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The Evolution of the Ramah Nature Experience

יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא, חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא, אמר ליה: האי, עד כמה שנין טעין? – אמר ליה: עד שבעין שנין. – אמר ליה: פשיטא לך דחיית שבעין שנין? – אמר ליה: האי גברא עלמא בחרובא אשכחתי, כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי – שתלי נמי לבראי.

One day, as [Honi the Circle-Maker] was walking on the road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, “How long will it take this tree to bear fruit?” The man replied, “Seventy years.” He asked, “Are you quite sure you will live another seventy years to eat its fruit?” The man replied, “I myself found fully grown carob trees in the world; as my forebears planted for me, so am I planting for my children.”¹ (BT *Ta’anit* 23a)

Ramah and Nature

ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES of summer camp is its location. Camp would simply not be camp if it took place in a suburb. For sixty years, Ramah has taken mostly suburban kids away from their homes, away from creature comforts and the car culture, depositing them in the woods for the summer. The camps are located in rural areas, some quite far from the nearest shopping mall, and closer to the natural world than most *hanichim* (campers) have ever lived.

In today’s climate of specialization among summer camps, the Ramah camps are distinctive because they offer a full range of programming. Most camp activities take place outdoors, and although the majority of programs do not focus upon the environment as the essential feature of the activity, the surroundings are an inseparable part of the experience. Many specialty camps, and particularly those that are not outdoor-oriented, are not located in rural settings;

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the camper lives in an environment similar to that of his or her suburban home. As the camping industry retreats from nature, Ramah remains steadfastly in the woods.

Given the growing prominence of environmental issues facing American society and the whole world, the influence that camp can exert in developing sensitivity to these issues is more important than ever. Many Ramahniks had their first experiences hiking, camping, gardening, and otherwise exploring nature under the auspices of camp, whether directly through nature-oriented programming or indirectly through other programs that take place outdoors. Whereas some alumni point to *bug teva* (an optional activity period for nature) as having had an impact, others invoke the *hiddush* (innovation) of holding morning *tefillot* (prayers) at a campsite on top of a mountain or taking a dip in a remote waterfall during a camping expedition. As we often hear, some Ramahniks think that you can't recite *havdalah* (the Saturday evening ceremony that separates the Sabbath from the rest of the week) without a lake.

Although there have been several studies to determine the value of camp with respect to furthering Jewish education and continuity,² little has been published exploring the role of camp in developing the camper's relationship to nature and the environment. How does camp put children in touch with nature? What have nature educators noticed with regard to how children respond to these experiences? What innovations has Ramah implemented to contribute to our growing sensitivity to the environment?

In the course of producing the present work, these questions were posed to a number of people who have been involved with Ramah's outdoor and nature programs, to determine what Ramahniks have taken back with them from their summers in the woods. The interviewees included nature and outdoor educators from all of the North American Ramah camps, many of whom had received special fellowships and training for their jobs. The results show that in the last decade, Ramah has demonstrated much creativity and innovation in inspiring its charges to consider their relationships with nature.

Areas of Nature Education³

There are two primary venues through which *hanichim* are exposed to nature: camping/outdoor adventure programs (which go by different names in different camps) that challenge the camper to take part intimately in physical outdoor activities and nature/environmental education that presents the camper with useful knowledge about the natural world and seeks to develop a heightened appreciation for it. These two are not necessarily associated with each other; in some camps they fall under the auspices of the same staff and in others, not. Regardless, they often cross paths in terms of educational objectives.

Although these areas are traditional camp fare, they both have changed markedly in recent years. Training has improved so that nature educators at camp are likely to know more about their subject; new programs were developed, especially in areas relevant to environmental concerns; today safety is a higher priority; and integration with other areas of camp is more common. These changes have developed due to the growing international consciousness regarding the environment and the greater appreciation of the opportunities presented for nature education at camp. As the suburbanization of America continues, the awareness of camp as an outpost in the woods increases; improvements in nature education are a natural outgrowth of the need to reconnect with the environment even as we move further away from it.

An additional, less formal path of exposure to the outdoors is the location of the camp itself. Virtually all campers and staff come from environments that are far removed from regular, intimate contact with nature, and camp is often the only place where they encounter flora and fauna that are not somehow contained. This type of incidental exposure to the natural world is increasingly limited to the time spent in camp, making camp a more significant venue for learning to understand the outdoors. Many a Ramahnik remembers the time that the black bear was spotted ambling across the *migrash* (open field surrounded by camper bunks) or that unfortunate incident with poison ivy. Furthermore, camp programming is often influenced by the weather, and the disappointment of a rained-out soccer game may have been alleviated by the clear night sky that permitted a view of the Perseids meteor shower that occurs faithfully every summer. For children growing up in a climate-controlled world, these experiences (less frequent outside of camp) help them to understand that although humans can manipulate their environments with ever greater skill and technology, this is still God's earth.

Modern Jewish environmental consciousness emerged within the last thirty years in conjunction with a growing universal environmental sensitivity. Pioneers in the field searched Jewish literature to find sources that pointed to such sensitivity in the Torah and later texts.⁴ This effort to connect environmentalism and Jewish tradition also touched Ramah, and the result is that in recent years, Ramah nature staff has reformulated nature and outdoor education to emphasize this new, Jewish-inflected awareness. Although recycling, composting, and low-impact camping were largely unheard of thirty years ago, the Ramah camps have changed in this regard. These new initiatives often refer to the standard-bearing negative commandment of *bal tashbit*, the injunction against wasting natural resources.⁵

Ramah has always aimed high with its multipronged educational objectives and though nature education was never front-and-center, it is a consistent

offering. In recent years, nature education at Ramah has responded to the greater urgency of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) by developing a new sophistication. The result is that more Ramahniks are learning about nature experientially than ever before.

Camping/outdoor programs

Camping and outdoor programs, known in the individual camps as *mahana'ut*, *etgar*, *al hagovah*, or *kav reches*, long have existed at Ramah. Traditionally, the older *edot* (divisions) would take trips out of camp for a few days: campers would be transported by bus to a hiking location, hike without packs, and at the conclusion of the hike would board the bus again to ride to their camp site. Food would be prepared by the staff, usually hamburgers and hot dogs. Little or no planned, systematic attention was paid to nature education, to minimizing impact on the environment, or to motivating *hanichim* to appreciate the outdoors. One exception to these limited programs was Camp Ramah in Canada's "tripping" program. For decades, in keeping with the culture of Ontario camps, Ramah Canada offered extensive off-site canoeing trips of four to six days for its teenage campers.

Today, the outdoor programs encompass a wide range of activities, including bicycling, canoeing, and rock climbing in addition to the traditional hiking and camping. Greater attention is paid to safety, and educational nature programming is often included as part of the outdoor plan. Furthermore, many camps have on-site outdoor activities that supplement the out-of-camp programming, including ropes courses and tree houses. Some camps also have in-camp overnight programs, especially for the younger *edot*, which use the more secluded areas of camp to create an outdoor experience. The variety of offerings and the depth of programming have blossomed in recent years.

Nature and environmental education

The nature programs at camp of which I am aware traditionally were small and operated in the shadow of the more glamorous camp departments. Whereas high-profile operations such as sports and *hinnuch* (education) might have numerous personnel and generous budgets, the *teva* (nature) instructor generally was relegated to a poorly-located, run-down shack with only his or her wits and a halfway-decent knife to plan *hugim* (activities). Until the infusion of foundation money beginning in 2000, the *rosh teva* (nature instructor) likely had not received formal training in nature education.

For example, during my years at Camp Ramah in New England, a nature program was offered only sporadically and when it did exist, it attracted only a few *hanichim*. It was offered as a *hug*, and nature study was not part of any

other sphere of camp. Prior to the arrival of a Jewish Environmental and Nature Education (JENE) fellowship (provided by the Foundation for Jewish Camping in 2004), no teva program was offered for several summers—the last *hug teva* had been led by a part-time teacher who visited camp a few days per week.

In recent years, nature education at Ramah dramatically expanded its repertoire. Gardening and recycling programs were introduced at several camps, and a whole new range of nature-based activities—including crafts, songs, and games—are offered at Ramah camps. The offerings are not only new and more exciting, but they are being taught by staff who are better prepared and have more training than in the past. Current trends in environmental consciousness have led to the recognition of a need for improved nature education, and Ramah has stepped in to fill that need.

Nature Education Fellowships

In recent years there also has been a flurry of funding activity on the part of philanthropic organizations to improve nature education in North American camps, and Ramah has benefited from these programs. Typically, these programs include external training and specify the requirements and responsibilities of the nature staff member. Two organizations in particular, the Foundation for Jewish Camping and the Nathan Cummings Foundation, have provided staff and training to Ramah camps.

The Nathan Cummings Foundation funded the Nathan Cummings Environmental Fellowship for three summers (2000–2002), providing several Ramah camps with nature education staff. Like its successor, the JENE Fellowship, Nathan Cummings provided a pre-camp, experiential training seminar for all of the fellows, including resource materials, activities, games, knowledge about flora and fauna, and so forth. The Nathan Cummings fellows were required to find and/or make their own supplies for training. At least five Nathan Cummings fellows served in Ramah camps. These participants took their knowledge and skills to Ramah camps for six summers, bringing a wealth of new programs, activities, and knowledge to an area that previously had received minimal attention.

The JENE Fellowship, provided by the Foundation for Jewish Camping, was a program that lasted only three summers (2003–2005) but appears to have had a significant impact upon nature programs at Ramah camps. The fellowship, in addition to a generous stipend, included a week of pre-season training by America's foremost Jewish nature educators with other JENE fellows at a camp in California, provision of sourcebooks and programming materials, and stipulations about ways in which the JENE fellow could be used in camp. Training took place over a week of residence in camp and covered a wide range

of subjects. The fellows worked in gardens, built compost piles, made fire from scratch, camped out under the stars, hiked, swapped recipes and songs, learned exciting nature-based activities and crafts, and discussed important environmental issues and educational techniques, among other activities. The goal was to produce a cadre of trained, nature education staff for North American Jewish camps, something that was sorely lacking. JENE produced at least three fellows that served in Ramah camps.

Innovations in Nature and Outdoor Programming at Ramah

Through interviews with nature and outdoor educators from all of the Ramah camps and drawing upon my own experience in the field, I have endeavored to present a portrait of the state of nature education at Ramah. The interviews revealed that there is a wide range of new methods and activities designed to bring kids to an understanding of nature and the environment. In addition to the gardens, compost piles, and recycling plans, some have re-imagined their camping trips as educational experiences; today many of the camps have ropes courses and climbing walls, designed not only to develop physical skills but also to foster team-building and to help individuals confront their fears. But the greatest innovation is the effort to raise the consciousness of the camp community regarding nature and the environment. The following is an examination of individual programming successes at various camps.

Eliav Bock, a rabbinical student at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and a JENE fellow in 2005, implemented a number of new programs at Camp Ramah in Canada, including a camp-wide recycling program, a *yom teva* (Nature Day) for younger edot, and a garden (“a miserable failure,” he reports). Since Eliav ran both the in-camp teva program, as well as maḥana’ut, he could enrich the latter with a good deal of nature/environmental educational content, and he ensured that his outdoor staff was well-equipped to teach.

The recycling program was particularly successful:

During staff week, I made plaques . . . each one started with the Hebrew word, *hayada’ta*—“Did you know?”—and then would give some statistic about camp. For example, it might say, “Hayada’ta . . . at camp we throw away 10,000 bottles each summer?” and then below, it said “Reduce, reuse, recycle.”

Bock encouraged the involvement of interested *madrichim* (counselors) in designing the program, and with their “buy-in,” the program took off. By the end of the summer, ḥanichim from the oldest *edah* (division) were overseeing the program, which collected bottles, cans, and paper. Bock also managed to further improve the visibility of nature education by making tie-ins with other areas of camp, particularly in the area of *tefillah* (prayer).

JTS rabbinical student Jill Levy, a Nathan Cummings fellow in 2002, initiated the teva program at Ramah Darom. In addition to creating a garden, a recycling program, and a unique siddur specifically for what she calls, “nature *tefillot*.” Although she was not responsible for maḥana’ut, Levy also spent time training the maḥana’ut staff in nature-oriented games and tree and insect identification. Having an interest in entomology, she “had that as a large focus of the program and was able to create a culture in camp of appreciating insects instead of fearing and killing them.”

One accomplishment about which Levy is especially proud is a minor victory for conservation enthusiasts, but a major one for a summer camp nature educator. She was able to convince the camp director to purchase individual coffee mugs for the staff and to set up hooks in the *ḥadar ochel* (dining hall) for them so that when staff members had coffee every morning at breakfast, they would not be wasting Styrofoam cups. This small cultural change is a prime example of the ways in which nature educators have helped Ramah camps understand that the principle of bal tashḥit applies not only to fruit trees surrounding a besieged city, but also to all of the things that we use.

Rabbi Shalom Kantor, a Nathan Cummings Environmental fellow, taught the ropes course and also managed the camping program during his summers at Ramah California. His innovations in the camping program included increasing the environmental education content of outdoor trips:

I began the process of infusing outdoor awareness education into the overnight programs, which really had not existed before, as I understood the programs. This included but was not limited to nature/surrounding awareness, biodiversity education, outdoor basic skills, [and] group and individual trust and cooperation programming.

Kantor reports that other programs introduced under his watch were a morning “hike and tefillah” program and the hiring of an additional outdoors educator to teach environmental awareness. In addition, Kantor introduced a small innovation to the camping trip of Tzofim (the rising-ninth-grade division):

We were able to expand the overnight program so that the boys and girls were separate from each other for one night and then together for one night. This allowed each gender to have an experience that was void of the inter-gender pressures that are a constant part of the camp experience, especially in the outdoor setting.

Even a minor ḥiddush like this can have a great impact on the outdoor experience; in some cases, putting aside awkward social pressures allows room for ḥanichim to learn more about themselves in the context of nature.⁶

Aaron Philmus, also a JTS rabbinical student, was a JENE fellow who worked as a teva educator at the Ramah Day Camp in Nyack, New York in

2005. He points to the *ginnat besamim* (spice garden) that was built with the cooperation of ḥanichim and rosh teva, Gail Kohler, as a successful innovation during his summer there.

We performed all parts of the planting with the kids: from clearing the grass to planting seeds and watering. We also made a big compost heap (a “soil machine”) with hay and leftovers from the animal feedings and learned about decomposition and the connection between adam (person) and adamah (earth). We also learned about the *berachab* [blessing] for *besamim* [fragrant things, such as spices]. Gail raised butterflies that loved to hang out on our flowers. Overall, a big success.

Aaron’s gardening experience was echoed in the garden at Camp Ramah in New England, where herbs, flowers, and vegetables were planted by ḥanichim. The produce occasionally ended up on Shabbat tables in the ḥadar ochel. The kitchen contributed back by donating vegetable peelings and the outer leaves of lettuce and cabbage to the camp’s compost piles that were tended by the ḥug teva.

Hannah Steigmann, a rabbinical student at JTS, spent the summer of 2004 developing a new recycling program at Ramah in New England. She created a character known as Captain Planet and appeared in character to introduce different groups within camp to the concept of *mibzur* (recycling). Steigmann, assisted by Adat Machon (the second-oldest division in camp) through their service project program, placed recycling boxes for mixed paper and mixed glass, plastic, and aluminum in individual *tzerifim* (bunks). These containers were emptied during *nikkayon* (clean-up time). By the end of the summer, the program was wildly successful, with collection bins filling up faster than the hauling company could empty them.

Rabbi Todd Zeff, director of Camp Ramah in the Poconos, served as *rosh maḥana’ut* (head of outdoor camping) at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin for four summers in the late 1990s and oversaw both the teva program and the outdoor trips. Zeff points to the importance of including the nature educational element in the context of camping trips and trained his own staff to teach ḥanichim about the various flora they encountered along the trail.

As part of these trips, Zeff would have ḥanichim pray individually, out of sight and hearing range from one another. He found that this enabled the children to connect prayer with the beauty of creation and gave them a particularly memorable experience that they would not otherwise encounter during regular camp tefillot.

Rabbi Harry Pell, who served as *rosh al hagovah* (director of outdoor and camping programs) at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires in 2000 and 2001, tells of the dramatic turnaround of this program that has occurred over the last

fifteen years. Although al hagovah always offered trips for all of the edot, it was a small operation that Pell described as “two guys and a shack”; today it is an all-encompassing program with a staff of twelve to fourteen. In the early 1990s, Seth Adelsberg began this turnaround by expanding al hagovah to include rock climbing and small, ten-person trips for Bogrim (the third-oldest division in camp) along the celebrated Appalachian Trail, which passes close to camp. The program, known as Etgar Ramah (“Ramah challenge”), expanded to other edot, with the continued and gradual purchase of equipment, such that today the four edot comprised of older campers all have Etgar Ramah tracks within al hagovah. Hanichim in these edot may choose from two-, three-, or four-day hiking or biking trips, and they pack and carry all of their own gear and food. Pell also points to the Judaic content of these trips, noting that tefillot and daily *shi'urim* (lessons) are an essential part of the experience, and how the trips focus on developing individual self-confidence and trust skills within the group. “I’m very proud of al hagovah,” he said. “There’s nothing else that I’ve been involved with that has seen so much growth and development. Everybody involved has contributed to it and made it grow.”

Pell also adds that out-of-camp, outdoor experiences can be far more rewarding than an in-camp ropes course, for example, which is an artificial construction. Al hagovah offers caving at caves located not far from camp, where campers are given the same team-building challenges that they face on the ropes course, but with a difference:

You take the bunk to a cave, and it’s suddenly real. They come together to help each other. . . . They also gain a sense of appreciation of the cave — you leave it as you find it. They are more cohesive as they come out, having overcome their vulnerability.

After spending one summer as rosh maḥana’ut at Camp Ramah in New England, I served as a JENE fellow for two subsequent summers and developed the teva program by bringing the wealth of programming activities from the JENE training to camp. Among the new programs that we initiated in 2004 were the A-side garden and the B-side compost pile. However, the programs with the widest reach and greatest success, in terms of both educational achievement and enjoyment by participants, were the in-camp overnights for each of the younger edot that we implemented in 2005. Rather than merely taking the kids out to *maḥaneh gimel* (an open, undeveloped field that is set apart from the rest of camp), feeding them macaroni and cheese cooked over propane stoves, and putting them to sleep under the stars, my assistant Deb Laufer and I crafted a more comprehensive program that, despite the in-camp location, took the hanichim out of their element and gave them multiple new perspectives.

Based around the camp's tree house that is in a remote wooded location on the opposite side of the mysterious and serene Mosquito Lake, the overnight generally included nature games, a night walk, star-gazing, ḥanichim preparing their own food over the campfire that they built, sleeping in tents that they assembled, and tefillot that highlighted nature themes that appear in the weekday liturgy.

As part of the activities, ḥanichim were given a solid dose of environmental education over the course of the overnight. In most cases, we began the program with a game supplied by the JENE resources that asked and answered questions about nature and the environment. We evaluated ways in which human activities affect the environment, including garbage production (we estimated how much garbage we made over the course of the program), light pollution that was clearly visible at night, and our own use of the camp's natural resources.

Feedback from this program was tremendously positive. Kids who were not interested in, or who were afraid of, the outdoors found something that appealed to them; veteran madrichim, who were skeptical of the whole idea of an in-camp overnight, admitted that it was much more fun and educational than any of the out-of-camp trips they had experienced. Hug teva received a corresponding bounce in interest.

Preliminary Indications of Success

The new approaches to nature education are exciting and fun for campers, but what have they learned? According to those interviewed, what have Ramahniks brought back with them from the woods?

Camping trips offer a more experiential classroom than in-camp teva activities, due to their highly physical investment in hiking and canoeing through picturesque places coupled with sleeping outdoors and learning to use a trowel. Among his ḥanichim, Eliav Bock has seen a greater awareness of their interaction with the environment. "Kids on my canoeing trips took away a greater sense of awe and appreciation for nature; a sense for how to live in the outdoors while leaving a smaller footprint on the resources around us."

The same sentiment was reported by virtually all of the interviewees. On the in-camp overnight program in New England, I saw a heightened interest in understanding the natural world. At the conclusion of the program, I would ask campers what they had learned, and the answers often surprised me; the overnight had sparked, in many of them, a sensitivity to the environment that had not existed the day before. The ḥanichim, in addition to having a great time cooking their dinner over an open fire, participating in a flashlight-free night walk, and visiting a "Bedouin tent," had assimilated numerous tidbits about

nature, the environment, and Judaism, from the source of bal tashhit, to the antidote for poison ivy, to the natural imagery appearing in *Pesukei Dezimrah* (the preliminary part of morning prayers).

Several of the nature educators mentioned ḥanichim who, in later years, recalled their positive nature experiences. Rabbi Zeff says that one camper told him that his program had “changed her life and helped her find direction.” Some of these ḥanichim became madrichim and shared their experiences with their own ḥanichim. Bock shared this touching story:

A first-year counselor told me that he had just returned from a camping trip with his ten-year-old campers. He told me how he had sat with them during a storm and watched the rain come down on the lake. He asked me whether I had remembered when I had sat with him some five years earlier when he was twelve and had helped him to see that being caught in a rain storm was not just a scary thing, but also an amazing act of God. I remembered clearly comforting him while he sat crying, because he had been so afraid of the rain. It made my summer to think that now he was passing this along to his own campers.

Rabbi Pell, having spent enough summers at Ramah in the Berkshires to see ḥanichim come through the al hagovah program, also mentioned the willingness of some of these ḥanichim to “give back.” Those who are inspired by their outdoor experiences are often willing, as madrichim or even as al hagovah staff, to share their inspiration with others. And thus the inspiration to understand and appreciate nature is transmitted to a new generation of Ramahniks.

Long-Term Trends

As global consciousness of environmental issues grows, the need for further education is unquestionable, and what better place for it than summer camp? Certainly, the success of the programs described above speaks to their value; they are fun and educational. Because the environmental fellowships have been suspended, at least for now, the future for nature education will depend on the willingness of individual camps to hire and train committed staff.

Regarding camping and outdoor trips, Rabbi Zeff sees a greater emphasis today on safety, as well as an improved focus on helping ḥanichim develop their personal independence. Given that most kids who come to Ramah grow up in the suburbs, the encounter with nature can be an empowering one, if they are given the tools to understand and appreciate it.

Hannah Steigmann admits that the recycling program was expensive and therefore not favored by her camp’s business manager, but the will of many ḥanichim and madrichim was behind it. As economic and governmental forces

make recycling more financially attractive, the pilot programs of recent years will become the established practice of the future.

Perhaps one example of good things to come is the new solar generator at Camp Ramah in California. Designed to eventually produce 300 kilowatts of electricity and initially to save the camp about \$30,000 per year in energy expenses, the generator also will spare the atmosphere 4.3 million pounds of carbon dioxide annually. The generator came online in May 2006 and quietly serves as a demonstration of *bal tashhit* in action, an icon that will be as much a teaching tool as an economic asset to camp. According to camp director Rabbi Daniel Greyber, by both using and educating about solar energy during future encampments, he and his staff believe they will create generations of Jewish leaders who are environmentally conscious and who will seek to move more and more institutions to environmentally friendly energy options. As the project develops into its second and third phase, Rabbi Greyber expects that the camp will perform an energy audit to learn about other ways the camp can reduce its consumption. "Just as we ask our *tzevet* [staff] to be role models, we believe that our camp plant should be a model for the type of world we want to create."

Conclusion

We are in a period of dramatic change with respect to environmental awareness. Although the theory and reality of global warming have been bandied about by the scientific community for more than half a century, it is only within the last two years that the realization of the seriousness of this problem has entered the public mind on a large scale. The need for nature education and an experiential understanding of the environment is greater now than ever before, and Ramah is meeting this challenge.

The renewed emphasis upon nature education, assisted by the environmental fellowships available in recent years, has produced palpable results in Ramah camps, including a variety of new programs. The specialists who managed these innovations have sought new access points within camp, generating interest among campers who otherwise would not have been reached. They have sought integration with other areas of camp, planting gardens in cooperation with the *hinnuch* staff, composting with the members of the Tikvah program (a division for campers with special needs), and bringing new perspectives to tefillot.

Integration with tefillot as a primary tool was mentioned across the board by all of the specialists. Indeed, the environment and prayer are natural allies; they comment upon and reinforce each other. Tefillot in natural settings, as many camp alumni can tell you, can be more inspiring than in any interior

space; likewise, the language of tefillah frequently draws upon images from nature: the awesome power and the subtleties of the natural world, the human connection to Creation, and the infusion of the Divine in everything.

Meanwhile, the camping experience has been heightened by the fresh infusion of nature education. With trip leaders focused upon using the outdoor experience as a path to understanding the natural world, *hanichim* are coming away from these trips with greater sensitivity than ever.

Now is the time, as Ramah turns sixty and eyes the next decade, to seek these opportunities for greater identification with our environment. The world cannot wait.

Resource List⁷

Nature education from a Jewish perspective

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Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet. Edited by Ellen Bernstein. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

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It's a Mitzvah! Step-by-Step to Jewish Living. Bradley Shavit Artson. New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1995, chapter 17 on *bal tashbit* (prohibition of waste).

The Jewish Sourcebook on the Environment and Ecology. Ronald H. Isaacs. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998.

Jews, Money, and Social Responsibility: Developing a "Torah of Money" for Contemporary Life. Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro. Philadelphia: Shefa Fund, 1993.

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Judaism and Ecology. Study guide. New York: Hadassah and Shomrei Adamah.

Let The Earth Teach You Torah. Ellen Bernstein and Dan Fink. Available through COEJL.

Listen to the Trees: Jews and the Earth. Molly Cone. New York: URJ Press, 1995.

The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man. Abraham Joshua Heschel. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1951.

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Notes

¹ Babylonian Talmud, *Massekhet Ta'anit* 23a. English translation from Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends*, William G. Braude, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 203.

²For example, see Ariela Keysar and Barry A. Kosmin, "Research Findings on the Impact of Camp Ramah: A Companion Study to the 2004 'Eight Up' Report on the Attitudes and Practices of Conservative Jewish College Students" (New York: National Ramah Commission, 2005) and its summary in this volume; and Steven M. Cohen, "Camp Ramah and Adult Jewish Identity: Long-Term Influences on Conservative Congregants in North America," in *Ramah, Reflections at 50: Visions for a New Century*, ed. Sheldon A. Dorph (New York: National Ramah Commission, 2000), 95–129.

³"Nature education" is a general term that may refer to a wide variety of activities and is used in this article to refer not only to familiarizing students with the features of the natural world (i.e., flora and fauna, terrain, climate, natural phenomena, etc.), but also to what may be further sub-categorized as "environmental education" (investigating how humans interact with and affect nature). "Outdoor education" is a term that refers to recreational involvement with nature, like hiking, canoeing, mountain climbing, etc.

⁴To my knowledge, although no author has attempted a history of contemporary Jewish environmental awareness, I have learned through personal communications with Dr. Gabe Goldman, Ellen Bernstein, and Barbara Lerman-Golomb that the seeds of this movement were planted in the 1970s, with the writings of Rabbi Everett Gendler and Dr. David Ehrenfeld and the development of ecologically themed Tu Bishvat seders; the founding of Shomrei Adamah in 1988 and of Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) in 1993 were subsequent milestones.

⁵While *bal tashbit*, from Deut. 20:19–20, is the prohibition of destroying fruit trees in the context of laying siege to a city, subsequent commentators extended its application to waste of any kind. It has been adopted by Jewish environmentalists as a universal prohibition against destruction of the environment and applied as support for a variety of positive and negative environmental "commandments." For example, recycling reduces waste and is therefore a manifestation of *bal tashbit*.

⁶At the suggestion of the *rosh edah*, we divided the same age group by sex for the in-camp overnight at Camp Ramah in New England in 2005, and likewise the results were remarkable. It seems that this approach can be especially effective for children of this age.

⁷This list was culled from a variety of sources, including the COEJL website (www.coejl.org) and a bibliography by Terry Lieberstein. Not all of these works are in print.