

The Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah in New England¹

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The summer of 1999 marked the 30th anniversary of the Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah in New England. The project, which serves adolescents with developmental disabilities, began in 1970 as the result of a joint effort among the Committee on Special Education of the United Synagogue of America, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the National Ramah Commission. Housed initially at Camp Ramah in Glen Spey, New York, the Tikvah Program soon grew to encompass programs in the Camps Ramah of New England, Wisconsin, California, Israel and most recently, Canada.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Ramah movement in America has spearheaded religious, Zionist summer camping, which has imbued Jewish youngsters with an appreciation of Jewish culture, Jewish religious practice, and Zionism. The Ramah movement has, in this way, nurtured the development of future Jewish leaders. The Ramah camps have, since their inception, incorporated into their structure the basic values of *Yahadut* (Judaism), observance of *Shabbat* and *kashrut*, use of the Hebrew language, participation in *tefillot* (daily prayer) and constant emphasis on the centrality of Israel to Jewish existence. Ramah, as a Jewish community, has provided a structure in which its members are both encouraged and expected to develop mutually trusting and responsible relationships; the Ramah community prescribes standards of ethical conduct which afford its members the opportunity to apply Jewish values to daily experiences.

¹ This article is based upon a paper delivered at the Second Annual International Conference on Jewish Special Education at Tel Aviv University, in December, 1993, by the authors, the founders and directors for twenty-nine years, of the Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah in New England.

Part I: Beginnings and Challenges

In early 1970, the National Ramah Commission was presented with a unique challenge. At that time, Ramah primarily served a population of campers who attended Hebrew schools and Jewish day schools, spoke some Hebrew, and were expected to become the leaders of Conservative Jewry in North America. A subcommittee of the United Synagogue Commission Jewish Education, however, requested that a Jewish summer camp incorporate a group of adolescents with developmental disabilities into its population. Various Jewish camps had already rejected this proposal before it was offered to Ramah. When this challenge was offered to Ramah, the Ramah directors, too, with one notable exception, turned down the proposal, citing a number of reasons. At that time they feared that the presence of a mentally and/or emotionally handicapped group in the camp community would disrupt the structure of the camp in the following ways:

- (a) it would dilute the level of Hebrew in the camp because of the accommodations which would have to be made for this “special” group;
- (b) it would create fear and anxiety throughout a community which had no previous exposure to a similar group;
- (c) it would become a financial burden to the camp and the movement, because of the higher staff-to-camper ration which would be required;
- (d) it would frighten away “normal” campers whose parents would be afraid to send their children; and
- (e) it would require the services of many specialists who would have limited, if any, Judaic background.

This pessimistic reaction to the proposal threatened to scuttle any further consideration of the project. The director of Camp Ramah in Glen Spey, New York (which was to relocate to Camp Ramah in New England in 1972), Mr. Donald Adelman, however, refused to accept his colleagues’ dour assessment. He viewed the proposal as a unique opportunity for Ramah to demonstrate its ability to become an “outreach” institution at the same time that it continued to concretize the values it had always espoused. His vision expanded the role of Ramah, as he believed that the

institution had the strength and flexibility to serve the Jewish community responsibly with regard to its handicapped members, while simultaneously continuing its mission of preparing youth for roles of Jewish communal leadership. Thus was born the Tikvah Program at Camp Ramah.

Ramah's decision in 1970 to integrate a special education group into a non-handicapped community was unprecedented. It was historically significant since there existed neither school nor community integration models at the time on which to base any prediction of success. No one really knew whether it was beneficial to remove developmentally disabled adolescents from restrictive settings at home and in schools and then challenge them with "inclusion" in an established environment which demanded high social and behavioral expectations.

In addition, there were many issues related to the ability and/or willingness of these campers to meet the religious requirements of the camp. How, for example, would this group respond to *tefillot* and rituals conducted in an unfamiliar language? Should they study Hebrew?

Most of them struggled to express themselves in, or even to understand, English. Should they be encouraged, or even permitted to prepare for *bnei* or *banot mitzvah* ceremonies? If they did succeed in becoming *bnei* or *banot mitzvah*, what role, if any, could they play halachically, in the religious life of the camp? One must remember, in retrospect, that these teenagers had, in most cases, been excluded from synagogue and Hebrew school participation, and thus came to Ramah with only that Judaic background that they might have been given at home. The Tikvah Program, nevertheless, transmuted these stumbling blocks into assets, and, as will be detailed in Part II, placed religious observance and learning at the center of its therapeutic regimen. Over the years, in fact, the Tikvah Program has included campers from Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Orthodox Jewish homes, and several children from at least two Chassidic sects have participated in the program with the support of their *rebbe*s.

During the first decade of its existence, the Tikvah Program enrolled many handicapped children of Holocaust survivors. One particularly poignant moment illustrates both the therapeutic value of the religious component of the Tikvah Program and its effect on the camper's family. The mother of a thirteen-year-old girl with Down Syndrome admitted to the Tikvah administrators that, despite the fact that her husband was a con-

gregational rabbi, she had been unable to pray since her imprisonment in Auschwitz. Upon witnessing the religious and social attainments of her daughter in the Tikvah Program, however, she felt she had been enabled again to find meaning in *tefillah*.

The decision to begin the Tikvah Program in 1970 with only eight adolescents allowed its founders to articulate carefully the broad goals of Tikvah, goals which continue to guide the Tikvah Program to this day. The basic premise of the Tikvah Program has been that every youngster with a disability who attends Camp Ramah should be provided the same range of opportunities as any other member of the Ramah community. The first summer, the founders inaugurated an intensive program of staff training for the Tikvah counselors, as well as for the general camp staff. A major goal of this training program was the elimination of the categorical labels which had defined this population in the past. Thus, while numerous identifiable syndromes were represented among the Tikvah campers, all staff members were encouraged to refer to these campers, not as personifications of this syndrome or that condition, but simply as members of another Adah (division) in camp, albeit with diagnosed learning and/or emotional difficulties which required additional supervision and some special programming. The use of the terms “mentally retarded” and “emotionally disturbed” was discouraged, as they merely labeled or stereotyped the youngsters without describing their needs in any useful way.

The Tikvah staff outlined to the rest of the Ramah community the behavioral expectations for the Tikvah population; the code words which they repeatedly employed were *accountability* and *accessibility*. The Tikvah staff urged the community to discard its preconceived notions of youngsters with disabilities and enjoined all members of the Ramah community to evaluate each Tikvah camper as an individual with specific strengths and needs. The Tikvah staff encouraged continuous, regular feedback from the general Ramah staff regarding the adjustment of each youngster in the program. Every supervisor of an activity at camp was expected to be accessible to Tikvah youngsters in the same way that he or she was accessible to other Ramah campers. At the same time, all members of the Tikvah staff were expected to be accessible to members of the general staff in order to facilitate the integration of the Tikvah campers into camp life. This dual principle of mutual accountability and accessi-

bility ensured that the professionally trained members of the Tikvah staff would be apprised of and respond to, in a timely and appropriate fashion, any intrusive behaviors which the Tikvah campers might exhibit. In this way, the Tikvah staff succeeded in forging a relationship of mutual trust between the Tikvah Program and the rest of the community.

In the early years of the Tikvah Program, the reactions of the Ramah community were mixed. Although most of the community genuinely tried to be sensitive to the feelings of the Tikvah campers. The early Tikvah populations were a “curiosity” in the camp, just as they would have been in their home communities and synagogues at that time. Members of the camp community would pepper Tikvah staff members with questions about specific issues relating to disability. Typical issues of concern included their “need” to understand the etiology of a disability, the prognoses for individual Tikvah campers, and acceptable ways of responding to challenging interactions with Tikvah campers. Despite the emphasis on mutual accountability and accessibility, described above, it was not uncommon in the early years of the program for many specialists throughout the camp to try to shy away from assuming staff responsibilities toward Tikvah youngsters. “I am not trained,” “I wouldn’t know what to do,” or, “I am uncomfortable,” were rationalizations offered by many specialty staff for their reluctance to provide services. The Tikvah leadership, along with the director of the camp, addressed the concerns of these staff members. Their efforts gradually helped to remove the emotional barriers to communication between the general camp population and that of the Tikvah Program.

It must be stated that a disproportionate number among the *mishlachot* (Israeli staff of the general camp) were particularly antagonistic toward the Tikvah Program during its infancy. Flush with the success of the Six Day War, and imbued with a sense of Israeli/Jewish invincibility, coupled with an ethic that glorified strength and power, many Israelis in the camp were unable to confront the physical, intellectual, and emotional deficits manifested by members of the Tikvah Program. Furthermore, a number of the camp physicians in those early years had to be prodded to extend to the Tikvah campers the same level of care they routinely provided to the non-handicapped campers. Some physicians - citing the special needs of the Tikvah campers and coupled with their misguided belief that they, the physicians were “not equipped to handle these problems,” -

tried to insist that a Tikvah staff member sleep in the infirmary with any Tikvah camper required to stay overnight. Needless to say, many heated exchanges took place between the medical staff and the Tikvah director during those early years.

Because of the commitment of Don Adelman, the camp director, to the success of the Tikvah Program, all programming in the camp had to take into account the participation of the Tikvah youngsters. Many of the educational leaders of the camp begrudgingly accepted the inclusion of individual members of the Tikvah program in prayer services, classes, recreational activities, vocational placements, and camp wide cultural programs. There were no educational models during the early 1970s from which to predict the outcomes of those first *mainstreaming* efforts at Camp Ramah in New England. It was, therefore, necessary to work very closely with the leadership of the camp to develop goals and expectations for the Tikvah population before each innovative project was introduced. These efforts produced many opportunities for Tikvah campers to be weaned away from the restrictive, special education “safety net” which the Tikvah Program provided and to be integrated for a significant part of the day with other divisions in the camp community. Tikvah families closely followed these developments and were thus encouraged to advocate for further integration of their children in school programs during the year.

The incorporation in 1970 of the Tikvah Program into Camp Ramah marked a turning point in the education of the Jewish child with special educational needs. This project served as a laboratory for rabbis, Jewish educators, mental health professionals and parents in which they could study, for the first time, the integration of adolescents with a variety of developmental disabilities into a Jewish setting. Tikvah spawned many additional projects throughout Jewish North America. The leadership of Tikvah encouraged parents and professionals to launch a needs assessment of this newly targeted population within the Jewish community. In its consultative role, Tikvah has provided a springboard for the creation of such innovative projects as a course on Jewish special education at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, synagogue-based Jewish special education programs, Jewish group homes and supervised apartments, integrated Jewish youth groups which cut across denominations, and *yeshivot* which serve students with special needs. Tikvah has also brought

about change in Jewish special education in Israel. Many former staff members now reside in Israel and pursue professions in special education or in closely allied fields. In fact, one member of the *mishlach*, who had been adamantly opposed to the inclusion of the Tikvah Program in Camp Ramah, opened his own day camp in Israel some fifteen years later. As the owner of the camp, he worked closely with a parent advocacy group to effect the integration of disabled Israeli children into his own summer program. Of course, our own Ramah Israel Program at the Israel Goldstein Youth Village operates a day camp for Israeli children with special needs.

Part II: Principles and Practice

The Tikvah Program is predicated upon the assumption that a religious community which, through mutual consent, practices a certain standard of behavior and is enjoined to value the worth of each individual, provides a unique framework in which to nurture individuals with disabilities. Camps Ramah, the Zionist camping arm of the Conservative Movement, provides such a milieu.

While an extensive body of literature exists with regard to *mitzvot*, the individual, Jewish community and the relationships among them, relatively little research has been published on the interrelationship of *mitzvot* and the *therapeutic* community. For the purposes of this paper, any Camp Ramah which supports a Tikvah Program will be considered a therapeutic community, for reasons which will become clear; but the point of reference will always be the Tikvah Program of Camp Ramah in New England, as that program is the oldest and, therefore, the most richly developed of the various Tikvah Programs.

In the first place, the Tikvah Program seeks to foster, in its participants, independence at the same time that it endeavors to nurture a feeling of belonging and interconnectedness; in a narrow sense to the Ramah community, and in a broader sense, to *am Yisrael*. Obviously, a balance must be maintained between these two poles of self-identity. As we will explain, the role of *mitzvah* is central to the development and maintenance of both these elements of the Tikvah camper's identity.

The second dynamic relationship that exists between the Tikvah Program and the rest of Camp Ramah is that of performer and enabler of *mitzvot*. The continuum along which we find those who perform *mitzvot*

and those who enable others to perform *mitzvot* is so intertwined with the success of the Tikvah Program that it must be considered as a separate strand, although it is related to the broader roles of “contributor” and “recipient”, below.

Finally, the third dynamic relationship that must be balanced is that of “benefactor” and “beneficiary” (Marx 1992, 234ff). While people with disabilities are generally viewed as the recipients of services rather than as contributors to the community at large, the Tikvah Program nurtures an environment in which the Tikvah campers contribute to the Ramah community as well as receive from it within a matrix of *mitzvot*. Examples will follow.

Thus, we may envision the Tikvah Program as existing along a three-dimensional matrix formed by the intersection of three axes: independence-interconnectedness, performer-enabler (of *mitzvot*), and benefactor-beneficiary. Ideally, Tikvah campers find themselves at the midpoint of each of these continua; that is, at the nexus of all three. The goal of the Tikvah Program as a whole, and for each of its participants, specifically, is the achievement of a balance between self and community, between performing *mitzvot* and between contributing to the community and receiving from the community.

Independence and Interconnectedness: The Role of *Mitzvot*

Im ain ani li, mi li? Uch'she'ani l'atzmi, mah ani? “If I am not for myself, who am I? And if I am (only) for myself, what am I? (Avot 1:14).” Hillel’s question epitomizes the perennial conflict between independence, self-definition, and self-assertiveness, on the one hand, and interconnectedness, group identity, and the subjugation of one’s inclinations to the needs of the community, on the other hand. This conflict is played out, resolved, and re-resolved as conditions change at Camp Ramah, just as it is in the Jewish community at large. This bipolar dynamic is expressed on many levels:

- a) that of the individual Tikvah camper vis-a-vis the Tikvah Program;
- b) that of the Tikvah camper, or former Tikvah camper, vis-a-vis the Ramah community, and;
- (c) that of the Tikvah Program vis-a-vis the general Jewish community.

In each case, one must assert self-identity while accommodating to the needs of the larger group. Simultaneously, however, the larger group must welcome the individual to membership. "At times, it is the individual who must identify with the community...At other times, it is the community that must bend toward the individual...(Marx 1992, 229)."

The development of one's identity cannot occur in isolation. People require, at the very least, a partner (Kron 1990,17), and ideally a network of relationships (Gresser 1987,29). A Jewish religious atmosphere, such as that afforded by Camp Ramah, is the ideal setting for a program which seeks to help adolescents with developmental disabilities develop positive self-identities and then reach beyond themselves to embrace the group identity offered by membership in the greater Jewish community. In many cases, the campers eventually substitute identity as part of the Jewish people for their formerly primary identity as disabled persons.

The vehicle for this development of positive identity is the *mitzvah* or religious commandment, emanating from a Source outside oneself, which prescribes required personal and/or interpersonal behavior. Religion is concerned with "power and meaning and value beyond the self (Gresser 1987, 18)" and therefore provides a socially accepted means of reaching beyond oneself as opposed to turning inward and dwelling only upon oneself and one's problems. It has been suggested, in fact, that Judaism and psychotherapy are similar in that they "both attempt to broaden the individual's perspective to a point where the person moves from preoccupation with the self, and its problems, to greater personal freedom and broad empathy with the needs of others (Honig 1991, 20)".

When one performs a *mitzvah*, one submits to a behavioral expectation that arises outside oneself, even though that behavioral expectation and one's own inclinations may be mutually exclusive. In performing *mitzvot*, therefore, one learns that, "I am not the center of value, meaning, and worth...This lesson is translated on the human level into a recognition of the value of others on their own terms (Gresser 1987, 31)". On another plane, when Jewish religious observance is the norm of the community, as it is at Camp Ramah, immersion in the religious life of the camp automatically promotes a feeling of interconnectedness with the community.

Tikvah campers, of course, accrue multiple benefits. First, they develop and then act upon the perspective that one must conform to communi-

ty norms of behavior, which then provides the inherent reward of group acceptance. Secondly, because everyone in the Camp Ramah community submits to these same imperatives and follows the same *mitzvot*, everyone else has also developed the same viewpoint that one must recognize the inherent worth of others, including adolescents with disabilities. Finally, by learning how to conduct oneself according to the demands of an observant Jewish community, both behaviorally and ritually, Tikvah campers are better able to integrate themselves into their Jewish communities at home. Those who come to camp without “synagogue skills” develop those skills that enable them to participate more meaningfully in synagogue services at home. Those who may already possess these skills learn to exercise behavior that is more socially acceptable within their own Jewish communities. For “normal” people, as well as for those with disabilities, one would posit, the “sense of belonging to a specific way of life has been a great source of emotional strength and stability for the adherents of Judaism (Honig 1991, 25).”

Performers and Enablers: Another Role of *Mitzvot*

A trenchant question has been raised with regard to helping people with disabilities, “How does one assist others without at the same time diminishing their self-esteem, almost inherent to the asymmetrical relation of benefactor and beneficiary? (Marx 1992,121)”. Marx answers his own question by suggesting that Judaism inculcates a positive attitude toward helping “the needy” through *mitzvot* which require the performance of acts of *gemilut chasadim* (loving kindness) and through its inherent conferring of *kavod* (honor) on those required to perform *mitzvot*. Furthermore, it is well documented that Judaism instills in its adherents a sense of communal responsibility for the education of all members of the Jewish community (Kaminetzky 1977, 104-5; Marx 1992, 217, 224). Providing such education, of course, fosters group identification in the individual receiving the education at the same time that it reminds the group as a whole of its responsibilities toward all of its members. Moreover, an “important insight for the one who participates [in acts of *gemilut chasidim* or *tzedakah*] as ‘benefactor’ or ‘donor’ may be the discovery of self-growth (Marx 1992, 234-5).”

Those who perform *mitzvot* have been referred to as “benefactors”, while those who receive assistance from such benefactors have been

referred to as the “beneficiaries” (Marx 1992, 235). Although some writers explore the positive effect that is exerted upon the performers of such *mitzvot* when these benefactors help the beneficiaries, little has been written about the therapeutic use of *mitzvot* to promote a sense of dignity and mastery in people with disabilities when these people are, themselves, the performers of *mitzvot*. It is generally accepted that to “be called by God to commandment is a matter of honor, status and dignity (Marx 1992, 170).” In addition, the performance of *mitzvot* permits one to master one’s world, “an important element of his dignity (Marx 1992, 170)”.

The Tikvah Program teaches its members how to perform *mitzvot* as well as how to enable others to perform *mitzvot* of which they, the Tikvah campers, are often the beneficiaries. All Tikvah campers learn to perform the various ritual *mitzvot* associated with synagogue services as well as those associated with more mundane daily activities. Specifically, they learn to participate in, and/or lead, daily and Shabbat services; they learn the various *brachot* (blessings) associated with foods including *Bircat HaMazon*, washing the hands, lighting Shabbat candles, the *Havdallah* service at the end of Shabbat, reciting the *Shema* before going to sleep, and so forth.

All Tikvah campers, in addition, participate in *Yahadut* (Jewish studies) classes, taught by their counselors in ways that the campers can understand. While the curriculum varies from year to year, topics have included *Shabbat*, *kashrut*, holidays, Israel, the Ten Commandments, and *gemilut chasadim*. In studying the Ten Commandments and, by extension, all laws governing behavior *ben adam l’chavero* (between people), the Tikvah campers have learned to behave in ways consistent with the norms of the Jewish community. They begin to modify their behavior, for example, in such a way that it reflects the values of *kibud av v’em* (demonstrating respect for parents) and, by extension, teachers and counselors. They practice acts of *hachnasat orchim* (welcoming guests), *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick), *hashavat avedah* (returning lost articles), *tza’ar ba’alei chaim* (exhibiting kindness to animals), and so forth. On the other hand, they learn to refrain from behaviors such as *lashon hara*, *gnayvat da’at*, *richilut*, and *onat dvarim*, all examples of wronging others with words.

In addition to simply “learning what Judaism says about” these values, Tikvah campers benefit in many other ways as well. First, the improvement in the campers’ behavior allow them to be more readily

accepted by other Tikvah campers. Secondly, in many cases, the improvement is such that the campers become more readily accepted by their nondisabled peers and may even be integrated into the activities of other divisions of the camp for part of the day. This increase in acceptance, due to the improvement in the behavior of the Tikvah campers, frequently carries over to school and community after the summer and, of course, contributes to the campers' more positive self-image. Thirdly, the fact that the teachers of the Tikvah campers are the campers' own bunk counselors provides each teacher/counselor with ample opportunity during the course of the day to reinforce the concepts presented in class. Finally, the emphasis on respect for parents, teachers and counselors, taught in class within the framework of Judaic sources, enhances the authority of the staff in other situations. It is not unusual for behavior modification, or discipline, to take the form of, "Do you remember what we learned in class today?"

Besides living according to the teachings of *Torah* and performing *mitzvot*, the Tikvah campers enable the rest of the Camp Ramah community to perform *mitzvot* which proceed from the concept of *kol Yisrael aravim zeh b'zeh*, "All Israel is responsible for one another." (Shavuoth 39a). The presence of the Tikvah Program grants the opportunity to the rest of the camp to perform acts of *gemilut chasadim* and *tzedakah* (righteousness) directed toward the Tikvah campers. This outcome is achieved in many small ways, as well as through more formal means, throughout each day. Informally, all members of the Ramah community are expected to help one another, so a natural extension of that expectation is the assistance afforded Tikvah campers who, on occasion may not be able to find a designated location, or who may appear upset or who need help in a particular activity. On a more formal level, other campers volunteer to tutor Tikvah campers in a variety of subjects, assist them in activities such as swimming, or serve as counselors-in-training (CITs) with bunks of Tikvah campers. Thus the Tikvah campers gain the benefits of both performing *mitzvot* themselves and enabling others to perform *mitzvot* as well.

Benefactors and Beneficiaries

The Tikvah Program and its campers, in the role of benefactors, often provide role models of perseverance, courage, and patience for the rest of the camp. At other times, their role as contributors to the Ramah community

takes the form of their serving as teachers, either by word or by deed. At still other times, the Tikvah campers fulfill the role of benefactors, in the concrete sense of that word, when they donate something tangible to the camp. Several examples will illustrate these points.

One member of the *mishlachot*, for example, regularly teaches the campers in his Hebrew classes about the Tikvah Program, capitalizing upon the opportunity to teach his students such phrases as *l'hitgaber al ha'etgar* (to overcome the challenge) in the natural context of discussing the program. This teacher has also invited some of the more articulate members of the Tikvah Program to appear as guest speakers in his classes. In these ways, the Tikvah campers serve both as role models and as teachers.

The Tikvah dramatic presentation is another vehicle through which the Tikvah campers educate both themselves and the rest of the camp community. Every Tikvah play that has been presented at Camp Ramah in New England is an original play written by the Educational Advisor to the Tikvah Program, and it serves as a means of coordinating all other aspects of the Tikvah campers' Judaic education. When the Tikvah Program presents a play to the entire camp community, the Tikvah campers meet community norms in that every division in camp is expected to stage a play for the enjoyment of the rest of the camp community. There is, however, one crucial difference. When the Tikvah Program presents its dramatic production, that play is always based upon a Jewish educational theme and is presented in such a way that the rest of the camp community views the Tikvah campers as teachers who convey an important message through their play. In this way, too, the Tikvah campers contribute to the camp community. The Tikvah play, because of its *chinuchi* (educational) nature promotes the positive image of the Tikvah campers as active instructors of others, rather than simply as passive vessels to be filled with teachings provided by persons more knowledgeable than they.

At the same time, of course, the Tikvah campers' own self-esteem is enhanced by the very fact that they do have something to teach others, and they need not always be the beneficiaries of teaching, service and the good will of others. In addition to conveying specific educational messages of Jewish content, the Tikvah campers' serving as "instructors" educates the Ramah community on another level as well. The fact that the Tikvah campers are able to impart Judaic values to for the entire Ramah commu-

nity is ever present testimony to the veracity of the Talmudic precept, *Ezeh hu chacham? Halomed m'kol adam*. "Who is wise? He who learns from all men" (Avot 4:1).

One of the most moving finales of a Tikvah play occurred with the Tikvah campers' singing of a rock version of *Al tistakel b'kankan, eleh b'mah sh'yesh bo* (Look not at the flask, but at what it contains" (Avot 4:27). While many of the Tikvah campers understood these words only in relation to the story line of the play, the poignancy of their singing these words was not lost on their audience.

Participating in social action projects has always been an integral part of the Camp Ramah experience. Some members of the Tikvah Program, therefore, have participated in the social action program of one of the older divisions in camp, visiting elderly residents of a nearby Jewish nursing home twice a week. How fitting it is that at the same time that some Ramah campers choose to fulfill their social obligation by volunteering to work with the Tikvah campers, fulfilling the role of benefactor to the Tikvah campers, certain Tikvah campers themselves fulfill the role of benefactor vis-a-vis the elderly. This situation exemplifies both the flexibility and the mutuality of the Tikvah-Ramah relationship.

In addition to contributing educationally and spiritually to the Camp Ramah, the Tikvah Program contributes to Camp Ramah in tangible ways. At various times over the years, the Tikvah campers have completed group arts and crafts projects, instead of individual ones, such as a mosaic sign with a Judaic theme or a patchwork quilt which depicted various Jewish concepts. Then, in appreciation of the support the camp community has extended to the Tikvah Program, the Tikvah campers have donated these projects to the beautification of the camp. Without question, however, the most ambitious of these contributions occurred during the summer of 1993 when the parents of the Tikvah campers donated a \$130,000 building to Camp Ramah in New England to be used during the summer by the Tikvah Vocational Program and during the rest of the year for retreat programs run by the camp. In all these ways, then, Tikvah campers, as well as the program itself, function not only as beneficiaries of services, but also as benefactors of Camp Ramah.

Through this brief glimpse at the dynamics of the Tikvah Program, we can appreciate how this unique program has simultaneously contributed

to, and benefited from, Camp Ramah. We would conclude that such a multifaceted, far-reaching, and ever-evolving program could only succeed in an atmosphere such as that of Camp Ramah, a religious community of shared values in which the uniqueness of each individual is cherished.

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