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Mildred Blaine Gershen in memory of
ALVIN E. GERSHEN, z"l
a long-time Ramah leader,
to whom this volume is dedicated.

DEDICATION*Alvin E. Gershen, z"l (1926–1989)*

PATIENCE, PERSEVERANCE, AND PLANNING” was one of my father’s favorite phrases. Looking back at advice he gave, each of these three concepts was part of the counsel he offered. One of the most important aspects he stressed was not just what happened today, but how what happened will affect the future. He lauded the past and recognized the present, but he knew that to linger too long in either was not prudent.

There was nothing more important to my father than family. Even though he passed away more than twenty years ago, his dedication to his family is one of the strongest memories we have of him—the opportunities he gave each of us and his drive to provide a complete Jewish foundation. My sisters and I understand these gifts quite well. Of greater relevance for Jewish continuity, all of his twenty-three grandchildren have been provided opportunities and the inclusive Jewish foundation he considered so fundamental.

He would be delighted with the growth and accomplishments of his family. He was so pleased with each of us. I can still remember going to meetings with my father where he would delight in telling stories about my sisters. The look on his face and the joy in his voice were infectious. Each of us can imagine listening to him talk about his twenty-three grandchildren. He would have loved the fact that his grandchildren are confident individuals who have utilized the opportunities they were given and have developed strong Jewish identities.

Twenty-three grandchildren, with a fifteen-year span in age, would have given my father a lot of new stories to tell. The grandchildren attend college in Louisiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, Massachusetts, and New York. They have made trips to Israel, Europe, and Central and South America with Jewish educational groups. These ventures would have given him new things to discuss every day. He would have shared with the world each elementary school grade, reveled in every high school activity, and taken pride in every collegiate achievement.

Our father would have loved the fact that all of his grandchildren attended Ramah camps and Israel programs and that many served on staff. He loved Camp Ramah and loved the opportunities it gave to all those involved. It wasn’t just the campers and staff who got something out of their summers.

It was the parents as well. Just spending time listening to his children gave my father joy; imagining the pleasure he would have derived listening to his grandchildren's stories can only make all of us smile.

It would be appropriate to say that even though he never attended camp as either a staff member or a camper, my father had "Ramah friends" — lots of them. He was a Ramah parent, a National Ramah Commission and Poconos board member, and served as the president of Camp Ramah in the Poconos. Those experiences gave him Ramah friends; they made him a Ramahnik.

His service to the Ramah Camping Movement is why dedicating a book about Camp Ramah in his memory is especially fitting. Ramah is as much a part of our lives today as it was a part of his life. Ramah was about providing opportunities *and* a strong Jewish foundation, and both were important to my father.

Twenty years ago, in the foreword to *The Ramah Experience*, my father gave his advice about how best to confront and overcome the issues that he believed affected the Ramah movement. As always, his advice reflected an understanding of the past but focused on the future.

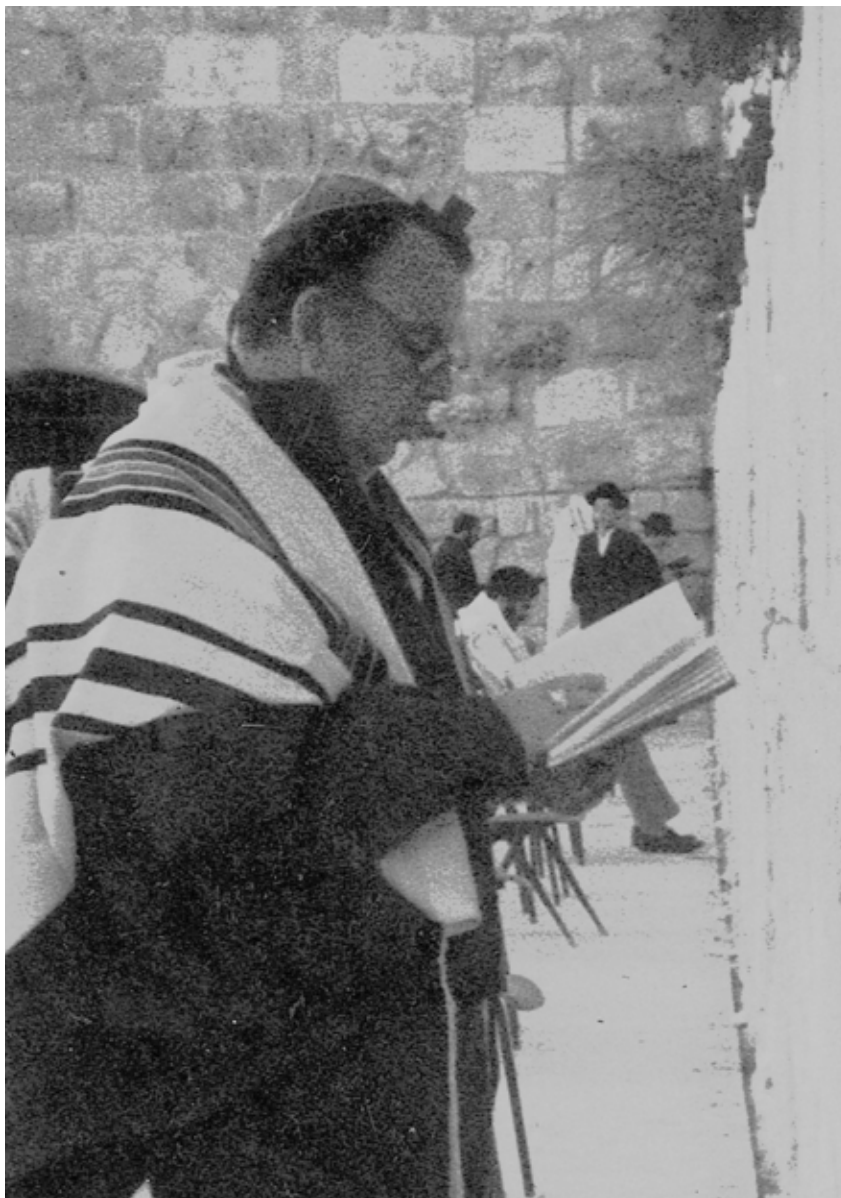
These are the challenges for the next forty years. They will be met and met successfully just so long as we approach these problems collectively — the dedicated lay leader, the dedicated educator, the dedicated rabbi, and the dedicated administrator. . . . We shall meet these challenges as we work together for the continued success of Ramah.

Looking at the Ramah Camping Movement over the last twenty years through the eyes of his grandchildren, it seems that the challenges he identified have indeed been met and met successfully. "A dream does not die if it bloomed once in a soul" is carved on my father's headstone. The next twenty years will continue to be as successful as the last twenty as Ramah continues to focus collectively on the goals that must be accomplished.

As the movement enters its seventh decade, it is easy to appreciate Ramah's glorious history and celebrated alumni. Our father would have been proud to have his family continue to underwrite this important history of an integral part of the Conservative Movement.

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Alvin E. Gershen, z"l



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The Gershen Family, 2008