



## Ramah and JNF Partner in Israel for Weinstein Institute for Counselor Training

January 2009/Tevet 5769

Every year, the [National Ramah Commission](#) convenes the **Bert B. Weinstein Institute for Counselor Training**. First- and second-year counselors from eight camps in the Ramah Camping Movement are selected to participate in this extraordinary leadership program. The Weinstein Institute has always been a unique opportunity for counselors to strengthen their skills, learn best practices from colleagues at other camps, and network socially. Senior staff members from each camp direct the program and facilitate leadership training workshops, program sharing sessions, and text study. This year, National Ramah held the Weinstein Institute in Israel in partnership with the [Jewish National Fund](#) (JNF). The one-week trip included 41 participants from across North America. In order to participate, individuals were required to raise a minimum of \$950 for a new indoor JNF playground in Sderot and to make a commitment to return to Ramah this summer.



In addition to providing Ramahniks with extensive leadership training, a primary goal of this program was to create hands-on social service opportunities so that our counselors, most of them Ramah Israel Seminar graduates, would develop a deeper relationship with the people and land of Israel. We spent our first five days in Dimona and Yerucham, with the remainder of the trip based in Jerusalem. During this first week, Weinstein participants spent six to eight hours a day working in a soup kitchen in Dimona; clearing brush and trimming trees in a JNF forest; working on the Na'ama Farm, which provides agricultural support to the local community; contributing to a city beautification project in Dimona; and working at the Tal Shachar school outside of Jerusalem. The physical work was exhausting but invigorating. We know that our participants will share inspiring stories with their chanichim this summer.

Just as incredible was watching our participants, covered in mud (*really* covered from head to toe), excitedly sharing camp programs and discussing camp. In fact, our group loved talking about camp. Wherever they were, they shared ideas, talked about camp culture and thought about how they would translate their experiences into camp programming.

On Friday afternoon, over 50 Ramahniks spending the year in Israel joined the Weinstein participants for the **Bob and Edith Lewis z"l National Ramah Shabbaton for Staff Training**. The davening was breathtaking; shira in our chadar ochel just perfect. The group organized its

own *makela* (choir) and dance troupe. They participated in a wide selection of text study classes and *sichot* (discussions). The gap year students departed after havdalah and *hadlakat nerot shel chanukah*. Before heading out to dinner on Saturday night, the Weinstein participants discussed the unfolding crisis in Gaza.

The group concluded its work projects in the Negev with a briefing from the mayor of Yerucham, Amram Mitzna, and a stop at Sde Boker. As the sun set, participants learned about Ben Gurion's vision and gathered together to sing. Many mentioned that this experience was a highlight of the week.



On our last evening, the group spent a couple of hours reflecting on the experience. Throughout the week they had consistently exhibited maturity, stamina, hard work, and Ramah ruach. It was clear that the combination of volunteer work, learning, speakers, and Chanukah and Shabbat celebration came together in a cohesive way to leave an enduring impression on everyone. Although many of the Weinstein participants had been to Israel numerous times, the experience through the Jewish National Fund empowered them to be caretakers of the land. Each day they rolled up their sleeves, got dirty and were able to step back and immediately see their accomplishments. Ramah is thrilled to have partnered with the Jewish National Fund, true visionaries in the building of Eretz Yisrael. Kol HaKavod to all who participated in this wonderful program.

*Amy Skopp Cooper, National Assistant Director  
Zach Lasker, Director, Camp Ramah in California*

[Click here](#) to view a video of Weinstein participants discussing their trip.

**Remember, you can plant a tree in Israel and donate to Ramah at the same time! [Click here](#) to learn more.**

**[Visit the National Ramah website at www.campramah.org.](http://www.campramah.org)**



*Read on for participants' reflections on this inspiring experience.*

Weinstein was a great way to meet other counselors, share program ideas, and help me think about my position as a staff member. Through this experience I was able to learn about myself as a counselor and try to improve for the upcoming summer. I had a chance to learn about other camps and talk to kids my age who share the same love for Ramah as I do.  
- *Elisheva Layman, Camp Ramah in New England*

It was my shortest yet most amazing Israel experience. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was a part of Israel, contributing to the land and helping to build a better future. The combination of Ramah and the Jewish National Fund led to a truly unparalleled fusion of learning and building.  
- *Hillel Buechler, Camp Ramah in the Berkshires*

We learned together about strengthening our abilities to be effective and impactful Jewish educators and role models in our Ramah camp settings....It was significant that this group of leaders in the Ramah movement joined together in Israel to make a statement about our commitment to, love for, and interest in [Israel's] past, present, and future.

I would do it again in a heartbeat.  
- *Aaron Goss, Camp Ramah in Canada*

- Sarah Sclare-Shapiro, Camp Ramah Darom



The Weinstein Institute helped establish and strengthen the values needed to be a Jewish leader: to do service, to love Israel, and to establish a sense of Jewish community.

- Elizabeth Kraemer, Camp Ramah in California

I enjoyed meeting madrichim from other camps and hearing about their experiences. I developed leadership skills as I attended hadracha sessions and did community service. This program, truly, was an excellent experience!

- Naomi Ehrich, Camp Ramah in the Poconos

I felt so lucky to be doing community service in the Negev at a time when Israel needed us the most. I'm proud to have helped to fulfill David Ben Gurion's dream of flourishing the beautiful desert land of Israel.

- Gila Hoffman, Camp Ramah in Wisconsin

Weinstein/JNF captured every aspect of Ramah that is so close to my heart-meeting Jews from around the world, showing our love for Israel, experiencing Shabbat together, and having fun.

- Ilana Sidorsky, Camp Ramah in Nyack