

CAMP RAMAH IN CALIFORNIA'S YOUNG ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

# chevrei ramah

NEWSLETTER

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חברי רמה



A Summer for a Lifetime

## Ramah Alumni Head Back to Camp



Young alumni enjoy a fabulous Shabbat weekend at Ramah.

### By Jon Weinbach

The sun was blazing, the karaoke was rocking, and the rabbi fell ill. That's one way to describe this summer's Chevrei Ramah reunion, which drew about 60 former campers and counselors -- and a few of their babies -- to the one and only Max and Pauline Zimmer Conference Center in Ojai. First thing's first: If you haven't been up to the 93023 zip code in a while, camp looks GOOD. For those of us who played our best *ga-ga* in the '80s, it's almost painful to see the upgrades throughout camp. There's a permanent (and beautiful) Kikar Zion amphitheater for Kabbalat Shabbat services -- i.e. today's Machon boys no longer have to lug benches on Friday afternoons. The basketball courts have glass backboards. In place of the old archery/cookout/thorny-plant area behind the tennis courts, there's now an actual soccer field. The new bunks have *air conditioning*. (Doesn't that

break some fundamental law of Ramah?) Perhaps most welcome of all, there is now grass in so many places where dust once ruled. And those are just a few of the improvements -- and more are on the way.

To get up to Ojai for this much-anticipated reunion, the smart folks blew off work entirely on Friday, avoided the gridlock on the 101, and pulled into 385 Fairview Road in the early afternoon. **Josh and Nikki Feldman**, with outrageously cute children **Ethan** (five years old) and **Lily** (two) in tow, were among the early arrivals and cooled off in the pool. Far more of us got to camp around dusk, just in time for a cozy BKR service led by Rabbi Dan. Unfortunately, it was the last we'd see of Rabbi Greyber -- a nasty cold sidelined him the rest of the weekend (There's only so much sleep-deprivation a camp director can endure by the end of the summer.) The healthy among us, however,

### Ramah Tribute Dinner Honoring Sheila and Aaron Leibovic

**When:** Thursday, December 6

**Where:** Sinai Temple

**General Admission:** \$250 per person

**Young Alumni:** \$75 per person

**Chevrei Ramah'niks:** \$50 per person

*Proceeds of the dinner will help us construct a new, second swimming pool at camp, with two waterslides! Please contact Ramah's development director, Carol Abrams, at (310) 440-1276 for more information.*

moved on to the Chadar Sheni for the familiar Shabbat dinner of salty soup and BBQ chicken. From what I could tell, the table conversations ranged from Middle East politics to breast-feeding to Kobe Bryant -- and I'm sure **Gary Frank**, among others, had strong opinions on all three topics. It was a little strange to see the main Chadar empty. Without the tables and benches and bustle of campers, the dining room actually seemed smaller than I remembered.

The night continued after dinner as we gathered in the Chadar Katan for some adult beverages and dessert. **Richard Sudar** whipped out the scotch, **Aaron and Jenny Aftergood** chatted up **Matt Spooner**, while **Earl Weinstein** recounted some memories with **Etan and Allison (Hurwitz) Kelman**, who recently completed a honeymoon safari in Africa. The **brothers Varon**

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## Director's Corner

### Taking Counsel with Others

*“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... (Genesis 1:26)”* What is the problem with this verse? Didn't see it? Look again. *“And God said, Let us...”* Us? Who is the “us” being referred to? Who joined with God in helping to create human beings?

Nachmanidies (1195-1270) says that God spoke to the earth, previously created, and asked the earth to participate in man's creation by providing the body – since human beings are formed from the ground – and then God provided the spirit/soul. Or HaHayim (1696-1743) explains that God used the plural to teach us that the name Elohim (used in our verse and associated with judgment) came together with God's 13 attributes of mercy and compassion, to create human beings with a balance of judgment and compassion.

But the explanation I want to concentrate on is Rashi's. Rashi says that God took a risk by using the plural. What was the risk? That heretics would read the plural and

argue that there were two gods, or that God needed help to create human beings. Why would God risk the very foundations of monotheism or God's omnipotence by including a plural form in the first chapter of the Torah?

Here is Rashi's answer: “the verse does not refrain from teaching proper conduct [derech erez] and the virtue of humility, namely, that the greater should consult and take permission from the smaller. If it had been written, “I shall make man,” we could not have learned that God spoke to His judicial council [presumably the angels].”

God takes a risk to teach us a lesson: even (and perhaps especially) the great should take counsel with the small. Too often adults overlook great wisdom and passion young people bring to the world. Experience is a great teacher but it often traps us into old and rigid ways of thinking. Campers returned home from Ramah a month or two ago. How many of them were asked by parents, teachers, synagogues and rabbis about their vision for Jewish life? Our children are not only the objects of education; Ramah campers can be wellsprings of creativity and originality in Jewish communities everywhere.

As we begin the Torah anew, may we have the wisdom to take counsel with each of God's creatures and may each of us be blessed, in whatever we do, to direct our hearts to heaven.

B'Shalom,

Rabbi Daniel Greyber  
Director  
Camp Ramah in California

### By Danny Varon

From the softball field in 1989 to the bike path in 2007, the road most often seems to lead through Ojai! As a first-year Nitzanim camper, spending a day on the softball field due to another Ojai Valley fire was, somehow, surprisingly comforting. Although I distinctly recall the smoke rising above the hills behind Bunks 5 and 6, sitting on the softball field with the entire camp was my first “welcome to the Ramah community” moment. In the 18 years since, there have been many more such moments -- from meeting fellow Ramahniks on Shabbat at GW Hillel, to returning every summer to work at camp with old friends, or reconnecting with others through Chevrei Ramah.

Now, Ramah alumni Aaron Aftergood and Michael Carroll and I are taking another road through Ojai ... this time on the saddle of a bicycle. For the second straight year, we are riding

## A Familiar Road

our bicycles 175 miles over two days to raise money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. (See <http://tinyurl.com/yte5zu> for more info.) While last year's ride took us down the coast to San Diego, this year's route will take us from Camarillo (not far from the outlets where we have all spent many a day off from camp) through the Ojai Valley, along Casitas Pass (remember the Nitzanim overnight?) and into Santa Barbara (passing El Capitan State Beach... I think that was Giborei).



From Left: Aaron Aftergood, Danny Varon and Michael Carroll

Ramah friendships are lifelong. No matter where we find ourselves down the road, we will likely meet up with a friend from Ramah along the way. But then again, those of us reading this newsletter already know that, and benefit daily from it. As we begin the new year, my prayer for all of us is that we have a year of health and happiness, and that we continue to build new relationships, strengthen existing ones, and help bring others back into the Ramah community to strengthen the whole.

*Danny Varon is an Attorney in the Orange County D. A. 's Office.*



Edah Notes are all about YOU, Camp Ramah alumni! Keep us informed by emailing us at [chevrei@ramah.org](mailto:chevrei@ramah.org).

*Betsy Uhrman*, former madricha, Machon Educator and Rosh Edah, was recently engaged to Joel Snyder. The happy couple relocated from New York to beautiful Northern California.

*Shana Gardenswartz*, former madricha and staff program coordinator, is engaged to David Jacobs.

*Aaron Inlender*, former madrich, is engaged to Rachel Gindi.

*Julie (Bernstein) Silverstein*, former madricha, and her husband Rusty recently became first-time parents to Matan, a healthy baby boy.

*Jeremy & Gwen (Shelden) Rosenthal*, former madrichim and Rashei Edah, recently gave birth to their second son, Michah.

*Jake Aftergood*, former madrich and moomcheh, is engaged to Emily London.



Aaron Inlender proposes to Rachel Gindi in Israel.

*Deborah Musher & Rabbi Joe Menasche*, former Ramah madrichim/moomchim and Rashei Edah, recently welcomed their son, Gabriel Marc, to join big sister Molly in the family. Joe serves as an Associate Rabbi at Congregation Shearith Israel in Dallas while Deborah continues her good work with the special needs population.

*Justin Weissman*, former madrich, moomcheh and Rosh Edah, recently married Shannon Jacob.

*Dr. Matt Albert*, former madrich and Rosh Edah, and wife Greta are expecting their first child. Matt recently embarked on a new adventure, founding a charter middle school in the Los Angeles area focused on social justice.

*Tova Mannis*, former madricha and Ezra Coordinator, recently began medical school at UC Davis.

*Matthew & Cheryl (Spital) Udewitz*, welcomed daughter Annica Johanna into the world.

*Robbie, & Emily (Stein) Varon*, former camper; and former madricha, moomchit and Rosh Edah, are expecting their first baby in the spring.

*Adam & Jamie (Datnow) Rosenthal*, former madrichim, are expecting their first child.

*Jason Michlowitz*, former moomcheh, and wife Michelle welcomed little girl Eryn Caitlin into their family.

## A West Coast Ramah Shabbat to Write Home About



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Do you remember writing and receiving Shabbat-ograms? A two hour stretch of *nikayon* on Friday afternoon? Shlepping benches to Kikar Tzion before the permanent Beit Knesset was built?

Well, the Shabbat spirit returned to Ramah alumni on May 11, 2007 when over 70 young adults gathered to celebrate the weekly holy day. The event was hosted by Jenny & Aaron Aftergood in their beautiful backyard,

where Ramah'niks had an opportunity to eat, shmooze, eat, toast, catch up with old friends and meet new ones ... and then eat some more. The evening was planned by the great team of leaders who work together on the Chevrei Ramah steering committee, and rated by those in attendance as a great success. The atmosphere was relaxing as attendees enjoyed challah, salad, pasta, and homemade desserts, while also sipping wine, beer and other beverages.

"Remember when..." seemed to be the catch phrase of the evening.

Chevrei Ramah has sponsored Shabbat dinners in Los Angeles and New York, and looks forward to another round of dinners in those cities and possibly Northern California in 2008 (5768). Discounted rates are always made available to members of Chevrei Ramah (membership info at [www.ramah.org](http://www.ramah.org)).

the air, the spices were passed, and it could have been Tzofim, summer '90. Except now, instead of dodging David Lazar and the Shmirah henchmen, we get to drink beer and indulge our karaoke mojo when the lights go out in Ojai. Roberto Weinstein channeled his inner Billy Joel with a rendition of "Piano Man," Spooner went silly on "Humpty Dance," and even Matt (reluctantly) grabbed the mic and attempted to sing Johnny Cash's signature hit, "Walk The Line." All in all, a thoroughly good time.

Before you can say "devil'd eggs," it was Sunday morning and time to head back to real life. Hugs and email addresses were exchanged underneath the futuristic new roofs that shade the dance patios outside the Chadar...and we loaded up our cars and headed for home. Many thanks to Matt and Aaron Aftergood for putting it together, and we would love to see more familiar faces at the next reunion.

Jon Weinbach is a sports reporter for the Wall Street Journal.

late hottest time of the day. There were a few highlights – notably **Robbie Varon's** outside touch and **Ashley Stone's** tenacity – but we all probably would have been better off doing Yoga in the library with **Yael Prizant**. Shabbat afternoon was blissfully lazy: splash time at the pool, snooze time in bed, or just schmooze time around camp.

Soon it was dark, and we were gathered on the hill, Peulat Erev-style, for the Havdallah circle. The familiar tunes filled



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## Reunion Recap: A Who's Who of Ramah'niks Bond at Camp Shabbaton

(Robby and Danny) relaxed with their wives, **Emily and Stacy**, and after putting their kids to bed, **Ryan and Ashley Stone** grabbed a couch and hung out with Chevrei Ramah mogul **Matt Albert and wife Creta**. And everybody made room for the limping **Roman Kopalevich**, fresh off (another) knee surgery. (His basketball days may be numbered.) Meanwhile, my pregnant wife **Amanda Garner** gleaned child-rearing tips from **Jennifer (Prottas) Lowe**, who knows a thing or two about kids: She and Eric have two kids of their own.

Shabbat morning arrived, and so did the heat. The blistering temperatures didn't prevent Mr. Aftergood from exhibiting his MJV – Most Valuable Jew – skills at shacharit services, but the soaring Fahr-heit convinced many folks to take it easy in the afternoon. (And isn't that what Shabbat is about, anyway?) Foolishly, some of us went to the basketball court and proceeded to play at the abso-

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CAMP RAMAH IN CALIFORNIA  
15600 Mulholland Drive  
Los Angeles, CA 90077  
www.ramah.org/alumni

### CHEVREI RAMAH LEADERSHIP

Aaron Aftergood  
Chevrei Ramah Chair

#### Steering Committee

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Jenny Aftergood    | Nate Smith      |
| Matt Albert        | Matt Spooner    |
| Sayeh Farivar      | Lindsay Stricke |
| Kayla Garaway      | Danny Varon     |
| Ali Hurwitz-Kelman | Stacy Varon     |
| Joey Miller        | Emily Varon     |
| Yael Prizant       | Jon Weinbach    |
| Suzanne Reznikoff  | Earl Weinstein  |
| Hallie Rosenbloom  | Justin Weissman |
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