

JEROME ABRAMS*Professor Seymour Fox, z"l (1929–2006)*

At the age of twenty, Seymour Fox, z"l, already was the educational director/cantor of a synagogue in Chicago. In the fall of 1952, Fox entered the Rabbinical School of The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). The following summer he was the adviser for the junior counselors at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. This was the beginning of Seymour Fox's career as a major force in the growth and development of the Ramah Camping Movement. In 1954, Fox became the director of Ramah Wisconsin. In 1956, upon completion of rabbinical school, Fox assumed the position of assistant to the JTS Chancellor. His major responsibility was supervising the Ramah camps. Fox made it his top priority. That year, Dr. M. Bernard Resnikoff, z"l, was appointed as the first full-time National Ramah director reporting to Seymour Fox.

Fox was appointed the associate dean of the Teachers Institute of JTS in 1960. Under the guidance of the renowned Bruno Bettelheim, he received his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1965. In 1966, he was appointed dean of the Teachers Institute. In 1967, Fox accepted the position of director of the School of Education at the Hebrew University and made aliyah. When the philanthropist Morton L. Mandel was the chair of the Jewish Agency's Committee on Education, he brought in Seymour Fox as a senior adviser. In 1990, Fox became the president of the Mandel Foundation in Israel and in 2002, the director for programming of the Mandel Foundation worldwide.

Seymour Fox's boundless energy, his powerful personality, and his innovative and creative mind are legendary. These personal qualities, along with his passionate commitment to Jewish education and to creating a new vision for this field, made him a major figure in the Ramah Camping Movement and the educational system of the State of Israel. At Ramah, he initiated and developed such programs as the American Seminar, the Israel Seminar, the Mador, and seminars during which directors studied regularly with the distinguished philosopher of education, Joseph Schwab. Fox developed retreats and seminars with the Teachers Institute faculty, the Melton Research Center staff, and the Ramah directors participating together. He elevated the Ramah directorship into a profession. In 1958, when I became the director of Camp Ramah in Connecticut (now Camp Ramah in New England), and David Mogilner, z"l, succeeded me as the director of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, Fox convinced the leaders at JTS that the job of being a Ramah director is a full-time position.

In 1963, Fox founded the Melton Research Center at JTS. He developed an unusual, integrated organizational structure of the educational facilities at the Seminary. Under one umbrella, he combined the resources of the Teachers Institute faculty as the academic base, the Melton Research Center as the educational research base, and Ramah as the “theory in practice” base. Under this educational umbrella, he also assembled an outstanding array of scholars, thinkers, and practitioners from both the secular and Jewish worlds who were active participants in these programs. Seymour Fox, without a doubt, was one of the major figures in making Ramah the “crown jewel” of the Conservative Movement.

At Hebrew University, Fox established the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora. He started the Jerusalem Fellows program, funded mainly by the Jewish Agency in Israel. In addition, he founded the Mandel Foundation, and under its auspices, the Mandel School for Educational Leadership. Fox served as an adviser to ministers of education in Israel. In all of Fox’s educational enterprises, two of his philosophical and methodological hallmarks were always evident. One was his commitment to inquiry, to questioning accepted theories and practices, and a passion for creating new visions of education. Second, he would manage to gather the best minds and practitioners from a variety of disciplines and have them interact directly with the participants, very often on a one-to-one basis. The trainees would experience firsthand, with these great minds, what it means to inquire, to question, to explore, and to probe for new ways and ideas—in other words, to be an out-of-the-box, creative professional, in addition to being proficient in the content, skills, and methods of the field. Fox was especially successful in developing this innovative educational process.

I conclude with the following personal musing: There is an old Yiddish expression, “*Mentsh tracht und Gott lacht.*” In 2006, approaching the age of 76, Seymour Fox finally decided to enjoy a little rest and recreation and announced his retirement. Suddenly, just two weeks later, he passed away. *Haval.*

RABBI JEROME ABRAMS opened *Camp Ramah in the Berkshires* in 1964 and retired as *director emeritus* in 1994. He spent his entire career of over thirty-five years as a *Ramah* director and senior leader. He started his career as the director of *Camp Ramah in Wisconsin* from 1956 to 1957 and subsequently directed *Camp Ramah in Connecticut* (now *New England*) from 1958 to 1960 and *Camp Ramah in Nyack* from 1961 to 1963.