



Dear Ramah Families and Staff,

While Covid contingency planning has taken its share of the spotlight this past year, we have also sought to reflect on the core elements that make a Ramah camp experience a success, namely creating a warm and nurturing environment for each and every Ramahnik that walks through our gates. We invite you to read the message below that highlights 7 of our core Ramah values of inclusivity and diversity.

**Maggid/ Storytelling**, the 5th section of the Passover seder, lies at the heart of the holiday retelling our foundational story. It is striking that we begin *Maggid* (storytelling), not by quoting the Torah or talking about theology, but instead by swinging our doors wide open and welcoming the **entirety** of our community to join in the story.

**“This is the bread of affliction...Let all who are in need come and share...”**

It is recited in Aramaic which might be hard for most of our tongues, but the selection of the language is significant. This was the language of the day, the most understood language by the people who needed the invitation. Aramaic was used because we can only tell **OUR** foundational story creating redemption when the **OUR** reflects the diversity of **OUR** Jewish community.

Ramah has always sought to ensure that our *shulchanot*- our tables- in Ojai are filled with the diversity of our community. That was true pre-pandemic and remains true as we plan to welcome *chanichim* (campers) and *tzevet* (staff) back to our beloved *machane* (camp).



**1) VALUE: JEWISH RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY:** While Ramah is proudly a Conservative Jewish Camp, our population reflects sizable cohorts of diverse groups of Jews affiliating as Reform, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, Chabad and other.

**a. RAMAH IN ACTION:** While public observance of ritual and practice will follow Conservative approaches, staff and campers alike will honor and respect diverse religious backgrounds and individual beliefs.



**2) VALUE: FAMILY DIVERSITY:** Ramah welcomes and reflects families of all constellations which include: single parents, same-sex parents, divorced households, blended families, non-parent guardians, and everything in between.

**a. RAMAH IN ACTION:** Ramah as an organization continues to improve its staff training, forms and procedures to enable all Ramah families to feel at home.



**3) VALUE: FINANCIAL DIVERSITY:** Roughly 1/2 of Ramah families require financial support to send their kids to camp including 35-40% who receive Ramah financial aid.

**a. RAMAH IN ACTION:** Ramah will continue to aggressively look for all means of making camp more affordable and accessible. We maintain need-blind admissions and will continue to embrace camp families and campers irrespective of financial capacity. At camp, our community will continue to elevate relationships over materialism as we strive to keep camp accessible and affordable.



**4) VALUE: CULTURAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY:** Ramah campers and staff include Jews of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds including Sephardic, Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, Israeli, Persian, Russian, Jews by choice, Jews of color, and more.

**a. RAMAH IN ACTION:** Ramah seeks to be a home for Jews from all these diverse backgrounds, both as campers and as role models on staff. At Ramah campers will learn about the diversity of the Jewish world through experiential education and create a culture of acceptance and celebration of traditions shared by Jews from around the world.



**5) VALUE: SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER DIVERSITY:** The Ramah community includes campers and staff of all sexual orientations and gender identities. With the recognition that gender identity and sexual orientation are distinct, Ramah seeks to simultaneously create a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ identified kids, staff and parents.

**a. RAMAH IN ACTION:** We achieve this through our sensitivity to avoid heteronormative assumptions in our language and programming and to educate our staff about the needs of gender non-conforming campers. In helping each and every Ramahnik to find their place in our kehillah, we assign bunking that supports a child's overall well-being, which may include bunking according to gender identity. We recognize that this area may represent a “learning zone” for some of our families and we would be happy to provide additional resources.



**6) VALUE: LOVE FOR ISRAEL AND A DIVERSITY OF PERSPECTIVES:** From its inception, Camp Ramah has maintained Israel and *Ivrit* as central pillars of Jewish identity and education. With hundreds of *shlichim* (Israeli staff) spending summers at Ramah and Ramahniks spending weeks, months, or decades living in Israel, the Ramah experience has also influenced Israeli society.

**a. RAMAH IN ACTION:** Ramah believes in infusing *Ivrit* and Israel experiential education into the camper and staff experience that reflects love for Israel. In an ever-increasing era of political polarization, we aim at Ramah to have civil discourse about Israel, led with age-appropriate education and values. Although not a formal part of our curriculum, our commitment to civil discourse extends to include the topics of U.S. and global politics.



**7) VALUE: NEUROTYPICAL DIVERSITY:** Camp Ramah has long been a welcoming place to campers and staff with disabilities. This has been a shining example of how communal diversity is a blessing and enriching for all.

**a. RAMAH IN ACTION:** Ramah maintains a commitment to further destigmatize differing abilities within and outside of the Tikvah community. We continue to find new ways to accommodate and support a broad range of needs of campers and staff throughout the camp experience and Ramah journey.

**PREPARING RAMAH CAMPERS FOR RAMAH DIVERSITY**

We are sensitive to the fact that our campers have had a wide-range of experiences throughout this pandemic, and, for many, camp will be one of the first opportunities to be in-person with peers. We ask parents to talk with their campers in advance of the summer about the importance of being open to new friendships, especially with campers that might seem different from them. Summer after summer, we see friendships blossom out of such openness. At the same time, we ask that you remind your camper that they will be embraced by a loving community for exactly who they are.

**A few talking points to get you started. Please encourage your camper TO...**

- Be open to meeting all kinds of wonderful kids, some of whom will become lifelong friends and others friendly acquaintances – but all deserving of kindness and respect.
- Be aware that each of us likely has something about ourselves that others might be interested in asking about that we may not want to discuss. It is important to establish personal boundaries and imperative to respect the boundaries of others.
- Turn to an adult in camp with any questions or concerns. Those adults include madrichim (counselors), Rashei edah (unit heads), yoatzot (parent liaisons), Director of Camper Care (Dr. Aviva Levine Jacobs), Camp Director (Ariella Moss Peterseil), Executive Director (Rabbi Joe Menashe) and Tikvah Director (Elana Naftalin Kelman).

The impact of classic Ramah moments of chilling on the *giva* (hill) with friends or cheering in Hebrew during Maccabiah are enhanced by the diversity of the people and experiences our children encounter at Ramah. Well into our 7th decade, Ramah is proud of our inclusive and diverse community in which we are cultivating the next generation of Jewish leaders.

With this letter, we hope to create a shared nomenclature for how our community is addressing some of the demographic and cultural changes that are at play in the Jewish world at large and Camp Ramah. If you would like to support our efforts or have questions or comments, please reach out to schedule a phone call with Rabbi Joe, Ariella or Aviva.

**Moadim L'simcha,**

Rabbi Joe Menashe, Executive Director  
Ariella Moss Peterseil, Camp Director  
Randy Michaels, COFO  
Dr. Aviva Levine Jacobs, Director of Camper Care and Staff Wellness  
Elana Naftalin Kelman, Tikvah Director  
Cc: Ellen Brown, Board Chair Camp Ramah in California



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