

Thoughts on Summers Spent at Jewish Camps

by Two Local Teenagers

Sarabeth Berman:

Each summer I return to the same familiar fields and cabins of Camp Young Judea in Amherst, New Hampshire. The camp has grown to feel like a second home to me, a place where I have met amazing other Jewish teens and shared so many lasting memories.

Whether it is discussing Zionist issues or just singing Jewish songs in the dining hall on Friday nights, I have never felt such a strong Jewish community. This past summer, as the oldest campers, we traveled to Israel for six weeks, spending time with amazing people and hiking around the most beautiful sights in the world. I felt the strongest relationship with Israel and my Jewish heritage I have ever felt. Some of my fellow campers live in areas where there are few Jews. For them, associating with other Jewish teenagers is an extraordinary experience. The spirit that fills the dining hall when we say the Birkat (grace after meals) is irreplaceable. Shabbat services are never boring when you are surrounded by familiar songs and familiar faces. And the warm summer evening and the warmth of friendships magnify the beauty of Havdalah.

As my camping years come to a conclusion, I reflect on the impact it has made on me as a person and as a Jew. I now have ties with Jewish teens from all over the country. Having had the opportunity to spend my summers in such an amazing environment has shown me the importance of a Jewish community and the strength and support it can provide.

Alex Weisman:

For the past seven summers I have been making the trip up to Northwood, New Hampshire, to Camp Yavneh. It only takes one day of being back with all my friends to start to feel like I have never left. In this respect Yavneh has become like a second home to me. My friends who go to other Jewish camps feel the same way.

One of the best things about camp is the community. Everyone at camp is Jewish, but the population is diverse in almost every other aspect. I enjoy the informal classes that take place every morning under a tree. We talk about controversial issues and how they fit in to a Jewish perspective. The opportunities for Jewish learning are nearly endless. Campers study Torah together on the steps of bunks and the rabbis are always around if you have any questions. Hebrew is used to make announcements and in everyday conversations. It is surprising how much Hebrew I learned by incorporating the language into daily living. The spiritual life at camp is also very enriching, from singing zmirot and dancing after dinner on Friday nights to the solemn Tisha B'Av services. I have been able to learn how to lead services as well as how services differ from orthodox to egalitarian. Campers from different religious backgrounds feel comfortable at camp because there are so many options. If you want to go to an orthodox minyan and daven mincha and ma'ariv, you can. If you are comfortable at an egalitarian service, it is also offered. If you don't know where you fit in,

you try both.

I am looking forward to this coming summer, when I go on a trip to Israel with fellow campers, a culmination of our summers at Camp Yavneh. Spending six weeks in Israel with the forty kids who have become my second family will be fun as well as spiritually enriching. I'm sure it will be a summer that I will never forget.

Camp has offered me the opportunity to really explore my relationship with Judaism. I have learned many things that I might never have learned, which now are very important to my life at home. I have learned how to be a productive member of the Jewish community while enjoying the summers with my friends.