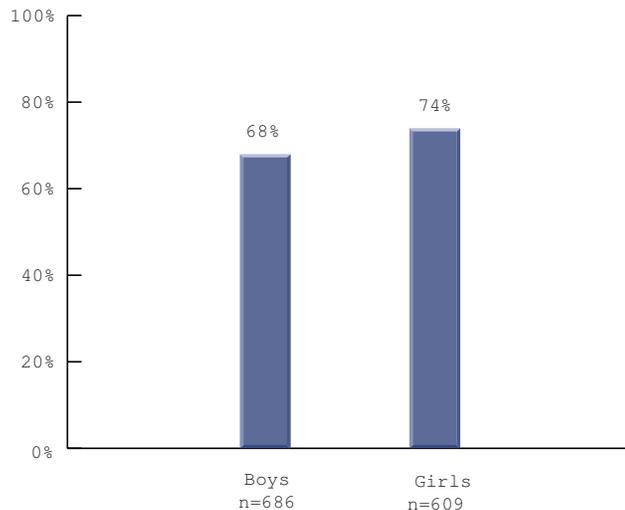
	Male	Female	Total
Attended Jewish summer camp	51	49	100
Never attended	58	42	100
<b>Total (n=1,295)</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>
p<0.05			

<sup>1</sup> The High School Survey and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survey include more boys than girls. The higher proportion of boys reflects our finding that boys are more likely than girls to undergo the Bar/Bat Mitzvah rite of passage in the Conservative movement.

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**Chart 2: Percentage of Each Gender Attending Jewish Summer Camp**

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## **B. Geography**

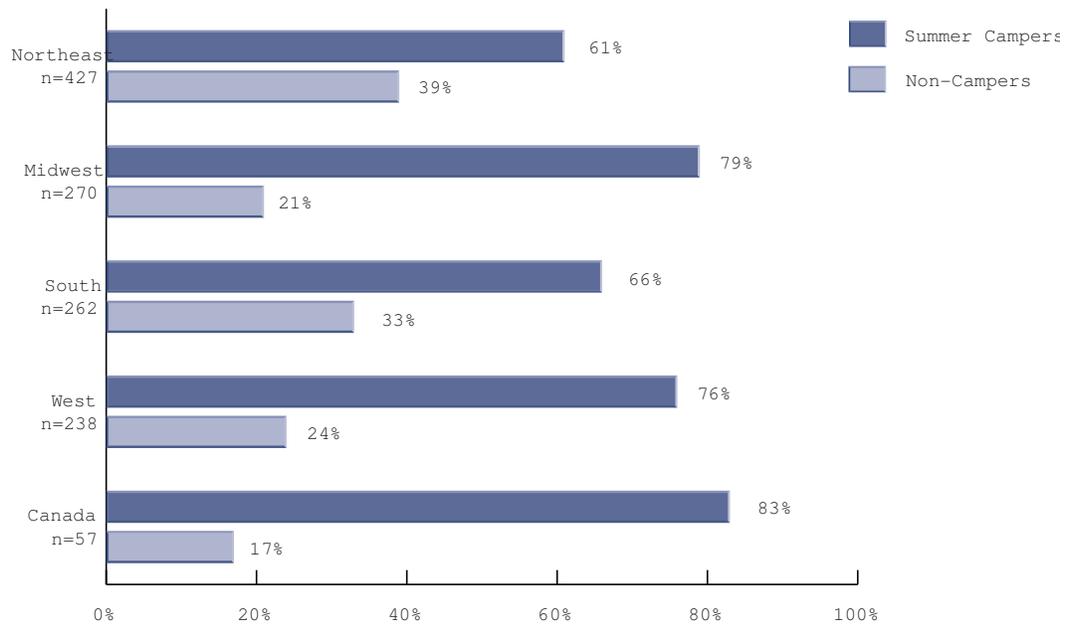
North American teenagers differ in their Jewish summer camp experiences according to their region of residence. Overall, Canadian Jewish teenagers are more likely than their American counterparts to attend Jewish summer camps. As shown in Chart 3 on the following page, American patterns vary by region with the Northeasterners in our sample exhibiting the lowest rate of attendance at Jewish summer camps.

How can we explain the lower attendance at Jewish summer camps of those from the Northeast, or the higher attendance among Canadian teenagers? It might be a function of the availability of Jewish summer camps in the area as well as the desirability of attending. Alternatively there could be more options for American youngsters or greater pressures to get summer jobs in the U.S. Further analysis of the data reveals that none of our small sub-sample of Canadian Jewish teenagers ever attended Camp Ramah. On the other hand, these Canadians are the least likely to drop out of Jewish summer camping after their Bar/Bat Mitzvah and they are the most likely to attend four or five summers at Jewish camps during high school.

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**Chart 3: Attendance at Summer Camp by Region and Country of Residence**

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### *Creating Three Populations of Jewish Teenagers*

Now we have described the characteristics of the camping and the non-camping populations, we can turn our attention to the focus of this study, which is to measure the added value to Conservative Judaism associated with attendance at some point in time at Camp Ramah. To do this we have created the three groups (shown in Chart 4) for comparative analysis on a battery of Jewish behaviors and attitudes. These variables measure their involvement and commitment to the practice and ideology of Conservative Judaism and the stated goals of Camp Ramah.

#### **A. Ramah Students**

As one might expect among these high school seniors there is a variety of involvement in Jewish life and some overlap between attendance at Ramah and other Jewish camps. In creating this category we selected all the students who experienced only Camp Ramah. According to this definition Ramah campers are 14% of all Conservative high schoolers and 20% of the Jewish summer camping population. A less restrictive definition of those who had attended Ramah at some time would have covered around 27% of the cohort but it would have been a very hetero-

geneous population in terms of exposure to Ramah and other camps so we would not have been able to isolate the “Ramah effect.”

This “pure” Ramah group was then further divided according to the intensity of this experience. The first category included those 64 students who attended Camp Ramah only before (or until) their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, namely until age 13, but did not attend Camp Ramah after their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, or during high school. The other five sub-groups included the 112 students who attended one, two, three, four, or five summers in Camp Ramah since their Bar/Bat Mitzvah<sup>2</sup>.

The small cell sizes for the categories of specific numbers of summers preclude the possibility of statistically valid results but wherever possible reference will be made in the analysis to results if they are overwhelmingly in a particular direction.

## **B. Other Summer Campers**

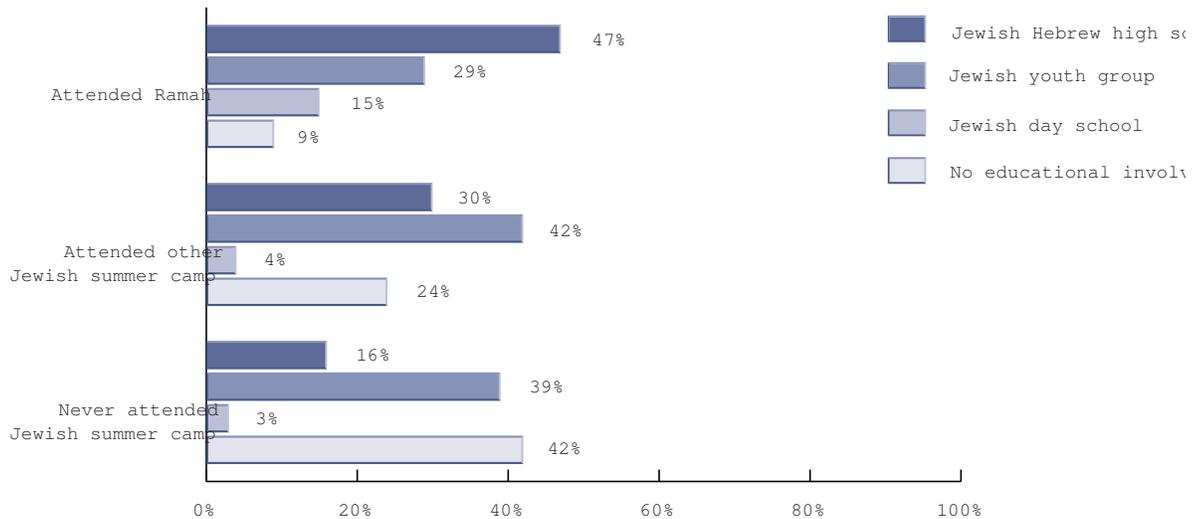
Similarly, we divided the students according to participation in other Jewish summer camps, for example, a Y or JCC, Young Judea, Jewish Scouts, Habonim, or others. The first group included 223 students who attended only before or until their Bar/Bat Mitzvah year. Groups 1-5 were defined according to the number of summers they attended these summer camps since their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, namely during high school. It is important to remember that some of these 482 campers had attended Camp Ramah before 1995 but in order to keep the first group — and thus the analysis “pure” — they have been allocated to the camps they attended during the high school years. Thus, the results may well add some small measure of Ramah effect to the other Jewish camping groups.

## **C. Never Attended Jewish Summer Camp**

Students who have never experienced any Jewish summer camp, neither before age 13, nor during high school by age 17, were classified as the “never attended Jewish summer camp” group. Again it is important to reiterate that this group too was raised and educated in Conservative congregations, many are members of youth groups and some have attended Hebrew High School during their teenage years.

<sup>2</sup>This includes counselors, counselor’s aids, or counselor-in-training.

**Chart 4: Jewish Educational Experiences During High School by Summer Camp Attendance**



## *Religious Attitudes and Behaviors*

### **A. Jewish Education**

How does formal Jewish education interplay with the informal Jewish summer camp experience? How many Ramah campers study in Jewish day schools? What is the role of Hebrew high school; namely, does it correlate with attending Ramah or other Jewish summer camps?

The Jewish educational experiences in Chart 4 summarize the level of Jewish involvement of high schoolers. It ranges from no Jewish educational involvement during high school to Hebrew high school and Jewish day school.

As seen in the above chart, nearly two-thirds of Ramah campers have continued their Jewish education, either in Hebrew high school or in Jewish day school, compared with only one-third of those attending other Jewish summer camps and only one in five of non-campers. At the same time, Ramah campers are less likely to have no educational involvement in the teenage years, 9% compared with 24% of those attending other summer camps and 42% of non-campers. This is not surprising since entry to Camp Ramah at age 10 and above requires continuing Jewish education. It also explains why there is a drop-out rate. As Chart 2 shows, 38% of Ramah campers who attended at age 13 do not subse-

quently meet this Jewish educational criterion during their high school years. In fact, two-thirds of Conservative Jewish high school students drop out of formal Jewish education by their junior year. Indeed day school drop-outs after 8<sup>th</sup> grade often enroll in Hebrew high schools or private studies to meet this study requirement for Ramah. Clearly, however, the myth that day school students dominate Camp Ramah beyond b’nai mitzvah age is exposed as inaccurate. They appear to be outnumbered three to one by Hebrew high school attendees.

## B. Religious Observance Since the Bar/Bat Mitzvah

When asked to self-describe any change in their pattern of religious observance over the last four years, 31% of students who attend Camp Ramah claimed they are more religiously observant at age 17-18 than they were in their Bar/Bat Mitzvah year (see Table 3). This figure is twice the rate for the 16% of the students who never attended any Jewish summer camp and higher than the 25% of those attending other Jewish summer camps. In all three groups about 40% of students, regardless of whether they attend Jewish summer camp or where, feel that their religious observance has not changed four years after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Clearly the larger proportion of students who say that during high school they feel less religiously observant than they were in their Bar/Bat Mitzvah year are found among those who never attended any Jewish summer camp.

**Table 3: Religious Observance During High School Compared to Bar/Bat Mitzvah Year (in percentages)**

	Much More	More	Same	Less	Much Less	Total
Attended Camp Ramah	7	24	41	20	7	100
Attended other J. summer camp	5	20	40	26	9	100
Never attended J. summer camp	2	14	42	29	13	100
<b>Total (n=1,295)</b> p<0.0005	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>

In general, Ramah campers represent more religiously observant Jewish teenagers. Noteworthy are the 43 students who attended four or five summers of Ramah camp since their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. They represent one-quarter of Ramah campers. Almost half of these committed teenagers say that they are more religiously observant than they were during their Bar/Bat Mitzvah year. A slightly more modest level of religious observance is found among students who attended five summers at other Jewish summer camps (38% have become religiously observant during high school). It is clear that attendance at Ramah and even other summer camps is associated with a positive and recognized difference in the religious behavior of these teens.

### **C. Plans for the Future Regarding Religious Observance**

When asked “how religiously observant would you like to be in the future,” half of all the Jewish high school students preferred to remain the same and about 43% wished to be more religiously observant. Only a fraction of the students preferred to be less religiously observant. Overall, there are no statistically significant differences regarding plans for future religious observance between students who attend Jewish summer camp and those who never did. It is hard to find significant differences in the patterns of future plans for religious observance between Ramah campers and other Jewish summer campers. Both groups of students either wish to become more religiously observant or stay the same. Only a few students wish to be less observant, though none of those who attended five summers of either Ramah or another Jewish summer camp wish to be so.

We can also examine Jewish teenagers’ perceptions about their religious observance in comparison with the intense Bar/Bat Mitzvah year. That was a time when most of them were required to undergo extensive religious studies, participate in synagogue services, meet regularly with the rabbi and cantor, and even involve the whole family in religious activities. The fact that the majority of students, primarily those who attended summer camps, either maintain or increase their level of religious observance, shows that these young Jews are committed. They did not feel that once they had completed their Bar/Bat Mitzvah requirements then they could at that time reduce or drop their religious activities. Moreover, looking at their plans for the future, we tend to believe that they wish to either maintain or increase their high school level of religious observance.

It is interesting to note that whereas there is some “wishful” thinking about the future throughout this teenage population, those who have actually achieved this goal of increased observance are more common among those who have attended Camp Ramah.

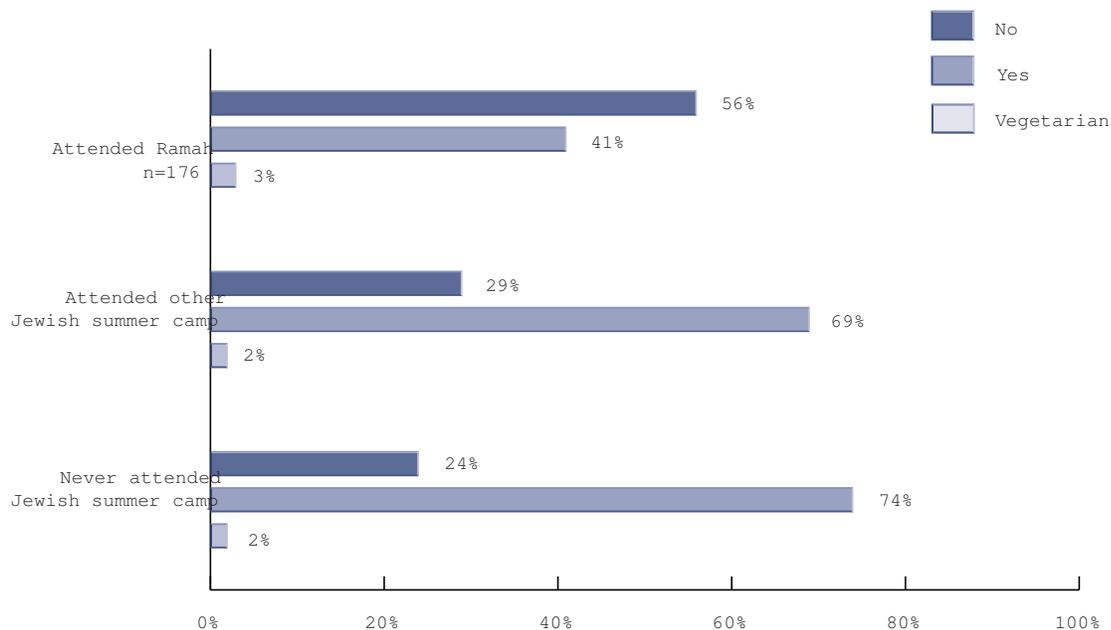
### D. Kashrut Observance

The food taboos of Kashrut are considered very important markers of commitment by the Conservative Movement and strict regulation is a feature of Camp Ramah. Yet in order to avoid the influence of family background we questioned these young people about their own voluntary choice of eating style outside of the home. In all, Ramah campers are far more likely to voluntarily observe the Kashrut laws outside the home than other Conservative teens. When asked “Do you eat meat and dairy foods together when you go out?” — 56% of Ramah campers compared with only 29% of those who attended other Jewish summer camps replied “no.” The majority (74%) of teenagers who never attended any Jewish summer camp do not observe Kashrut laws outside their home. (See Chart 5.)

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**Chart 5: Do You Eat Meat and Dairy Foods Together When Going Out?**

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Moreover, those who attended four or five summers at Camp Ramah are the most committed to Jewish dietary laws. Overwhelmingly, 70% of them do not eat meat and dairy together when they go out. It is hard to find similar patterns among those who attend other Jewish summer camps. Even among the more committed, those who attended four or five summers, only 36% do not eat meat and dairy when they go out.

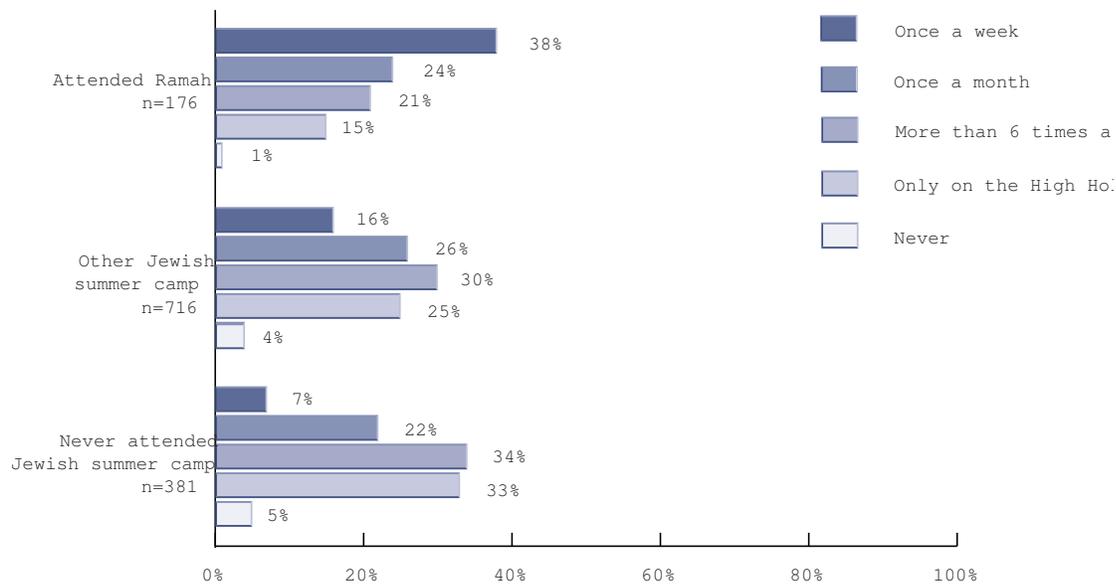
### **E. Synagogue Attendance**

Compared to non-campers, teenagers who attend Jewish summer camps are by far more likely to attend synagogue weekly. Chart 6 shows that in general, Ramah campers go to synagogue more frequently than campers from other Jewish summer camps — 38% compared with only 16%. The latter group is also more likely to go to synagogue only on the High Holidays. The contrast between Ramah and non-campers is even more striking with five times the weekly rate of attendance (38% v. 7%) and twice the cumulative monthly or more rate (62% v. 29%).

Further, the more extensive the Jewish summer camp experience is, the more likely the teenagers are to attend synagogue services weekly. This association is found primarily among Ramah campers, whereby the majority of those attending five summers go to a synagogue weekly. At the same time we find hardly any teenagers who never go to a synagogue in the Ramah group. Moreover, the camp experience generally during high school is associated with synagogue attendance.

In conclusion, with regard to religious observance, we identified consistent linear patterns among the three populations of Jewish teenagers. The Camp Ramah group comprises the most religiously observant of Conservative teenagers. They are followed by the teenagers who attended other Jewish summer camps. The third group, who never attended any Jewish summer camp, is the least likely to be religiously observant. The size of the gaps among the three groups are not always similar, though the patterns are retained whereby the “other Jewish summer camp” stands as a middle group. With regard to Kashrut observance, however, the middle group maintains patterns similar to those who never attended Jewish summer camp, thus trailing far behind the Kashrut observance of Ramah campers.

## Chart 6: Synagogue Attendance

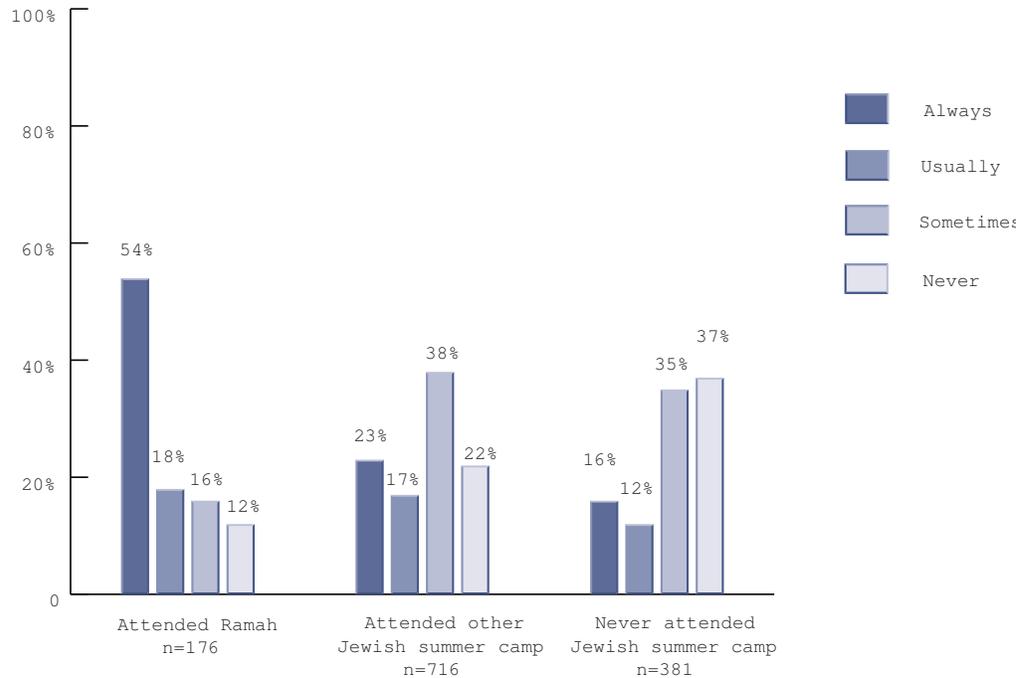


## F. Home Background: Shabbat Celebration at Home

To gain an insight into the influence of home background we asked our high school seniors; “How often does your family do something special on Friday night or Saturday because it is the Jewish Sabbath?” The findings in Chart 7 show that over half of Camp Ramah families always do something special on Friday night or Saturday to observe the Jewish Sabbath, compared with only 23% of families of those who attended other camps and only 16% of non-campers.

Clearly, Camp Ramah families are more religiously observant. Only 12% never do anything special on the Jewish Sabbath. By comparison, over one-third of Conservative families with students who never attended any Jewish summer camp, never do anything special on Friday night or Saturday. One may certainly assume that the pattern reflects the varying family norms – though we do know of numbers of anecdotes of Ramah campers returning home and introducing greater Sabbath observance in the family.

**Chart 7: Celebration of the Jewish Sabbath at Home**



## *Jewish Identity*

### **A. Importance of Being Jewish**

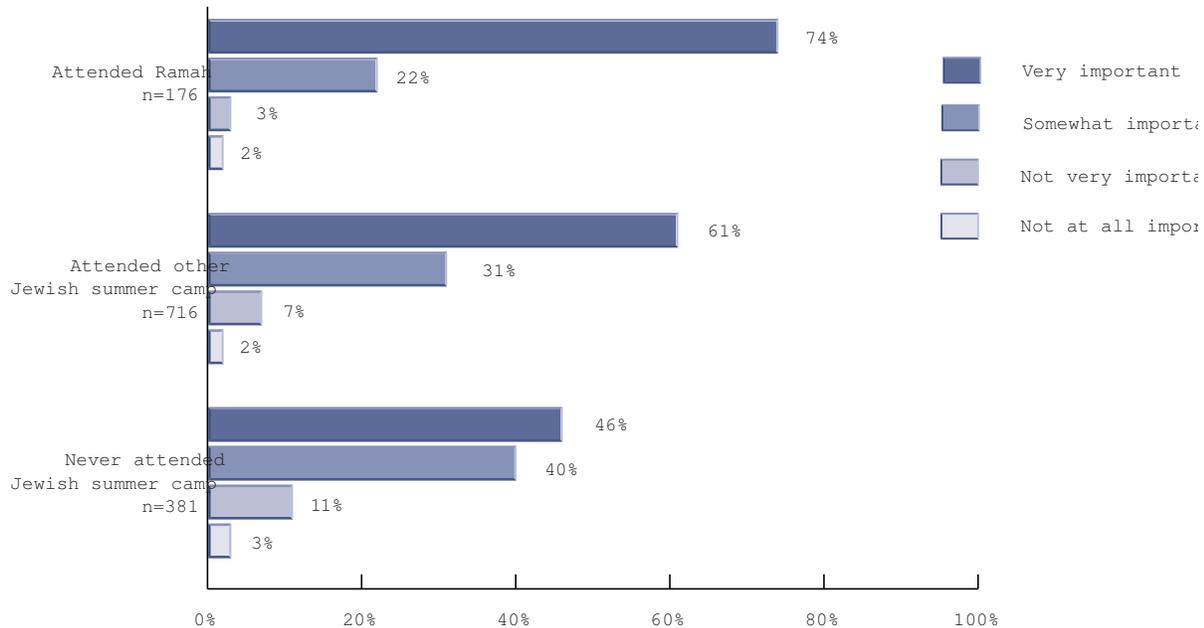
In order to explore the Jewish identity of our cohort of teenagers we asked: how important would you say that being Jewish is in your life? As with other indicators, teens attending Jewish summer camps, with Ramah campers at the forefront, express stronger positive opinions regarding their Jewish identity. Looking at Chart 8, we see that attendance at Jewish summer camp is also associated with less negative responses, especially in the “not very important” category.

Ramah campers overwhelmingly (96%) gave mostly positive responses. Moreover, almost all the students attending five summers at camp indicated that being Jewish is very important in their life. Those who attend other Jewish summer camps also follow a linear pattern whereby an increase in the intensity of the Jewish summer experience is associated with a stronger Jewish identity. Thus, the more summers attended in Jewish camps the more likely the teenagers are to regard being Jewish as very important in their life.

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**Chart 8: Importance of Being Jewish**

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## **B. Jewish Connectedness – Feeling of Peoplehood**

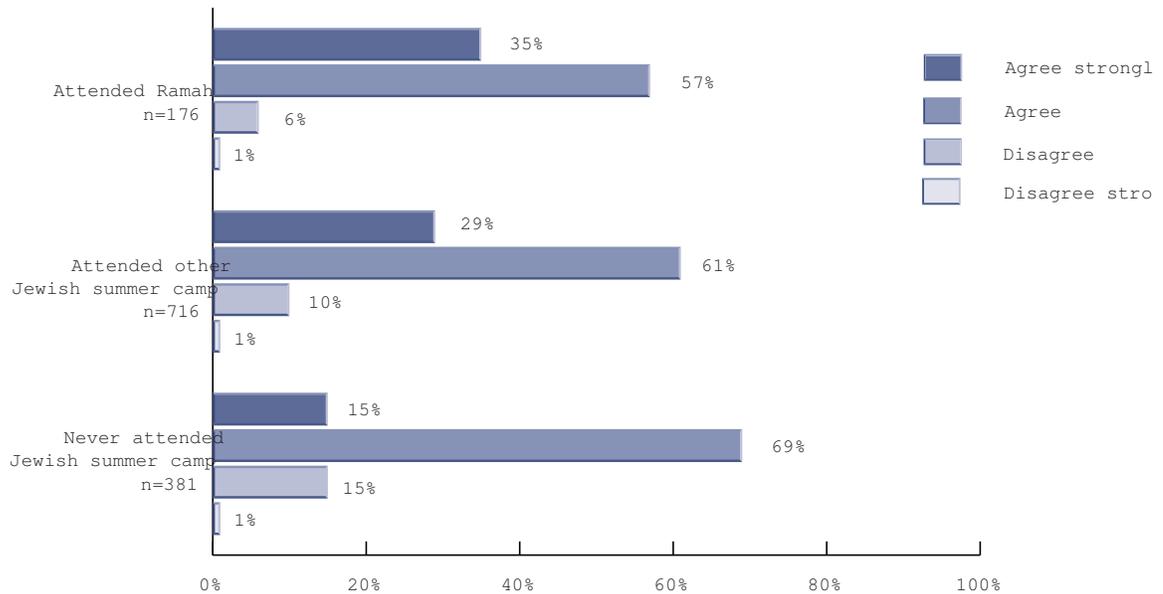
The vast majority (87%) of Jewish teenagers feel a responsibility to help Jews in need around the world. As shown in Chart 9, teenagers who attended Jewish summer camp are more likely to agree strongly that they have a responsibility to help Jews in need around the world than those who never attended any Jewish summer camp.

Ramah campers express the strongest responsibility of *Ezrat Achim* (helping other Jews in need); 35% agree strongly compared with 15% of those who never attended any Jewish summer camp.

Another measure of Jewish Connectedness is how far teenagers look at the entire Jewish community as an extended family as shown in Chart 10. Overall half the sample do, but Ramah campers express the strongest feelings of Peoplehood, with 68% viewing the entire Jewish community as their extended family (compared with 57% of those attending other Jewish camps and 52% of non-campers).

Relationships with Jews and non-Jews also reveal to what extent teenagers today are connected to the Jewish people. Given that the teenagers live in an open society, both in the U.S. and Canada, we expect

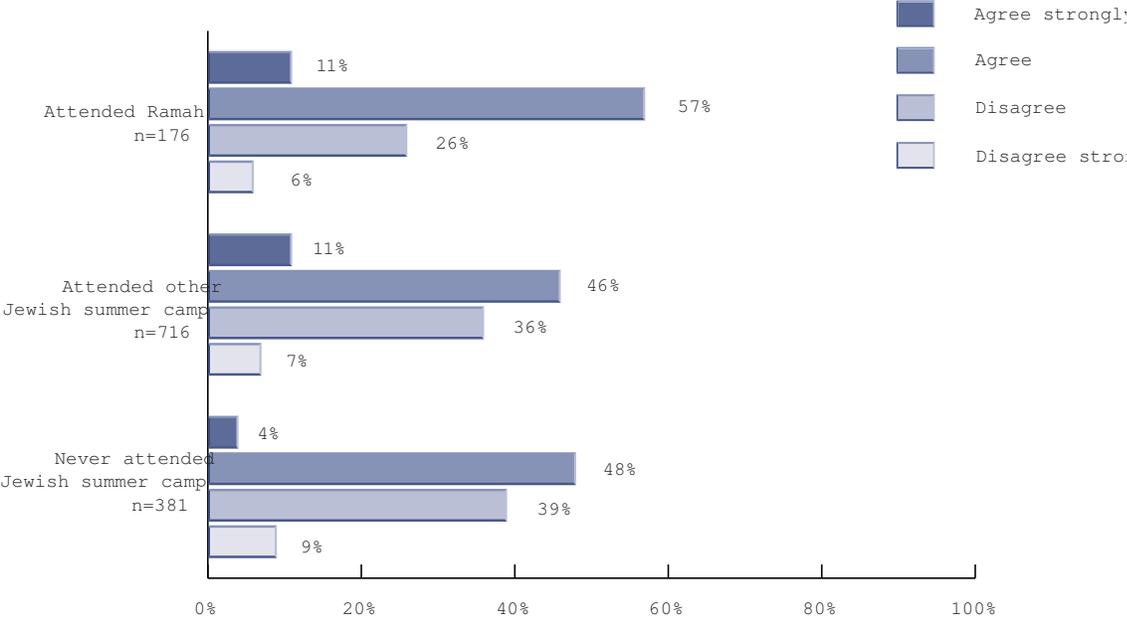
**Chart 9: I Feel a Responsibility to Help Jews in Need Around the World**



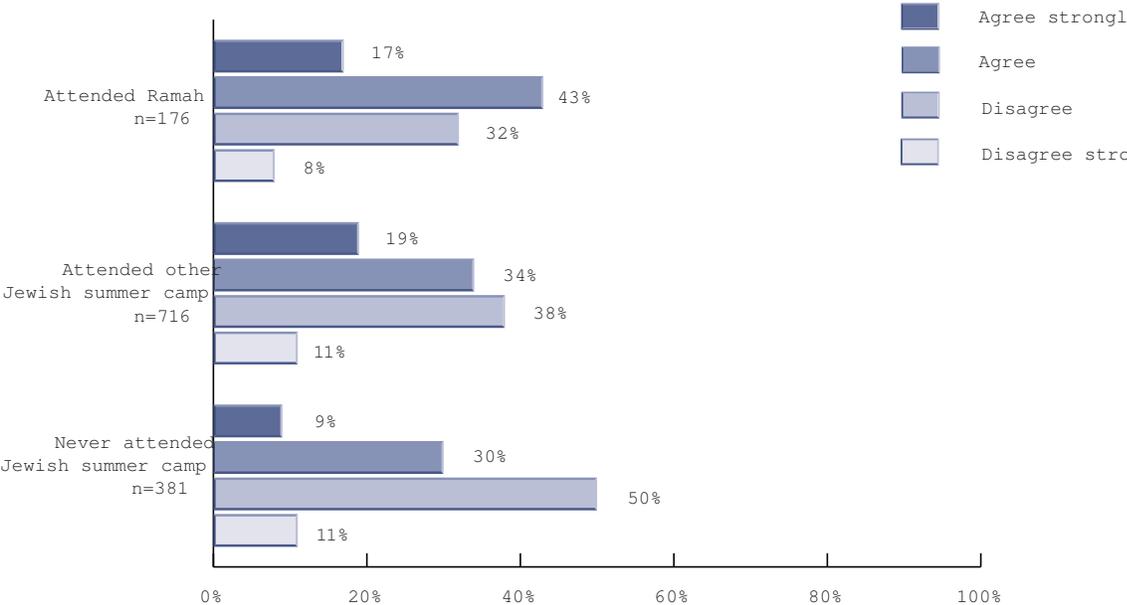
them to be open as well to non-Jews. Indeed, they split almost equally so half of them do not relate more easily to Jews than to non-Jews. (See Chart 11.)

Teenagers who attended Camp Ramah are somewhat more likely to relate more easily to Jews than to non-Jews (60%) than those attending other Jewish summer camps (53%). This variable is to some extent an inversion of the Jewish friendship patterns described below. Greater Jewish socialization inevitably increases in-group ties and social segregation but it does not appear to be too dominant a trend among Ramah campers or other Jewish camp attendees.

**Chart 10: I Look at the Entire Jewish Community as My Extended Family**



**Chart 11: I Relate More Easily to Jews Than to Non-Jews**



### C. Conservative Denominational Identity

To assess loyalty to the Conservative movement, this cohort of teenagers, who were all trained for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah rite of passage and socialized in Conservative synagogues, across the U.S. and Canada, were asked whether they agree or disagree with the following statements:

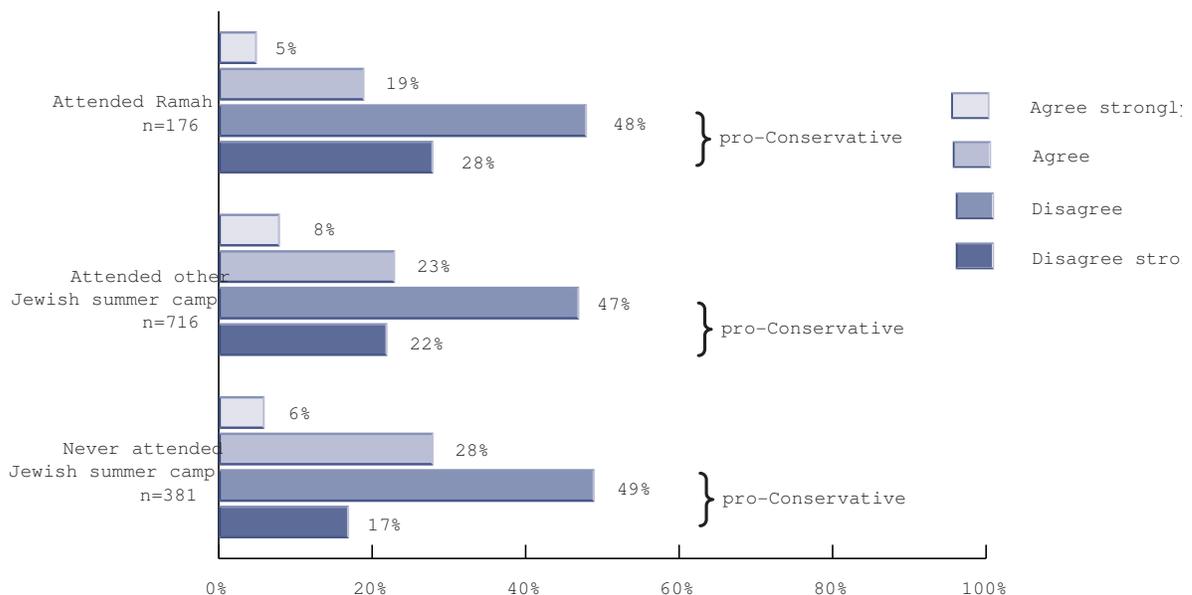
*I don't really think of myself as a Conservative Jew*

*I don't think I could ever be Orthodox*

*I don't think I could ever be Reform*

Overall there are no major differences between teenagers who attended Jewish summer camps and those who never did in their self-perceptions as Conservative Jews. As expected, 76% of students who attend the summer camp associated with the Conservative movement, namely Camp Ramah, affirm Conservative Judaism. (See Chart 12.) Further, more summers at Camp Ramah are associated with greater Conservative Judaism loyalty. Among Ramah campers, drop-outs after the Bar/Bat Mitzvah are less likely to disagree with the statement, "I don't really think of myself as a Conservative Jew." Once again, the small numbers inhibit the presentation of a detailed table for Camp Ramah.

**Chart 12: I Don't Really Think of Myself as a Conservative Jew<sup>3</sup>**



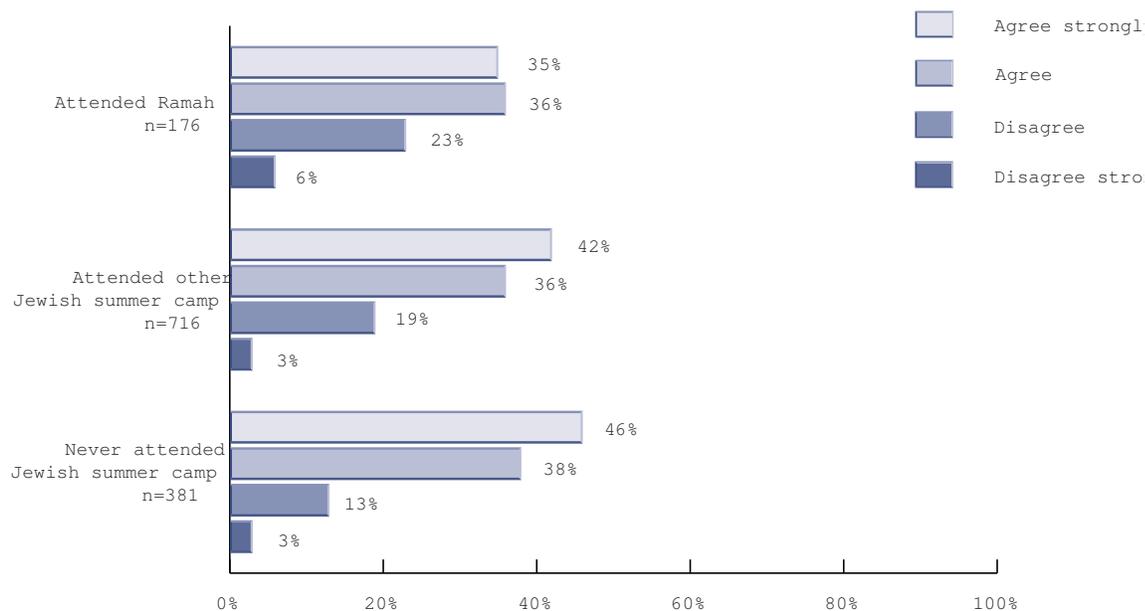
<sup>3</sup>To disagree or disagree strongly with this statement is an affirmation of Conservative Judaism.

Are Conservative high school students leaning towards Reform or Orthodox Judaism? Looking at charts 13 and 14 we find that they are more likely to reject Orthodox Judaism than Reform. While 80% of Jewish teenagers, regardless of whether or not they attended Jewish summer camp, agree that they don't think they could ever be Orthodox, a smaller 44% of them disagree with the statement "I don't think I could ever be Reform," thus leaving open the possibility of endorsing Reform Judaism.

Ramah campers however, are less likely than Conservative teenagers in general to reject Orthodox Judaism (29% could see themselves as Orthodox<sup>4</sup>) It is possible that these teenagers come from families with an Orthodox background or that some may have studied at one time at Orthodox Jewish day schools and thus have been more exposed to Orthodox Judaism. It should be noted that Ramah's philosophy, that each Jewish person needs to be open to increasing observance, may also support this openness to traditional life.

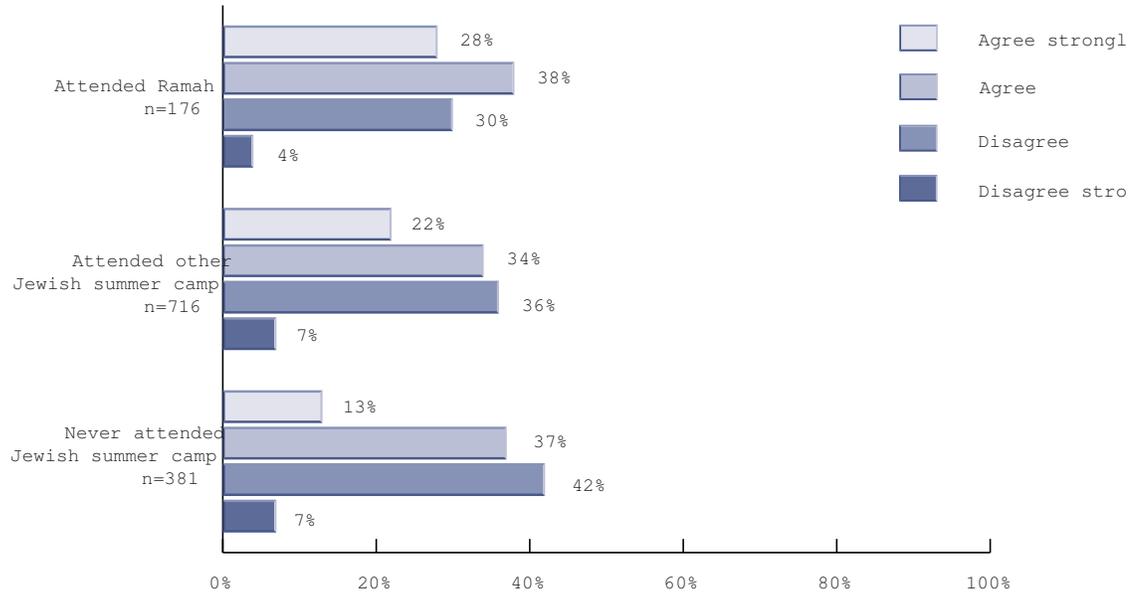
This traditionalist stance is verified by the results in Chart 14 since consistently, Ramah campers are more likely than teenagers in general to reject Reform Judaism. Sixty-four percent of them agree with the statement: "I don't think I could ever be Reform" – a higher proportion

**Chart 13: I Don't Think I Could Ever Be Orthodox**



<sup>4</sup>Looking at those attending Camp Ramah four or five summers, we find even less rejection of Orthodoxy (only 65%).

**Chart 14: I Don't Think I Could Ever Be Reform**



than the other two groups (59% and 50%). In summary, teenagers who attended Camp Ramah are more loyal to the Conservative Movement. About 75% positively affirm Conservative Judaism. Furthermore, among all Jewish teenagers, Ramah Campers are the most likely to lean towards Orthodoxy and the least likely to favor Reform Judaism.

**D. Attachment to Israel and the Hebrew Language**

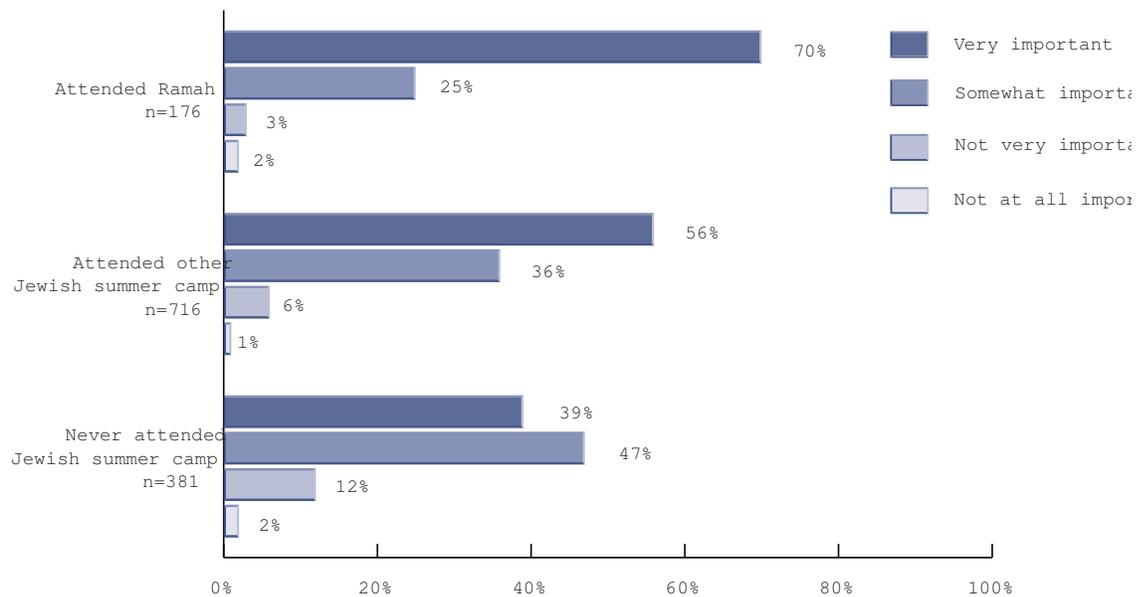
A key ideological plank of the Conservative Movement and Camp Ramah is Zionism. Ramah bills itself as a Hebrew-speaking environment. Indeed Ramah’s mission statement indicates that Israel is the second educational setting which makes up the Ramah experience. Thus the attachment to the Jewish homeland and the Hebrew language are important measures of Ramah’s overall effect on campers. As shown in Chart 15 , teenagers who attended Jewish summer camps have developed stronger bonds to Israel. Over half of them claim that Israel is very important to them. They are also less likely to say that Israel is not important to them.

Ramah campers express an even stronger attachment to Israel than teenagers who attended other Jewish summer camps: 70% vs. 56%. Moreover, the more Camp Ramah experience, the more likely teenagers

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**Chart 15: Importance of Israel**

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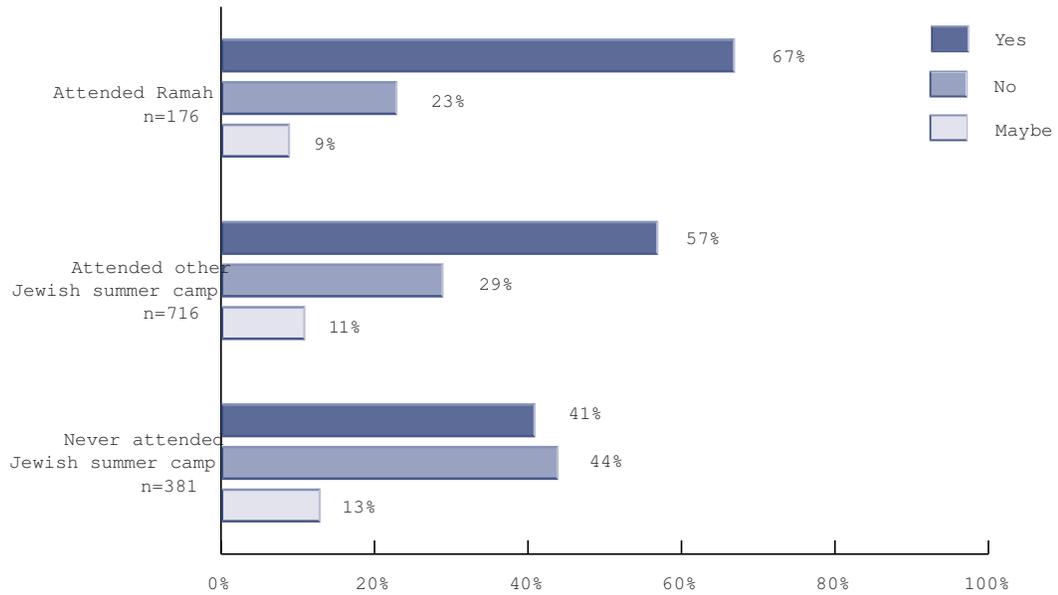
are to be strongly attached to Israel. None of the Ramah campers in the sample who attended three or more summers since their Bar/Bat Mitzvah said that Israel is not important to them. And over 80% of those attending four or five summers of Camp Ramah said that Israel is very important to them.

Another way to look at teenagers' feelings and commitment towards the Jewish homeland is through their consideration of the idea of studying in Israel in their junior year of college. In all, those attending Jewish summer camps are more likely to consider taking junior year studies abroad in Israel. (See Chart 16.)

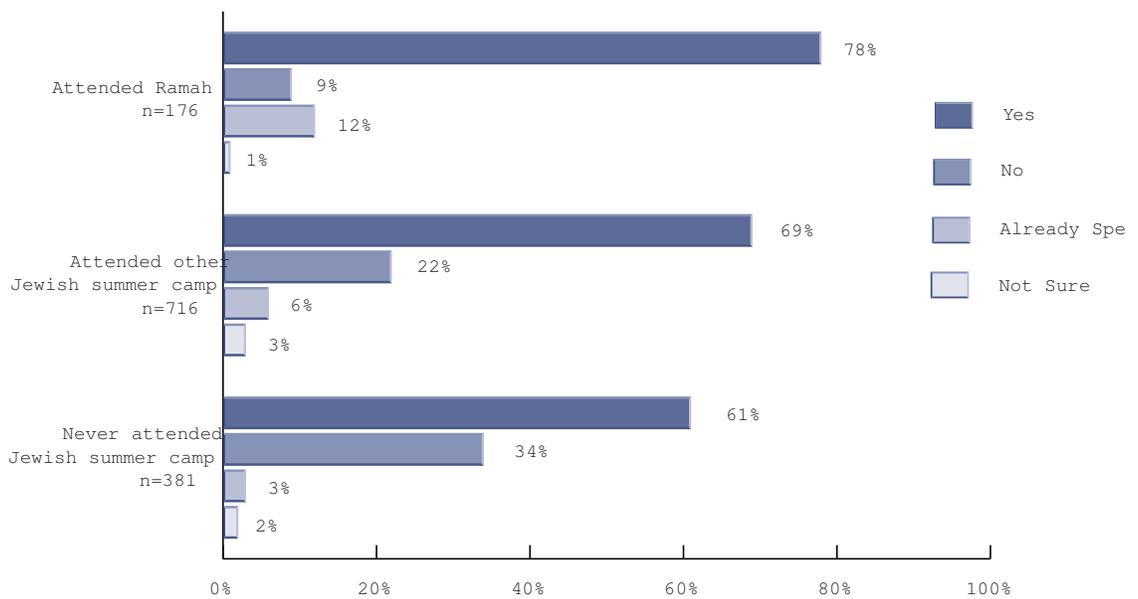
Once again, teenagers who attended Camp Ramah are more likely to consider studying their junior year of college abroad in Israel, 67% compare with 57% of those attending other Jewish summer camps. And again, more summers at Camp Ramah are associated with greater enthusiasm about studying in Israel.

Ramah campers are more interested in speaking conversational Hebrew. (See Chart 17.) Moreover, speaking or understanding modern Hebrew are more likely to be very important to their own sense of Jewishness compared with teenagers attending other Jewish summer camps. (See Chart 18.)

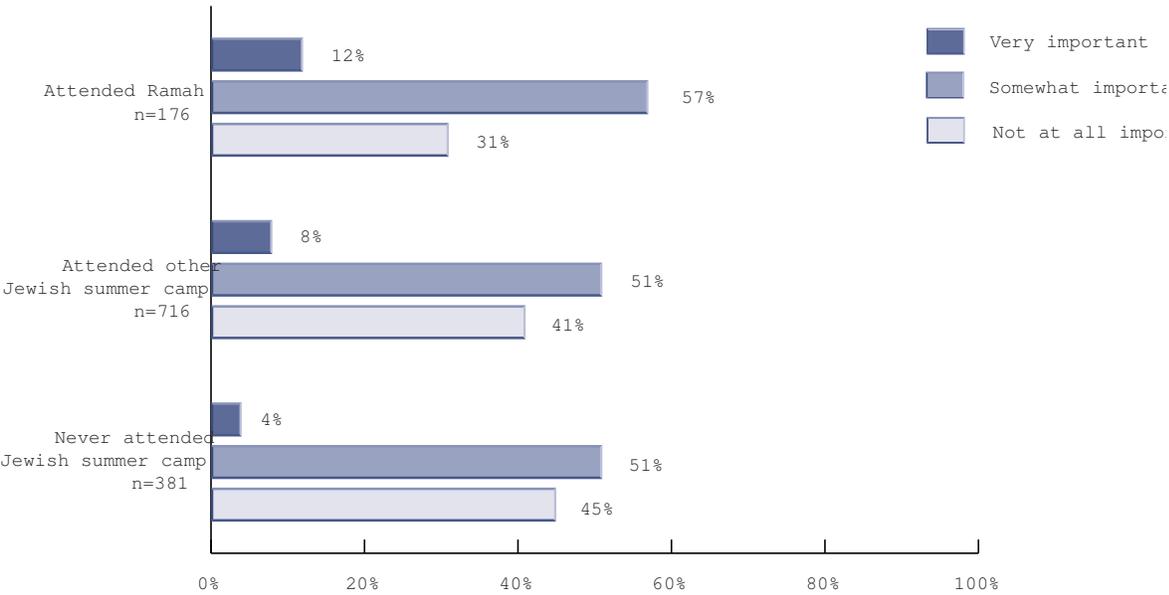
**Chart 16: Would Consider Taking Junior Year Studies of College Abroad in Israel**



**Chart 17: Would You Like to Speak Conversational Hebrew?**



**Chart 18: Importance to Your Own Sense of Jewishness of Speaking or Understanding Modern Hebrew**



*Jewish Socialization*

**A. Jewish Friendships**

Summer camp is an intense social experience, so naturally one might expect attendance at Jewish summer camp to be associated with more Jewish friendships. However, as shown in Table 4, the differences between Jewish friendships of those who attended any Jewish summer camp and those who never did are quite small, though statistically significant.

Looking deeper into the data, we find Ramah campers are more likely to have mostly Jewish friends compared with those who attend other Jewish summer camps and the gap widens with increased camp involvement. In both groups more extensive Jewish summer experience during high school is associated with more Jewish friendships. For example, 46% of those attending three or four summers at other Jewish summer camps have mostly Jewish friendships compared with only 31% of those attending only one summer. Among Ramah campers, 65% of those attending five summers have mostly Jewish friends compared with only 33% of those attending only one summer.

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**Table 4: Proportion of Friends Who Are Jewish (in percentages)**

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	<b>Most</b>	<b>Half</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A Few</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Total</b>
Attended Camp Ramah	38	21	21	19	1	100
Attended other J. summer camp	34	21	21	22	4	100
Never attended J. summer camp	28	18	24	24	7	100
<b>Total (n=1,295)</b> p<0.05	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>

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## **B. Dating Behavior**

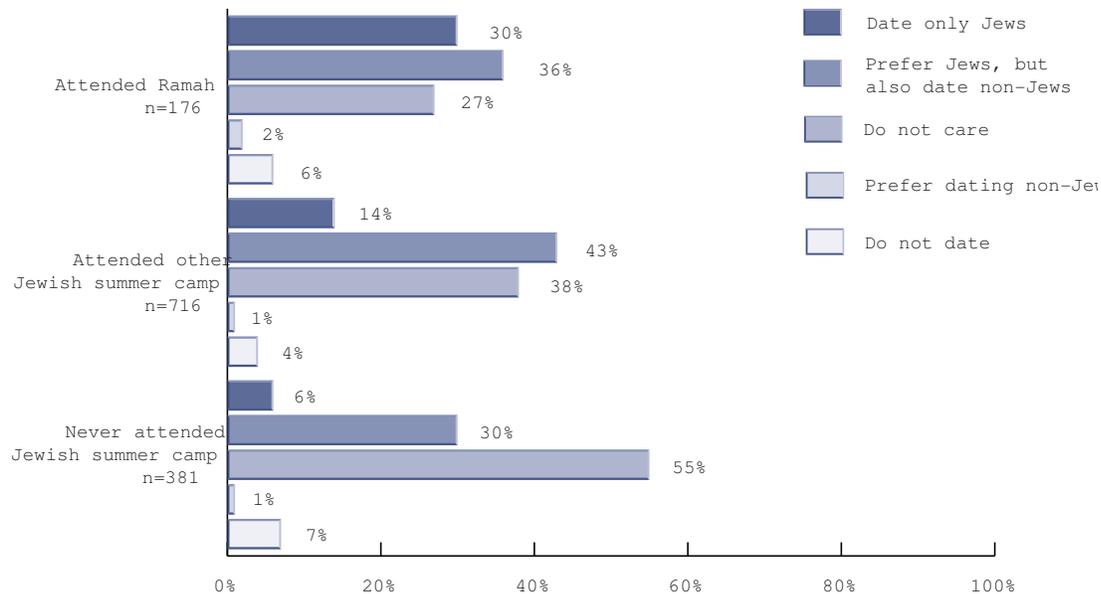
Given the growing concern about rising rates of intermarriage in recent decades, a critical question for Conservative Jews is: are their teenagers dating non-Jews? Thus, we asked our participants a series of questions regarding their dating behavior. The first was: “When you date, do you date: only Jews, prefer Jews but will also date non-Jews, do not care if your date is Jewish, prefer to date non-Jews, or do not date?” Here we try to relate dating behavior to Jewish summer experiences.

As seen in Chart 19<sup>5</sup>, most of the teenage sample will date non-Jews, but teenagers who attend Jewish summer camps are more likely to date only Jews. The Ramah camper cohort has the highest proportion of teenagers who date only Jews; 30% compared to 14% of those attending other Jewish summer camps date only Jews. A plurality of the teenagers who attended other Jewish summer camps fall into the “prefer dating Jews but also date non-Jews” category. Jewish teenagers who never attended any Jewish summer camp are much more likely not to care if their date is Jewish. Put another way, over half of those who never attended Jewish summer camp — but only 27% of Ramah campers — are indifferent to the religion of their date. Interestingly, in general almost none of these Conservative teenagers prefer to date non-Jews. Presumably these preferences are related to their Jewish friendship circles! In addition, teenagers who attend Jewish summer camps may be encouraged to date Jews by their family or peers.

Again, looking further at Ramah campers, 70% of the most committed ones (those who attended five summers during high school) date only

<sup>5</sup>Only teenagers who expect eventually to get married were asked this question.

## Chart 19: Dating Preferences



Jews. In comparison, 26% of teenagers who attended five summers of other Jewish summer camps during high school, date only Jews. Thus there are strong correlations between both the type and length of Jewish summer camps and the dating behavior of high school students. Are they also correlated with their attitudes about future marriage partners?

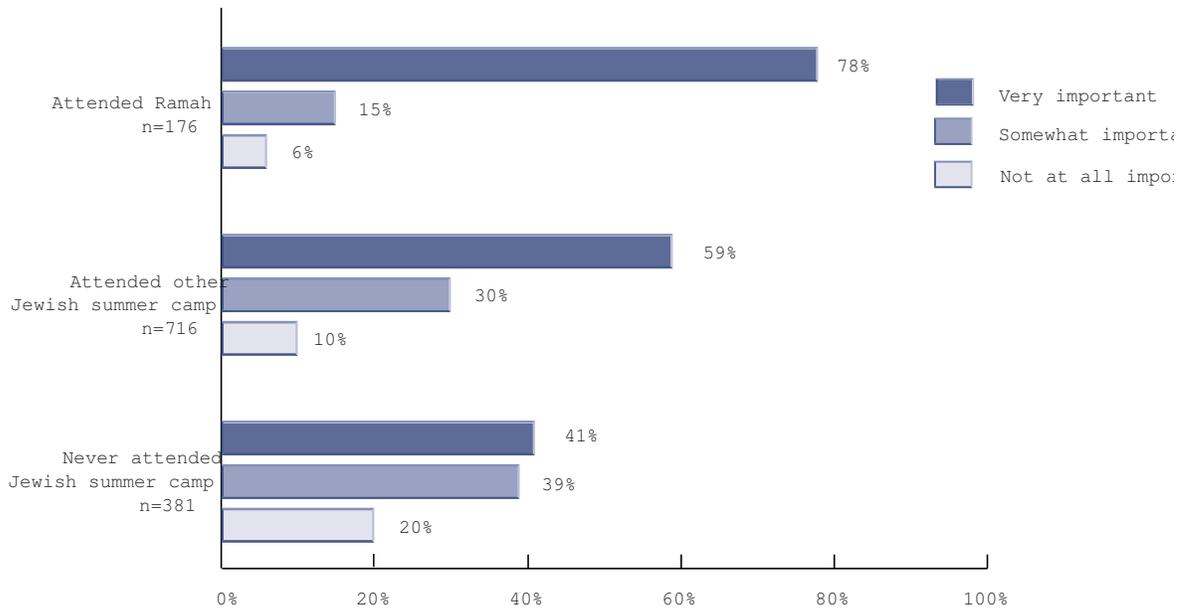
Chart 20 shows that teenagers who attend Jewish summer camps are more likely to view marrying somebody Jewish as very important than are those who never attended any Jewish summer camp. At the other end of the scale the last group, non-campers, is twice as likely as attendees at other Jewish summer camps (and as three times as Ramah campers) to think that marrying somebody Jewish is not at all important. We clearly find a consistency in response between dating behavior and intermarriage attitudes. Teenagers who never attended any Jewish summer camp are largely indifferent as to whether the date is Jewish or non-Jewish, and have moderate attitudes regarding the importance of marrying somebody Jewish.

In line with this consistency of correlation between dating and intermarriage attitudes, Ramah attendees represent once again the group most committed to in-marriage. Over three-quarters of them (78%) view

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**Chart 20: Importance of Marrying Someone Jewish**

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marrying somebody Jewish as very important. The more summers spent in Jewish camps, Ramah or others, the more likely the teenagers are to view marrying somebody Jewish as very important. To illustrate this point, all 17 of the students who attended Camp Ramah five summers in high school think that it is very important to marry somebody Jewish.

### **C. Voluntarism**

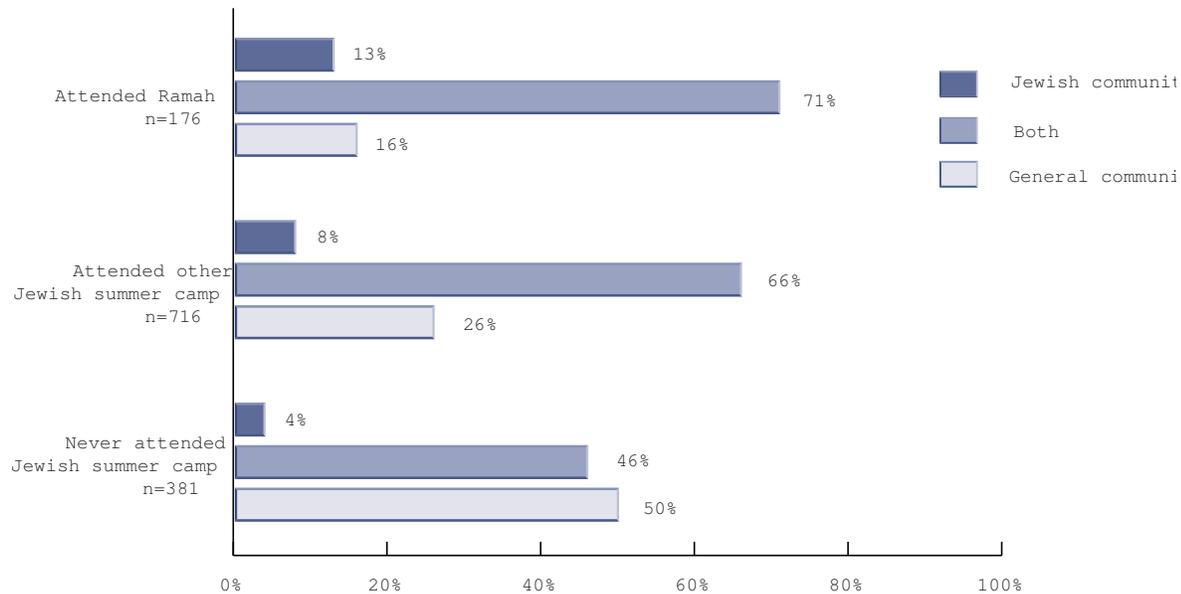
Is attendance at Jewish summer camp associated with greater voluntarism among teenagers? Do they volunteer in the Jewish or general community, or in both? Are Jewish summer camps succeeding in the transmission of Jewish values of *Ezrat Achim* (helping one's brothers) and *Gemilut Hasadim* (deeds of caring), or are these values embedded in Jewish families and Jewish formal education? This puzzle is a challenge and critical both for researchers and also for Jewish educators and leaders.

In all, teenagers who attend Jewish summer camps are somewhat more likely to volunteer in their community generally (87% compared with 79% of those who never attended.) Ramah campers are even more likely than those attending other camps to volunteer in the community, 94% and 86% respectively (data not shown here).

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**Chart 21: Volunteering in the Jewish or General Community**

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An interesting pattern emerges when we look at whether the teenagers volunteer in the Jewish community or general community. (See Chart 21.<sup>6</sup>)

Teenagers who attended Jewish summer camps are more likely to volunteer in the Jewish community as well as volunteering in both the Jewish and general community. At the same time those who never attended any Jewish summer camp are twice as likely to volunteer in the general community only. The Jewish camping experience redirects the teens towards a more Jewishly-participative volunteering framework.

Ramah campers are the most likely to volunteer in the Jewish community, (13%) and in both the general and Jewish communities (71%). However, there is no linear relationship between the number of summers spent in Camp Ramah and patterns of voluntarism. Likewise there is no linear relationship between the number of summers spent in other Jewish summer camps and patterns of voluntarism.

<sup>6</sup>Only students who volunteer in their community were asked this question, namely 84% of 1,295, or 1,094.

# Summary of Findings

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In the previous pages we compared and tested the patterns of response of three groups across a range of Jewish behaviors and attitudes and found statistically significant results. In every table there was a clear rank order in the pattern of responses with the most normative Jewish responses being most frequent in the Camp Ramah group, followed by the other Jewish camps and then non-campers. The question that now arises is: what issues exhibit the biggest differences in responses between Ramah campers and other affiliated Conservative youth. To decide this we will investigate the above tables to see where there are the largest gaps or point differences between the groups.

The widest gaps between Ramah and the other campers occur in certain areas of religious observance and Jewish belonging. The gap between them is 27 points on Kashrut observance (Chart 5) and 22 points on weekly synagogue attendance (Chart 6). The realm of dating and inter-marriage (Charts 19-20) also clearly shows a Ramah influence. The gap on “very important” to marry a Jew is 19 points and on dating “only Jews” is 16 points. The next widest gap is 14 points on the attachment to Israel ‘very important’ response (Chart 15). On the “importance of being Jewish” scale (Chart 8), in terms of the “very important” response, the gap is 13 points.

In contrast to the above significant differences, there are areas where there are smaller differences between Ramah campers and the rest of our high school sample. These are the pattern of friendship, measures of Jewish and Conservative identity and voluntarism.

We may conclude from this analysis that Ramah succeeds in inculcating its norms and values in its campers. Ramah emphasizes religious practice, the power of Jewish community and belonging, and Israel, and these are the areas where Ramah campers have the most positive profile differences from other Conservative youth. However, there is one chart that suggests there is a complication to this positive picture and therefore the need for a more refined analysis. Chart 7, which measures home Shabbat celebration, has in fact the widest gap of any variable measured. On weekly Shabbat celebration the gap between Ramah and other campers is 31 points!

Ramah campers clearly express a more Zionist outlook than teenagers who attend other Jewish summer camps. Does Camp Ramah work to independently instill a Zionist pride in the youngsters, or do they bring it from home and Ramah works to reinforce this value? Is a summer camp, as a Jewish institution, succeeding to build more committed young Jews?

To shed light on these critical questions we must follow the lead of Dorph's earlier research and turn to a multivariate analysis, which controls for home background and other key characteristics, before we can conclusively report that Ramah has real independent effects.

The purpose of the following multivariate analyses is to assess the relationship between the three types of attendance at Jewish summer camps and two domains, one behavioral and the other cognitive, once we control for family background influences. These are the religious behavior (as measured by synagogue attendance) of Conservative teenagers and their Zionism (as measured by level of attachment to Israel).

## *Synagogue Attendance*

In the analysis of variance on the following page, we define the dependent variable as synagogue attendance of the students in high school (in 1999). It is a dichotomous variable. We assign the value 1 to frequent attenders, (i.e. those attending synagogue weekly or monthly), and the value 0 to those attending less frequently, (i.e. attending more than six times a year, on the High Holidays, or never). The two explanatory independent variables are synagogue attendance of the parents in 1999, and summer camp experience.

Both independent variables are statistically significant at the .001 level. The two-way interaction between the independent variables is not statistically significant. Thus we can assume an additive model and look at the results of the multiple classification analysis.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 5: Multiple Classification Analysis of Synagogue Attendance**

<i>Variable/Category</i>	<i>Grand Mean=0.40</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>N</i>
<b>1. Synagogue Attendance of Parents</b>			
6 + times a year, High Holidays, never		-.27	650
Weekly or monthly		.29	607
		beta=.57	
<b>2. Jewish Summer Camping</b>			
Never		-.07	379
Other camp only before BBM		-.07	235
Other camp in high school		.05	467
Ramah only before BBM		.08	64
Ramah in high school		.11	112
		beta=.14	
Multiple R Squared =.370			

<sup>7</sup>It should be noted that the analysis of variance is used rather than logistic regression, given that the dependent variable is dichotomous, since the distribution of the dependent variable is in the range of 40-60 percent. In this range the results of both forms of analysis are virtually the same. this

Table 5 is in two parts. The first part shows the effect of parents' synagogue attendance on children's synagogue attendance, after controlling for children's summer camp attendance. The second part does the opposite. It shows the effect of summer camp attendance on children's synagogue attendance, after controlling for parents' synagogue attendance. The effects are shown as deviations from the grand mean of each variable and category. For example, 69% (0.40+0.29) of teenagers whose parents attend synagogue weekly or monthly also attend synagogue at least monthly. Only 13% (0.40-0.27) of teenagers whose parents are less frequent attendees are in contrast themselves frequent synagogue attendees either weekly or monthly. The beta coefficient indicates the strength of each factor's net effect, after controlling for the other factor.

The influence of parents' synagogue attendance on their children's synagogue attendance is evident, yet not surprising, given that the children still live at home, and in many cases all family members go together to services. Interestingly, Jewish summer camping works in a clear linear direction with Ramah during high school at the top of the hierarchy of experiences. Thus summer camping is an important predictor of teenagers' synagogue attendance even when the family's influence is controlled. While only 33% (0.40-0.07) of teenagers who never attended a Jewish summer camp, or those who attended another summer camp only before their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, go to synagogue weekly or monthly, more than half (0.40+0.11) of recent Ramah campers attend weekly or monthly during high school. Clearly, the parents' influence is stronger, yet Ramah campers score above other Jewish summer campers. The more recent and intense the Ramah experience is, the more frequent synagogue attendance is. Overall the model explains 37% of the variance in high school teenagers' synagogue attendance. Thus Ramah exerts a clear, autonomous influence on synagogue attendance upon campers – both when reinforcing family attitudes and in stimulating teens to attend independently of the family.

### *Attachment to Israel*

Beyond religious behavior, sustaining strong pro-Zionist attitudes is another important way of building Jewish identity. The longitudinal framework of this study enables us to follow up teenagers' attachment to Israel from the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year through high school and relate it to summer camp experience as well as to parental input. Discussion about Israel at home was found to have a strong pro-Zionist effect on Bar/Bat Mitzvah teenagers in 1995 (Keysar and Kosmin, 1999).

A similar analysis of variance is presented whereby the dependent variable is attachment to Israel in 1999. The value of 1 is assigned to students who say Israel is “very important” to them, and 0 to those who say Israel is “somewhat,” “not very” or “not at all” important. The independent variables are attachment to Israel in 1995 (year of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah), again a dichotomous variable: Jewish summer camp experience; parents’ discussion of Israel or current events in the Middle East with their child; and visits to Israel of the student (never and 1+ times).

Once again, all the independent variables are statistically significant at the .001 level. The two-way interactions between the independent variables are not statistically significant. Thus again we can assume an additive model and look at the results of the multiple classification analysis. (See Table 6.).

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**Table 6: Multiple Classification Analysis of Attachment to Israel**

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<i>Variable/Category</i>	<i>Grand Mean=0.52</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>N</i>
<b>1. Importance of Israel in 95</b>			
Other		-.13	544
Very important		.10	696
		beta=.23	
<b>2. Jewish Summer Camping</b>			
Never		-.06	378
Other camp only in 95		-.07	233
Other in high school		.06	455
Ramah only in 95		.03	64
Ramah in high school		.10	110
		beta=.13	
<b>3. Parents discuss Israel, current events in the Middle East</b>			
Yes		.06	818
No		-.11	422
		beta=.16	
<b>4. Ever visit Israel</b>			
Never		-.13	580
1+ times		.12	660
		beta=.25	
Multiple R Squared =.243			

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Teenagers who visited Israel develop the strongest feelings toward Israel; 64% say that Israel is very important to them. Unsurprisingly, early Zionist ideology already at the time of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah helps sustain strong attachment to Israel later on. Those who said that Israel was very important to them at age 13-14 are more likely to think that Israel is very important at age 17-18, expressing strong feelings 10% above the overall mean.

Parents-child discussions at home about Israel and events in the Middle East also increase the likelihood of strong attachment toward Israel. Jewish summer camp experience, primarily during high school, contributes to stronger attachment to Israel. Ramah campers are more likely to feel that Israel is very important to them (62%) compared to those attending other Jewish summer camps (58%) even after the introduction of controls for other variables. The main gap is between Ramah and those who never attended any Jewish summer camps, whereby only 44% say that Israel is very important to them. Interestingly, other camping during the high school years has more effect than Ramah before age 13 on the attachment to Israel. This given, the Ramah in high school statistic shows that high school camping per se makes a real difference on the Zionism scale.<sup>8</sup>

Overall the model explains 24% of the variance in high school teenagers' attachment to Israel. This points to the central role of camping during the teen years in shaping an independent attachment to Israel among the younger generation. This finding has policy implications for funding camping and associated teen visits to Israel since the data reported above also suggests that teenage visits by campers during high school lead to a willingness to consider attending a junior year in college in Israel. The result of involvement with summer camping is therefore a much more intense, and perhaps longer, engagement with Israel than that offered by short-term experiences, such as Birthright Israel, to those on the periphery of the Jewish community.

In conclusion, the evidence from this longitudinal panel study provides a clear basis for the claim that attendance at Camp Ramah during the high school years has a holding effect on youth from committed Conservative homes and a transformative effect on others from less religious families.

<sup>8</sup> The effects and beta coefficients presented in tables 5 and 6 are adjusted for the other independent variables, and can be viewed as net effects.

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# Reflections and Policy Implications

*Sheldon Dorph, National Ramah Director*

In this section I would like to offer some reflections upon this rather unique study of the effects of Jewish camping upon the attitudes and behaviors of teens affiliated with the Conservative Movement. These reflections are provided in the same order as the topics covered in the research, referencing the tables and charts of the study for the reader's convenience.

For each topic, I will offer some reflections and then some policy implications for consideration. In doing so, I will try to highlight issues and possibilities not only for Ramah, but for Jewish non-profit camping in general, where applicable.

## *A. Attendance at Jewish Summer Camps (Tables 1-2, Charts 2-3)*

### **Reflections**

Given that only about 25% of these teens have or are still attending Ramah and that 30% of Conservative teens have never attended a Jewish summer camp, there remains a significant untapped Conservative reservoir of prospective campers.

When compared with the Wertheimer data on adult cohorts attending Ramah over the years (see *Conservative Synagogues and their Members*, Chart 23, p. 25), we do see increased market penetration by Ramah. This is also supported by the 11-year enrollment data compiled by Ramah for overnight Ramah camps. There continues to be increased pressure upon Ramah to open new bed capacity to meet this communal demand. Given the increase in Ramah's market penetration by age cohort, there is no reason to anticipate a drop in interest in Ramah camping, even if the Jewish population of the United States begins to drop.

### **Policy Implications**

- Regardless of the results of the 2000 NJPS, due out in a year, there remains a large core Jewish population of children in the Conservative community and the larger core Jewish community, who are potential Ramahniks. This clearly justifies opening between one and three additional overnight camps in the next five to seven years. Our own projections indicate that an additional eastern camp, as well as two additional camps west of the Mississippi, will be required during this five- to seven-year period.

- Initiatives in California, the Rockies and the Eastern Seaboard should be intensified, as should the identification, recruitment and training of new staff.

## ***B. Religious Attitudes and Behaviors***

### **Jewish Education (Chart 4)**

#### ***Reflections***

There is no question but that Ramah’s attendance requirement of year-round Jewish education keeps Conservative teens involved in Hebrew high schools and private tutoring. It may also be that the decision to leave Ramah around Bar/Bat Mitzvah is linked to the decision to end one’s Hebrew school attendance, although it’s not clear which comes first. Given that Ramah directors make alternative study arrangements with teens when needed, it seems doubtful that most teens who would want to continue at Ramah could not or would not find a way to meet the Jewish study requirement.

#### ***Policy Implications***

It may behoove Ramah to link camping to continuation at Hebrew high school even more forcefully, through tuition stipends at either or both institutions. It could be a great boon to Jewish education beyond Bar/Bat Mitzvah when so many identity issues come to the fore.

### **Religious Observance Since Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Into the Future (Table 3)**

#### ***Reflections***

Please note that continual involvement in Jewish Education when linked with the Jewish camping experience has a strong positive affect on teen religious behavior. Both of these commitments are largely voluntary by the teen years. One can certainly make the case that each alone and in concert strengthen the personal commitment to a religious way of life; however it is defined by the teen in his or her proximal environment. We are watching adolescents in the process of shaping an active Jewish identity along the behavioral religious dimension. We will have an opportunity to look at the dimensions of “belonging” and “believing” later in the data.

#### ***Policy Implications***

- The data points to a major emphasis and investment in camping and formal teen learning as twin pillars of Jewish identity devel-

opment, when they can be maintained through the senior high school years.

- It also argues for another look at this cohort somewhere during the junior/senior years at college to see if their commitments maintain themselves in the open marketplace of ideas and lifestyles called “university.”

## **Kashruth Observance (Chart 5)**

### ***Reflections***

Ramah has had an important effect in maintaining this hallmark of Jewish observance. It is important to recognize that not only is Ramah strictly kosher, but *Kashruth* is taught in both formal classes and, at many camps, through kosher cooking activities, where campers (and staff) are exposed to food preparation and keeping a kosher kitchen.

### ***Policy Implications***

Ramah’s linkage of high communal *Kashruth* standards, personal and accessible staff models and freedom of individual expression, have had the desired effect of leading teens to “own” this aspect of religious observance – both outside the camp and at home. Here there is a wide difference between Ramahniks and those who either attend other Jewish camps or who have never attended a camp.

## **Synagogue Attendance (Chart 6)**

### ***Reflections***

Here again the data points to the influence of Jewish camping in general, and Ramah in particular, in positively affecting participation in synagogue life back home.

### ***Policy Implications***

- When these areas are taken together, it is abundantly clear that when Jewish education and family membership in a Conservative synagogue are held constant, there is something about Jewish-content camping that clearly affects the religious life and orientation of teen campers, so that they come to personally “own” their Jewishness. (The last section of the research will reflect further on this finding.)
- We may posit such things as accessible adult role models, a camp community of peer observance, openness to questioning and discussion, the “normative” quality of Jewishness at camp, and the

voluntary, parent-free society of Jewish camping, as key contextual cultural factors in this phenomenon. This represents a very real area for qualitative research.

### ***C. Home Background: Shabbat at Home (Chart 7)***

#### **Reflections and Policy Implications**

Whatever else they may love or hate about camp, Ramah campers constantly point to Shabbat as the most special experience at Ramah. One suspects that the teens in other Jewish camps feel that way about Friday night – if not the entire Shabbat. From my study in 1976 (see pages 243-271), I note that Ramah functions to (a) support positive home observance – helping teens to incorporate the home model into this newly “free” teen self – and (b) influence the teen from a non-observant or less-observant home to consider and adopt some greater degree of religious observance. Neither of these effects should be undervalued in a world where by age 18 every teen is in a position to observe or drop aspects of Jewishness, regardless of home background.

### ***D. Jewish Identity (Charts 8-11)***

#### **Reflections**

The measures reported in Charts 8-11 point to the effect of Jewish camping on both feeling a sense of Jewishness and a sense of responsibility for helping Jews in need as part of one’s extended Jewish family. If one views a Jewish camp as a voluntaristic, participative community of experience, then this finding is not surprising. But in a world of individualism, egalitarianism and privation, to find a cultural context where such a sense of Jewish community can be fostered is exceptional.

The balancing of Jewish commitments with involvement in the larger open society indicated in Chart 11 should be followed into the college years to see if they hold in the context of the university. In their decisions about Kashruth, Hillel, Shabbat, campus activism, junior year abroad in Israel, and sexual and ethical mores, our teens will face life decisions that both reflect earlier attitudes and, in themselves, shape future adult Jewish life style.

#### **Policy Implications**

- If Jewish communal leadership feels a commitment to the survival and continuity of the Jewish collective, it needs to pay more

attention to Jewish camping, which seems to have an exceptional influence on shaping the behavior and attitudes of the next generation as it stands on the threshold of adult decision-making at age 17.

- That Camp Ramah seems to stand at the forefront of creating such communities implies that it should be carefully studied to determine the factors which build such a cultural context. Some of these factors may be found in previous writings (see Bibliography) and in the Ramah Mission Statement provided at the end of this report). Note that it is not by accident that Ramah was and remains a mission and vision-driven educational enterprise (see *Vision at the Heart*, by Seymour Fox, and *Ramah at 50*, by Sheldon Dorph).
- The Ramah data argues for creating increased capacity at Ramah for educating teens and college-aged staff. Facilitating such growth should be of deep interest to both Conservative movement leaders and to funders and institutions concerned with Jewish continuity and renaissance.
- The data argues for the creation of additional college-age study and work opportunities within the Ramah summer educational community, extending this experience to those who are not yet “Ramahniks.”

## ***E. Conservative Denominational Identity (Charts 12-14)***

### **Reflections**

In assessing the sum of these three charts, one may paraphrase Aristotle’s “the unexamined life is not worth living” and comment that regarding Ramah’s teens “the traditional lifestyle is worth examining as a real life option.”

Ramah’s philosophy of encouraging each Jew to become open to increasing observance, reflection, and commitment to a Jewish lifestyle also supports the lessening of rejection of Orthodoxy noted within these findings.

### **Policy Implications**

- There is room for Ramah to become more explicit in its teaching of the tenets of Conservative ideology, though it is clear that it has not driven its campers away from the Conservative fold. One might wonder if a more open, participative, inclusive synagogue

style in our own Conservative congregations would make more room for Ramahniks who are finding their way to Orthodox or Chavurah-centered programs.

- Conservative synagogues and leaders in many areas of the country have been less than proactive in promoting Ramah as the camp of choice for their students and families. There is some indication in these findings that such passivity regarding the choice of Ramah as a summer camp may do the movement a real disservice in terms of preserving membership and observance among the cohorts of prospective synagogue members who are coming of age.
- The Wertheimer adult study (1995) certainly indicates that Ramah attendance is highly correlated with members' participation and leadership in synagogue life (see p. 31, Table 5 in Wertheimer, *Conservative Synagogues and Their Members*, 1995).

## ***F. Attachment to Israel and Hebrew Language (Charts 15-18)***

### **Reflections**

To date, there has been a decision by the Birthright donors and consultants that high school teen Israel programs are not worth their investment. This data seems to belie that assumption, at least as it applies to the cohorts of teens who attend Jewish camps – Ramah as well as others.

In fact, the evidence assembled argues for a strong investment in Jewish camp teens, whose interest and commitment to Israel far exceeds non-camp attendees. This was further demonstrated in the summer of 2001, when the Intifada reduced teen Israel programs the least among camp cohorts as opposed to youth group and unaffiliated cohorts. Clearly the effect of the *Mishlachot* (Israeli emissary staff sent by the Department of Education of the Jewish Agency) and the Hebrew/Israeli environment that flavors our camps have created a strong human and emotional bond to Israel for campers. This consciousness can be expected to continue into college years.

Also interesting is the high level of desire to learn spoken Hebrew. Here we have not found an adequate methodology to actualize that interest in a real way, Ramah included. In cooperation with the Department of Education of the Jewish Agency, Ramah is spearheading an effort to revitalize spoken Hebrew in all Jewish-content camps and on Israel trips.

## Policy Implications

- Birthright should consider reversing its policy of investing only in those college students thus far “untouched” by the Israel experience. It is doubtful that such “silver bullet” approaches ever work in promoting long-term identity formation. There are cadres of high school students in whom the community needs to invest both during and after high school. Perhaps Birthright funding and a camping experience at a quality Jewish camp should be linked to provide real continuity and follow-up. Ramah’s request for funding to pilot this idea was turned down by Birthright in the spring of 2001.
- The interest in spoken Hebrew needs to be explored more deeply. Perhaps we should be reversing our thinking and offering intensive Hebrew Ulpanim with the Israel experience and camping involvement as a linked effort both before, during and after the Israel experience.

## G. *Jewish Socialization*

### Jewish Friendships (Table 4)

#### *Reflections*

The effect of Jewish camping on the increasingly Jewish make-up of a teen’s friendship grouping increases exponentially with the number of summers spent in Jewish camps. This is an extremely important piece of data in evaluating the long-term affect of camping. It argues what camping directors have known for a long time: the retention of teens at camp is a critical aspect of identity formation and creating an alternative membership peer culture to that found at most American public high schools. It gives the Jewish teens a second and sometimes primary reference group that offers alternative values and social standards to which they may aspire as Jews and people.

#### *Policy Implications*

- Given this exponential affect of multiple summers at camp, strong efforts at recruitment and retention of teens in the camping system are called for. This may require increased scholarship monies, increased year-round connection with teens by the camp through e-mail, counselor involvement, reunions and a kaleidoscope of programming that is varied and meets the emerging interests and passions of teens while retaining the core values of the particular camping program. In essence, we need to do what-

ever is necessary to retain their involvement in camping through high school.

- It may also require a strong educational intervention with parents as to the value of keeping their teens and college students at camp.

## **Dating Behavior (Charts 19-20)**

### ***Reflections***

The influence of Jewish camping on dating behavior and attitudes toward in-marriage is in keeping with the concept of camp as a powerful alternative membership and reference group for teens. Here too, the retention of teens at Ramah has a strong exponential affect on their in-group dating patterns, and it is here that Ramah distinguishes itself very clearly from other Jewish camps, and the non-Jewish camping experience group.

### ***Policy Implications***

- Hold on to those teens through high school by every possible means. We cannot afford to lose any Ramah teenagers during the junior and senior years of high school. This argues for increased scholarships, but also for a variety of programs – Israel Seminar, Meytiv, and arts specialties for this critical age group.
- It would be important to follow them through college in this area.
- Ramah’s longstanding standard of accepting only halachically Jewish children (while cooperating with Rabbis who are in the process of converting children and who wish Ramah to be part of their education for conversion) may be a critical factor in maintaining a secure place for encouraging and fostering in-marriage.

## **Voluntarism (Chart 21)**

### ***Reflections***

Jewish camping in general, and Ramah in particular, seem to influence the commitment of teens to volunteer communal work. This augurs well for their continued involvement in communal service as adults. Ramah and other Jewish camps are high on participative democracy. The camp culture is based on doing for oneself, contributing to the group, and helping others. Ramah has a clear emphasis on teen social action built into its entering 10<sup>th</sup> grade programs and in its inclusion of special needs children in the camp culture. These emphases grow out of a Jewish value system that is taught as an explicit part of the volunteer program at camp.

### ***Policy Implications***

- The camp setting is a microcosm of a Jewish community, which should be recognized by donors and communal leaders as “breeding grounds” for the development of communal leadership for coming generations. A program of camp scholarships in exchange for year-round intern volunteerism would be a wise investment from every vantage point – by synagogues, federations and Jewish social agencies.
- It is important to note that voluntarism and social service are not “grafted” onto the Ramah program, but grow out of a core set of Jewish values at Ramah. Other camps would do well to explicate their own set of Jewish values as a framework for social action. Otherwise these become simply another “activity” at camp.

## ***H. Multivariate Analyses***

### **Synagogue Attendance and Attachment to Israel (Tables 5-6)**

#### ***Reflections***

While causation is nearly impossible to prove in this kind of social science research, multivariate analysis confirms what Dorph’s 1976 study found: Jewish camping, especially during the teen years, and Ramah in particular, positively affects religious behavior and belonging. Ramah reinforces positive Jewish family norms but also serves to empower teens to establish their own positive Jewish norms, even when family attitudes, beliefs and behaviors are not positively Jewish.

#### ***Policy Implications***

- It is rare to find a Jewish institution that can create an environment in which the next generation can internalize and take ownership of positive Jewish values and behavior. This study indicates that Jewish camping is such an educational community. It behooves donors and communities to reassess their priorities in educational funding and move Jewish-content camping higher on the agenda of continuity, survival, renaissance, or whatever it is currently called.
- If major donors continue to tout Israel as a key part of forming Jewish identity in the next decade, they need to reverse policy and give added weight and funding to the teen Israel experience for camp groups, which this study shows may be a key independent variable for increasing Israel consciousness, attachment and readiness for further involvement.

- The multivariate analysis clearly indicates that there is no silver bullet for Jewish identity. Rather, funders and educators need to build multi-dimensional intervention points, which create educational institutions and experiences to promote mutual reinforcement of positive Jewish values and behaviors, by family, camp peer groups, schools and Israel experiences. When taken together, these factors can create a next generation of Jewishly-committed leadership for our communities and synagogues.
- For the Conservative movement, the policy implications of this study should be a “no brainer” – build more Ramah camps, and educate and train more college-age students. The ages between 13 and 25 may be critical for the renewal of the Conservative movement and its synagogues.

# The Ramah Mission Statement

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- I. The current mission of Ramah is to create educating communities in which people learn to live committed Jewish lives, embodying the ideals of Conservative Judaism. Out of such communities, Ramah continues to “raise up” committed volunteer and professional leadership for the Conservative Movement and contemporary Jewry.
- II. Ramah communities represent a powerful synthesis of educational and Jewish characteristics:
  - regular study and engagement in open and continuing dialogue with Jewish texts, Halachah and values
  - a participatory Judaism which fosters and nourishes ever-increasing Jewish confidence, skill, observance, Hebrew ability and a sense of joyous Jewish living
  - a caring, encouraging approach to personal growth and individual religious experience which interact to form Jewish identity
  - a religious commitment to social justice and the ecological welfare of our world
  - a readiness to undertake reflective religious and educational innovation within the guidelines of Conservative Judaism’s values and practices as set forth in Emet V/Emunah.
- III. The core of Ramah’s program is directed toward two target populations: Campers (ages 9-16) and Staff (ages 17-25). Since Jewish learning and living are life long, one may become a Ramahnik at various moments in life. This leads us to offer the Ramah experience to a widening circle of participants, especially alumni and the families of our campers.
- IV. Ramah pursues its mission through two unique, powerful educational settings:
  - The summer camp and winter-retreat settings. It is the experience of intensive immersion in a total environment of Jewish arts and culture, sports and daily living which educates toward personal commitment.
  - Israel - our commitment to the renaissance of the Jewish people in its homeland is reflected in a variety of intensive Ramah programs in Israel, as well as in the staffing and programming of our camps throughout North America and Ukraine.
- V. Ramah affirms the centrality of home and synagogue as the primary institutions of Conservative Judaism. Our work carries with it the obligation to support and elevate the quality of home and synagogue life. Similarly, Ramah stands at the nexus of day school, supplementary and informal education in the Conservative Movement, where cooperative effort can advance the total educational experience of our youth.