



## Update on Maslul Yisrael Fellowship October 2022

A new program for Ramah in summer 2022 was the Maslul Yisrael Fellowship, a partnership with the [Shalom Hartman Institute](#). This program convened 18 talented Ramah staff (15 North Americans and 3 Israelis) in May 2022 at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. There, they studied with Hartman's esteemed faculty using Jewish text, values, and ideas to explore how Israel fits into their North American and Israeli Jewish identities, and developed a set of tools and frameworks to foster substantive and compelling educational experiences about Israel in camp. As part of the fellowship, participants were expected to create and execute a meaningful Israel education program at camp in summer 2022.

Based on post-summer conversations with fellows as well as direct observation of their work in camp, we highlight here three major outcomes from the program that we hope can be replicated with more Maslul Yisrael fellows in the future. These are (1) feeling a sense of connection and belonging with other Ramah staff members; (2) having greater motivation to include shlichim and shlichot at camp; and (3) leading higher-level programs and conversations about Israel with multiple audiences at camp.

In addition to these three outcomes, we are also happy to report that a considerable majority of 2022 Maslul Yisrael fellows plan to return to work at camp again in summer 2023, even though that was not a requirement of the program. Many who were counselors in 2022 are hoping to return as rashei edah in 2023.

### **1. A sense of connection and belonging**

Bringing together a cohort of staff from nine different Ramah camps could have led to a week of awkward discomfort, as people only began to get to know one another. Instead, what we found on Maslul Yisrael was that the fellows connected with each other quite quickly. Learning in intensive sessions with Hartman faculty, touring east Jerusalem together, going grocery shopping together on the first night, and sharing camp Shabbat traditions with one another helped the group become more cohesive.

By the end of the trip, participants were sad to part ways, and during the summer, they maintained an active WhatsApp group, sharing pictures, messages of refuah shleimah for those with Covid, and highlights from their Israel programs.

One participant explained, “Sharing this experience with other Ramah staff members brought such power and meaning to all we were learning. I feel as though our similar yet different experiences really helped to focus our conversations and internalize how we can bring it to camp.”

Another participant told us after the summer ended that she was inspired by a teaching that one of the other Maslul Yisrael fellows from a different camp shared during Havdalah in Israel. Even though she sometimes struggles with public speaking, she felt motivated to offer the same teaching at Havdalah in front of the entire staff during staff week.

We hope to be able to bring returning Maslul Yisrael fellows to our Weinstein staff training conference in January 2023, to give people a chance to debrief their 2022 summers in person and to continue enhancing their roles as Israel educators in camp.

## **2. Including shlichim and shlichot**

One major goal of Maslul Yisrael was to motivate North American staff to be more inclusive of shlichim and shlichot at camp during the summer. We worked towards achieving this goal in a couple of ways on the trip.

First, and most importantly, two shlichim participated alongside North American staff for the duration of the program. A third shaliach was able to join for a handful of sessions with Hartman. They spent the week learning, living, davening, singing, and eating all together. Having these joint learning and sharing experiences helped the North American staff understand in a deeper way what it’s like for a shaliach to come work at a Ramah camp. They heard real stories from new friends, and also saw in sessions with Hartman faculty how Israeli perspectives on political and religious issues can be different from theirs.

Second, the group traveled to Tel Aviv for an afternoon *mifgash* with a number of shlichim coming to many of the Ramah camps. This meet-up allowed for our staff to get to know each other even before staff week began. We also facilitated a conversation about some of the challenges and opportunities of being a shaliach at camp. This early face-to-face connection made it much easier for Maslul Yisrael fellows to later welcome those specific shlichim/ot who attended this session, but also the rest of the mishlachat at camp.

Reflecting on what it was like to welcome shlichim to camp this summer, one participant explained: “It felt different to work alongside Israelis this summer than last summer. This summer, I came in actively thinking about the conversations we had on Maslul Yisrael. How could I help create a community with less division between North American and Israeli staff members?”

### 3. Leading higher-level Israel programs and conversations

All Maslul Yisrael participants led some kind of Israel programming at camp this summer. Some came into Maslul Yisrael already knowing what they wanted to do this summer. For example, one of the shlichim who participated wanted to lead a tekes for staff the night before Yom Yisrael to honor fallen Israeli soldiers and victims of terror. Through Maslul Yisrael, he received more support and buy-in from the other two fellows from his camp. They also encouraged their friends on staff to take the program seriously. It worked. The director of the camp reported afterward that you could hear a pin drop in the room; that's how engaged the staff members were.

Maslul Yisrael fellows led their programs for a wide variety of ages and populations. Some participants led programs for staff during staff week, to help facilitate a better culture of collaboration and trust between American and Israeli staff. Others led programs for elementary school-aged campers, using visual aids to introduce basic Israeli geography and history. One Maslul Yisrael fellow led a discussion with about the ways Israel is portrayed in tefillot and was pleasantly surprised to see the level of sophistication coming from many of the campers.

Programs for older campers were the only programs that directly used materials from the Hartman seminars. A pair of fellows who both worked with rising 11th graders at one of the Ramah camps used Hartman's "X Happened" session to lead a conversation about what happened during the Israeli War of Independence and how people might respond to those events in contemporary times. Another incorporated a Yehuda Amichai poem into a Shabbat afternoon discussion for 10th graders about Jewish identity.

We are happy with the ways these fellows brought Israel to their programming in a way they would not have without Maslul Yisrael. There is still room for further enhancing Israel education at camp. Those counselors who led the most successful programs had support and guidance from their directors and/or other Jewish educators in camp. As we prepare for the next group of Maslul Yisrael fellows, we will need to do more to make sure they have programmatic support and accountability during the summer.

#### **Maslul Yisrael 2023**

We are thrilled that the Shalom Hartman Institute is doubling down on its support for teen and young adult programming through an initiative called [Wellspring](#). Maslul Yisrael is one of the first programs of this initiative and we have already begun conversations with Hartman to continue it this spring.

Read more about the Maslul Yisrael fellows trip to Israel [here](#).