

Camp Leaders' Torah Notes 2014

By Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow

It is hard work building Jewish community. Some of us loathe looking under the hood to understand the mechanics of how excellent Jewish experiences are engineered. If we are up to the challenge reflecting on what drives transcendent experiences at, we will find that the blueprint of community is values, and the basic building blocks are healthy relationships among campers and staff.

Remember the story of the Stone Cutters of Salisbury Cathedral:

On a foggy autumn day nearly 800 years ago a traveler happened upon a large group of workers adjacent to the River Avon. Despite being tardy for an important rendezvous curiosity convinced the traveler that he should inquire about their work. With a slight detour he moved toward the first of the three tradesmen and said "my dear fellow what is it that you are doing?" The man continued his work and grumbled, "I am cutting stones." Realizing that the mason did not wish to engage in a conversation the traveler moved toward the second of the three and repeated the question. To the traveler's delight this time the man stopped his work, ever so briefly, and stated that he was a stonecutter. He then added "I came to Salisbury from the north to work but as soon as I earn ten quid I will return home." The traveler thanked the second mason, wished him a safe journey home and began to head to the third of the trio. When he reached the third worker he once again asked the original question. This time the worker paused, glanced at the traveler until they made eye contact and then looked skyward drawing the traveler's eyes upward. The third mason replied, "I am a mason and I am building a cathedral." He continued, "I have journeyed many miles to be part of the team that is constructing this magnificent cathedral. I have spent many months away from my family and I miss them dearly. However, I know how important Salisbury Cathedral will be one day and I know how many people will find sanctuary and solace here. I know this because the Bishop once told me his vision for this great place. He described how people would come from all parts to worship here. He also told that the Cathedral would not be completed in our days but that the future depends on our hard work." He paused and then said, "So I am prepared to be away from my family because I know it is the right thing to do. I hope that one day my son will continue in my footsteps and perhaps even his son if need be."

It is a special stone cutter who understands that he is building the Salisbury Cathedral. It is a special counselor to see that conversations with Jewish content is not about building temples, or acquiring extrinsic knowledge- rather it is a discovery of intrinsic wisdom. Inspired by our relationships with each other, this resource will awaken our awareness of the values that we are the most dedicated to, so we can imagine what our community will look like when it is built.

This resource provides examples from our tradition, meaningful quotes, and questions for reflection. For Summer 2014, discussing these resources will remind staff to be intentional in their planning, designing, implementing, in facilitating programs so that both campers and staff learn, grow, and develop as Jewish people. The Jewish content was intentionally designed to be accessible. We encourage you to look up sources for placing text in its context, and exploring the nuances expressed in the original language.

Even maasu habonim, hayta le'rosh pina.
The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (Psalms 118)

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Staff Week

1. Create a Shared Story

Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki of 12th century's commentary on Genesis 1:1: "It was not necessary to begin the Torah except from Exodus 12:2 which says 'This month is to you...'. This is the first commandment that the Israelites were commanded. What is the reason that it began with the Book of Genesis?"

► Rashi explains that the Torah could have started as the Israelites received their first collective charge to action, but instead it started with all of the stories in Genesis that came long before the Israelites became a nation. Before we get to the rules, behaviors, and programs that will make us successful as a group, we need to revisit our collective narrative. If we spend time sharpening our understanding of these stories, we will be

better positioned to shape our future. **What is the founding story of this community? How did individual staff members come to the camp? Where are our campers from? What changes have been made in the past few years? How do we celebrate this history?**

Staff Week

2. Don't Judge A Book By Its Cover

Rabbi Meir used to say: "Do not look at the flask but at what is in it; there may be a new flask that is full of old wine and an old flask that does not even have new wine in it." (*Pirkei Avot* 4:27)

► Through the work of multiple social psychologists who were in conversation with each other's research (including Edward E Jones, Victor Harris, Lee Ross, Robert Nisbett) there are two trends for how we view ourselves and other people: the "observer bias" and the

"correspondence bias." The observer bias is the tendency to overemphasize the influence of a situation on someone's behavior, and underemphasize the responsibility of personality. The "correspondence bias" is people's tendency to place an emphasis on internal characteristic or qualities to explain someone else's behavior in a given situation. Confusing these two, and thinking something is due to someone's personality when it circumstantial, or vice versa, is called the "fundamental attribution error." We need to have a balanced perspective to understand our campers' and colleagues' behavior, see who they are, and address what they need. We also can look deeper at our own biases, when we need to be resilient, recover from failure, and learn from our experiences. **How do we better see the potential the bias of each and every participant and staff?**

May 18- May 24, 2014: Bamidbar

3. Teacher's Responsibilities

"These are the chronicles/children of Aaron and Moses on the day that God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai. These are the names of Aaron's sons...These are the names of Moses' sons" (Numbers 3:1-2, 26).

► Rashi refers to "These are the offspring of Aaron and Moshe." It mentions only the sons of Aaron, yet they are called "offspring of Moshe." This is because he taught them Torah. This teaches us that whoever teaches his friend's son Torah it is as if he had fathered him. (*Talmud Sanhedrin* 19B).

In the role we have to care for and teach other people's children, we have a lot of responsibility. We also have a great opportunity and honor. **What are the most rewarding moments of being a counselor? What makes this responsibility difficult?**

May 18- May 24, 2014: *Bamidbar*

4. Working Hard

“...Thus shall you do for them, so they shall live and not die; when they approach the Holy of Holies, Aaron and his sons shall come and assign them, every man to his work and to his burden. But they shall come and look as the holy is inserted, lest they die.” (Numbers 4:17-20)

► In the time of the Tabernacle, Aaron and the priests coordinated the community to contribute meaningful gifts and offerings in the spirit of maintaining the integrity of the community. Though the high priests had a lot of responsibility, without delegating and empowering other people to participate, they would not have been able to function.

Both the Hobbit and Harry Potter celebrate the importance of the everyday person in accomplishing big tasks. Best articulated by the wisdom of the seniors in the community, Gandalf says, “I found it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay;” Albus Dumbledore says, “Perhaps those who are best suited to power are those who have never sought it.” In this holy work of Jewish education, we may sometimes feel like the everyday person who is fighting for power, and we may sometimes be the high priest who is given all of the authority. **Through our work, how are we involved in the most important parts of camp? How do we let other people glimpse our goals and processes so they can be a part of the work we do? What more can we do to motivate people to step up?**

May 25- May 31, 2014: *Nasso*

5. Seek Truth

If a woman is accused of adultery by her husband, and there are serious grounds for suspicion, she is given a choice: accept a divorce or stand up to a strange test. The test, if she opts for it, requires her to drink "bitter waters" into which the name of God had been dissolved. If she is guilty, she dies instantaneously (Numbers 5:12-31).

► Not all moments at camp are warm, fuzzy, and fun. If someone has to step up to be the “bad cop” and maintain order in the community, uphold expectations, or enforce rules, how do they do that in a thoughtful way? This biblical example of law, punishment and justice, raises interesting questions: What are “serious grounds” for suspicion? Are there tests that can actually prove

someone’s innocence? What might be ideal situation or dynamic after the conflict is over? These questions are important because **when there is a need to address difficult behavior in our community, how do each of us respond? What are our policies and our consequences- and if it’s important to us, how can we treat the person who made a mistake with care?**

May 25- May 31, 2014: Nasso

6. Empowering the Individual Is Important

Though the offerings for the *korbanot* (sacrifices) were the same, the leaders brought different *kavanot* (intentions) and symbolisms that were unique to their tribe (Numbers 7:10-36).

► Each person has a unique motivation for participating in community, and each person in the group brings unique gifts, ideas, and perspectives to the team: some people may learn best by seeing, hearing, doing, or even teaching. Some

campers will prefer group games, others reading alone. Some will seek adventure, and others will create art. There are multiple doorways to entering community, and having meaningful time at camp. The same holds true for staff – we each have different experiences, and strengths. The work that we do, and the sacrifices that we make will feel more worthwhile when everyone is fully invested in the process. **How do we honor different voices of our group? How can we better understand people's intentions and motivations? How do we create innovative programming that works well for different campers?**

June 1- June 7, 2014: Beha'alotcha

7. There's Always A Second Chance

In the time of ritual sacrifices, anyone who was impure on the holiday of Passover, and therefore couldn't bring the mandatory *Korban* (sacrifice), was given the opportunity to do so a month later (Numbers 9:6-14).

► Time may not always be on our side. As long as each day may feel, the weeks fly by, and things that we didn't plan for may interrupt our schedule. Maybe acknowledging mess ups is sufficient for rebooting. **What does it look like to not bring our best selves at the right time? How can we support**

each other to bounce back? How do we manage our time to finish what we started? What do you want to redo?

June 1- June 7, 2014: Beha'alotcha

8. Including the Outsider

Moses said to his father-in-law, Chovev son of Reuel the Midianite (also known as Yitro), "We are now on our way to the place that God promised to give us. Come with us and we will let you share the benefit of all the good things that God has promised Israel." "I would rather not go" replied Chovev/Yitro, "I wish to return to my land and my birthplace." "Do not abandon us" said Moses, "After all you are familiar with the places where we are going to camp in the desert, and you can be our guide." (Numbers 10:29-31)

► Yitro was not Jewish, and he was a valued member of Moses' family. Moses saw Yitro's presence as an opportunity to learn and be guided in a new adventure. There are people in our community who might be different: consider religion, race, ability, geography, economics, look, style, gender identity, sexuality, job position, year at camp (like first year counselors), etc. It may be easier to get a vantage point about our values and issues from another person who is not in the midst of the average experience. **How do we include these people in the greater camp community?**

How do we invite thoughts about these issues through camp programming? How do we see these strangers as guides who can be resources for new issues?

June 8- June 14, 2014: *Shlach*

9. Be Positive

Ten of the twelve spies gave the following report: "We came to the land where you sent us, and it is indeed flowing with milk and honey, as you can see from its fruit. However, the people living in the land are aggressive, and the cities are large and well-fortified. We also saw the giant's descendants there." (Numbers 13:27-28)

► The spies in this story had a mixed review about their experience. They saw that what they would be working for is worthwhile – and brought back concrete evidence when they showed the fruit. However, they focused on their fears about the challenges ahead. They had forgotten about recent victories and their ability to overcome obstacles. Their negativity is connected to

wandering in the desert for 40 years. In our lives, we have accomplished great things that can get lost to critique and fear. **What journey are we about to explore and how do we feel? What is a balanced assessment of our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and problems- personally and collectively?**

June 8- June 14, 2014: *Shlach*

10. Forgiveness

God was angry with the people of Israel, and was going to kill them with a plague and annihilate them. Moses protested, so that the people would not be destroyed. He pleaded, "With Your great love, forgive the sin of this nation, just as You have forgiven them from the time they left Egypt until now" and God said, "I will grant forgiveness as you have requested." (Numbers 14:18-20)

► The relationship between God and the Jewish people is described as a great first love that works through disagreements. In this passage, Moses reminds God about that relationship. Perhaps he would urge God to take a listen to John Legend's song "[All of Me](#)" "love your curves and all your edges, all your perfect imperfections. Give your all to me, I'll give my all to you." When Moses stands up for the people, he is focused on the original

vision for a promising future. **At camp, how have we moved past conflict and disagreement? Can we see problems as endearing opportunities? How do we remind ourselves of our original Action Plans and goals to make peace?**

June 15-June 21, 2014: Korach

11. Sameach B'Chelko- Be Happy With What You Have

"Isn't it enough that the God of Israel has separated you from the community of Israel? He has brought you close to Him, allowing you to serve in God's Tabernacle and to minister as the community's leaders. Although He gave this privilege to you and all your fellow Levites, you are now also demanding the priesthood!" (Numbers 16:9-10)

► In Pirkei Avot 4:1 "Ben Zoma said: Who is rich? Those who are happy with their portion." In this text, Moses is responding to Korah- who didn't have a large portion, but also wasn't happy. A role model for seeking happiness in the face of adversity is Sam Berns. Sam was diagnosed with progeria at age two- a disease which caused him to age quickly. At seventeen years old, a few months before he passed, he explained in

a [Ted Talk](#) how he beat obstacles by creating a "Philosophy for a Happy Life." His suggestions include: 1) Be OK with what you ultimately can't do, because there is so much more you can do. 2) Surround yourself with people you want to be around. 3) Keep moving forward. 4) Never miss a party if you can help it. So "clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth- because I'm happy" (Pharrell Williams).

What are you grateful for? What are you capable of doing? Who are the people who make you feel good? How will you move forward? How will you turn an event into a party?

June 15-June 21, 2014: Korach

12. Camp Dynamics and Authority

Korach, along with Dattan, Aviram, and 250 men from the tribe of Reuven, challenge Moses and Aaron's leadership. Eventually Korach, Dattan, and Aviram, along with their entire families are swallowed up by the earth, while the 250 men were consumed by a heavenly fire (Numbers 16: 1- 35).

► Korach's story raises some issues of challenging authority and group dynamics: leaders need to set limits, deal with inappropriate behavior, and stay positive, and community members need to find constructive ways to give them feedback and criticism. Consider the controversy of protests and strikes in America: there is an experience of

inequity or injustice, difficult decision making by the leadership, conflict, public inconvenience, and sometimes, a balanced resolution. **How do people exert authority and influence in our team or staff meetings? Who has pushed back? What were the consequences? Is there a way to say no without getting swallowed whole?**

June 27- June 28, 2014 Rosh Chodesh Tamuz

13. Encourage The Heart

Pirke Avot 2:16: It is not your duty to complete the work. Neither are you free to desist from it. The day is short, the work is great, the workers are lazy, the reward is much, and the master of the house is impatient.

► Rosh Chodesh is a time for us to reflect on our community and what we will yet accomplish. Sometimes there is so much to do, and there is pressure from limited time, or difficult coworkers, intimidating supervisors, or high expectations. In these difficult times, we need to hold each other

up by celebrating great memories, and offering encouragement. In the movie Frozen, in the song [“Do You Want to Build A Snowman?”](#) supportive Anna says to her jaded sister, Elsa, “Please I know you’re in there- people are asking where you’ve been. They say ‘have courage’ and I’m trying to, I’m right out here for you, just let me in. We only have each other, it’s just you and me. What are we gonna do?” Rosh Chodesh Tamuz is specifically seen as the height of summer. Just as a snowman can survive in the sun, how our relationships at survive in the height of the year when we are not together? **How can we better inspire and encourage each other’s hearts by inviting each other “to build a snowman”? How will we protect our relationships from melting during the time we are off?**

June 22-June 28, 2014: Chukat

14. Asking Effectively

The people of Israel want to pass through Edom’s territory and make a series of offers, such as, “We shall go on the highway, and if we drink your water- I or my flock- I shall pay their price.” Edom continues to say no, and threatens war.

► When there is a need for help or cooperation, how the request is asked can make all the difference. Though the people of Israel made some generous offers, none of them were appealing to Edom because they never asked “What is it that you want?” If we can learn what

motivates people’s decisions, and consider their self-interest, maybe they would be more inclined to do what we would like. **What motivates our people?**

June 22-June 28, 2014: Chukat

15. Complaining and Appreciating What We Have

Miriam dies and the well dries up and the nation gathered against Moses and Aaron to complain that there isn’t any water (Numbers 20: 1-11).

► What do people complain about at your camp? That the cabin’s too hot or the food’s not good enough? Sometimes the situation might in fact be difficult, but people will be better prepared to cope

if they have perspective. In the Torah, the Israelites could either push onward, or return back to Egypt. Returning to Egypt is like giving up, and going home to something that is familiar, but uncomfortable. Pushing onward in the desert is like going on an adventure that will expand horizons. **At camp- what bogs us down? What can we do to push onward through our desert? When our resources are scarce, how do we treat our providers? (Consider the kitchen staff, administrative staff, maintenance staff, who we might take for granted). How do we give appreciation to the people who support us through thick and thin?**

July 4, 2014

16. Liberation

Declaration of Independence - July 4, 1776: When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

►The history of American freedom and the Exodus from Egypt share a theme: "Let my people go" so that they may practice their religion in freedom and security. It is fitting that while President Obama enjoyed his annual Passover Seder, he spoke about hope for peace in Overland Park Kansas. Three innocent people who were killed when a gunman, just one day before Passover, opened fire at a Jewish community center and retirement home on Sunday. Obama [said publicly](#), "We will continue to come together across faiths to

combat the ignorance and intolerance, including anti-Semitism, that can lead to hatred and violence. And we will never lose faith that compassion and justice will ultimately triumph over hate and fear."

How do the lessons from Exodus manifest in our community? What are the ways we enjoy freedom and independence here? What injustices still need to be made right?

June 29-July 5, 2014: *Balak*

17. The Magical Lessons

Along Bilam's way he has an encounter with his talking donkey. (Numbers 22: 21- 35)

►Balaam is a man on a mission. It takes three times for Balaam to listen to the donkey's nonverbal cues before the donkey starts speaking

-which is a bizarre and magical occurrence in the Torah! At camp, there might be subtle signs that lead to the crazy blow up. **How have we been blind or deaf to the things people around us are communicating? What makes it hard to pay attention? How do we act as our best selves, unwavering, when we realize what needs to be done?**

June 29-July 5, 2014: *Balak*

18. Stubborn Until Smiles

Though intending to curse the Israelites, Balaam blesses them: "*Mah Tovu Ohalecha Yaakov.*" (Numbers 23:1- 24:28).

►Balaam had his mind made up to be cold and angry, because he was hired by Balak to curse the Israelites. However, when Balaam got to a height where he was overlooking the Israelite community,

he had a change of heart. When he "let go", it is as if he said, "It's funny how some distance makes everything seem small; and the fears that once controlled me can't get to me at all" ([Frozen](#)). Ultimately, Balaam found his personal space to have new perspective, and his blessing celebrates the "good tents" that is the safe space of the Jewish people. **If we are resistant, mad, or negative, how do we change our minds? What do we need to say out loud that we feel we can't? What is the balance between personal space and collaboration in community?**

July 6-July 12, 2014: *Pinchas*

19. Humility in the Chain of Command

Motivated by the question of Tzafchad's daughters regarding their father who died without any sons, the laws of inheritance are discussed. Moshe brought their case to God, who told him that "the daughters of Tzafchad speak properly" (Numbers 27: 1-11).

► Sometimes, there are situations we hadn't anticipated, and imagining worst and best case scenarios can prepare us to plan ahead. In this story, solutions come from a group of women who asked bold questions to advocate for their needs. They were heard by the leadership, and change was made- which demonstrates effective dialogue

and feedback. At camp, everyone from the director to a first year bunk staff, should not be afraid to acknowledge that other people (junior staff, campers, etc) might have ideas and perspectives that are worth considering. **What have we learned from managing down the chain of command? How do we accept feedback about situations we didn't anticipate? When do we ask clarification questions, substantive questions, left field questions, or just question authority?**

July 6-July 12, 2014: *Pinchas*

20. Styles of Leadership

Moses is told to prepare for his death, and Joshua is chosen as his successor. (Numbers 27: 12- 23). The Midrash depicts Joshua as setting up chairs in the library after everyone else has left (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:14).

► There are many different styles of leadership. Different situations demand different leaders and leadership styles. Leaders are figure heads who shape visions, and they help out with schlepping things. **What styles of leadership are manifest in our group? How might each of us expand our**

leadership tool box? How do we all contribute to our community?

July 13-July 19, 2014: *Matot*

21. Be True To Your Word, and Be Yourself

The laws of personal vows and self-imposed verbal obligations are listed (Numbers 30: 2- 17).

► The words we say can have a lasting impact. We can't undo a text message or an email after we've hit "sent" and some people have faced

severe consequences for their mistakes. We should be mindful with our words so we make promises that we can keep to our campers, our fellow staff, or our supervisors. We can also get locked into self-imposed verbal obligations, when we say "could" "should" and "would." When we are in community and hear each other's commitments, we can choose to remain silent, hold each other accountable, or forgive and forget. **What promises have you made? What have you kept, and what do you need to be annulled? How is our group holding each other accountable to following through on our words?**

July 13-July 19, 2014: Matot

22. Different Isn't Bad

As a concessions so that Reuben and Gad could settle on the Eastern side of the Jordan, they agreed to lead the fight to conquer land. Moses agreed, "When then land is then conquered before God, you may return [home] and you will be free of any obligation before God and Israel. (Numbers 32:22).

► It must have taken courage for Reuben and Gad to ask for something different from the other Israelites. Perhaps for their families, they were doing acts of self-care when they requested to settle in a different location. However, when they asked, they recognized the greater good, and agreed to not abandon the group when it counted.

Therefore, when we ask for unique treatment how

do we still engage with the group? And like Moses, how do we communicate the bottom line of responsibilities and make decisions that people respect? How do we determine what is fair and equitable?

July 20-July 26, 2014: Masei

23. Pausing During Pressure from Mistakes

"You must designate towns which shall serve you as refuge cities, to which a murderer, who killed a person accidentally, can flee" (35:11).

► While hopefully nothing severe has happened at this point in the summer, it is inevitable that mistakes were made. If it feels like walls are tumbling down in the place that you love, and

great clouds are rolling in over the hills bringing darkness from above, you may wonder, "How am I going to be an optimist about this? And where do we begin?" Bastille's song Pompeii describes this feeling of confusion and frustration, and suggests that it almost feels like we've been here before. In other words, mistakes continue to happen, and we need to have a plan, or a system, for responding. The Torah doesn't suggest that murders are OK, but having a refuge city gives the community a chance to pause and breathe so they can seek justice. **In our community, how do we respond to pressure, mistakes, and crisis? How do we preserve and nurture this utopia, and make learning from mistakes part of the picture?**

July 20-July 26, 2014: Masei

24. Be Strong

Completion of the book of Numbers: "These are the commandments and laws that God instructed the Israelites through Moses in the West Plains of Moab on the Jericho Jordan" (36:13).

► With the completion of reading a book of the Torah we say, "*Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek*" - Be strong be strong, and may we be strengthened! On this occasion it is great to reflect on our strengths because there is something that we are

Each an expert at. We are more than just a piece in the games. **What is something that each of us would like to strengthen for the rest of this summer? What are the strengths of the community we have built together?**

July 27-July 28, 2014 *Rosh Chodesh Av*

25. Make Moments Matter

“One may acquire eternal life in a moment, another after many years.” (Talmud Avorah Zarah 18a)

Chodesh marks the month. In camp a day feels like it lasts a week, but a week feels like it passes in a day. When our time is over, don't you want people to say, “This person was a legend, a legend of their time. When they were at a party, the party never died”? ([We Own the Night by Wanted](#)). Your 15 minutes of fame might take the entire summer to materialize, or it might happen in an instant. **What are you doing in this moment to positively impact the people around you? How have you seen your colleagues make a world of difference? What will you do to recommit to making memories that last a lifetime?**

► The Jewish calendar offers several chances to reflect on the passing of time: Rosh Hashannah marks a year, Shabbat marks a week, and Rosh

July 27-August 2, 2014: *Devarim*

26. Making Collective Memory

Moses recounts the history of the 40 years from after the 2nd Tablets (Deuteronomy 1:1- 18), but then moves them along: "*Rav lachem shevet*"- Enough of your dwelling by this mountain- journey "to the Amorite mountain", and "come and possess the land"

stories will we tell about this summer? Can we help our campers find the right words to co-create memories? What is the history of our camp and what have we inherited? What are things that we do every year? What things that we will change or create? How do we hold these both as sacred?

► In Hebrew, Deuteronomy is called *Devarim*, words. In this section, most of the book is a repetition of the previous books of the Torah. The act of putting something into words and retelling a story transforms history into memory. It was important to hear this message right before the encouragement to begin the next journey. **What**

August 4-August 5, 2014 *Tisha B'Av*

27. Beyond The Tragedy

A wise person always carries two pieces of paper, one in each pocket. On one it says, “The world was created for me.” And on the other it says, “I am but dust and ash.” (Rabbi Bunim of P'shiskha)

balance conviction, and flexibility, have confidence, and yearn to grow. One role model of a balanced and well lived life was Alice Herz Sommer, who died after 110 years of life, and was the oldest pianist and Holocaust survivor to date. Her legacy, shared in the Oscar nominated documentary [“The Lady in Number 6”](#) is based on the hope that she brought to thousands of people in a concentration camp through the power of music. **How can we honor her memory by living a joyous Judaism? How will we share our gifts with the community to make the world a better place? How do we find balance in our emotions and self-esteem through challenging times?**

► Interspersed throughout our joy, lightheartedness, and fun are reminders that the world is not perfect, and in fact may be a little bit broken. Whether changing one life, or changing the world, we can feel inspired, but also humble,

August 4- August 5, 2014 Tisha B'Av

28. Unplug But Don't Tune Out

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning. (Psalms 137)

► Unplugging at camp is like unplugging on Shabbat. Ironically there is a video about the merits of not watching videos, called "[Technology Shabbat](#)". Tiffany Shlain reminds us that when we

remove ourselves from laptops, iPods, smartphones, our interactions feel different. When we are no longer obsessed with Facebook, email and text messages, we may fulfill our yearning to connect with face to face conversations. The focused time and attention that we give to people builds relationships and makes it possible to care about each other's concerns. **Even if we are itching to get away, how do we stay present with our camp family? How do we connect with our larger Jewish family during the year? How might we use technology to never forget where our heart lies?**

August 3-August 9, 2014: Va'etchanan

29. Envisioning the Future

Moses looks over to the other side of the Jordan.

► There comes a time when leaders see the end of their journey; as we reach the end of a phase, we may not be able to finish what we started –

personally, with campers, and with our programs. Just because our hands aren't full doesn't mean we should check out. [Echosmith's song March Into the Sun](#) reminds us to keep up positive energy even if it feels like we are sitting on our hands: "with hands in our pockets, this doesn't have to be our last dance. With hands in our pockets, this world doesn't have to end. No grand finale. Hands in our pockets, we'll march into the sun." We can still lead our community as they march into the sun.

What's your dance move going to be, while you dance into the sun? If you could leave one more message, make one more impact, what will it be?

August 3-August 9, 2014: Va'etchanan

30. Reflect and Remember

"Pen Tishkach et hadvarim asher rau einecha"- Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children.

► The American Authors Song "[Best Day Of My Life](#)" relishes that moment of feeling on top of the world; we dreamt big, we reached high, and we may have actually danced with monsters through the night. **Before we wake, how will we make sure that we don't forget what we experienced? With things looking up, and the end in sight, how will we ensure that what we built will stick?**

August 3-August 9, 2014: Va'etchanan

31. Believe Without Seeing

Here we have the first paragraph of the *Sh'ma* (Deuteronomy 6: 4- 9).

► Why do we cover our eyes when we say the *Sh'ma*? There are a number of reasons, but it is interesting that so many of us know to do it, but do

not necessarily know why we do this. One explanation is that for the Jewish creed, there is a presumption that God has no form. So our deepest faith is in something that we will never experience with our eyes. In covering our eyes it is as if we are saying, "I believe in You/you even when I do not see You/you". **To what degree is this true for us in other relationships in our lives? Do we trust our staff members even when we do not have an eye on them? Do we trust our campers even when we do not have an eye on them? Do we feel like we are part of this community even when we do not see each other? Is camp part of our lives even when we are not here on site?**

August 8-August 9, 2014 Shabbat Nachamu

32. Camp Is A Comfort

The people of Israel shall keep *Shabbat*, observing Shabbat throughout the ages as a covenant for all time. It is a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days *Adonai* made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day God ceased from work and was refreshed. (Words of the prayer "*Vshamru*")

► *Shabbat* may be one of the best parts of camp. *Shabbat Nachamu* is the Shabbat immediately following *Tisha B'Av*- where we are meant to be even more mindful of the opportunities we have to feel safe, comforted, and refreshed. At camp, all counselors are considered "youth workers" and all youth workers are "Mandated Reporters." If any camper confesses an incident of abuse or rape,

staff are required to tell their supervisor because saving a life is more important than confidentiality. In the moment where someone is suffering and needs to share their story, there are four statements that should be made to create safe space: "Thank you for telling me." "I believe you." "You've done nothing wrong." "I will get help for you." **What systems are in place in our community to help people feel safe enough to tell the truth? To what degree does the ear of a listening and compassionate caretaker bring comfort after hard and painful work? How will the memory of being comforted at stay with campers throughout their lives? How can we connect to Shabbat beyond camp?**

August 10- August 11, 2014 Tu B'Av

33. Wear What Suits You

Tu B'Av, the 15th of Av, was a joyous holiday in the days of the Temple in Jerusalem. Unmarried girls would dress in simple white clothing (so that rich could not be distinguished from poor) and go out to sing and dance in the vineyards surrounding Jerusalem to find their matches.(Talmud Ta'anit, 30b-31a)

► At your camp, is dressing up for Shabbat an exciting and important time? In words of [Macklemore's hit song Thrift Shop](#), "They be like, 'Oh, that Gucci- that's 'ella tight.' I'm like, 'Yo- that's fifty dollars for a T-shirt'. Limited edition, let's do some addition." On one hand, we want to celebrate our individuality through choices, tastes, and style, and it feels good to put in extra effort to

look special. On the other hand, we want to create an equal community where people aren't uncomfortable because of their personal choices, or their financial situation. **How can we bring more joy from making memories of shared experiences?**

August 10-August 16, 2014, Ekev

34. Absentees

Moses reviews the incident of the Golden Calf. (Deuteronomy 9:1-29)

►The Golden Calf Incident (GCI) is an amazing case study in a dysfunctional group. One interesting aspect of the GCI is Moses's absence.

Can the supervisor take a day off? If we cannot, what are the implications? What are the needs of the group and who can meet these needs so the supervisor can take a day off? How do we welcome the supervisor back after the absence?

Last Week of Camp

35. Sustain Community

"Do not separate yourself from the community" (Pirkei Avot 2.5)

►The work of camp was to build a community together. Just because our time here is ending it does not mean the community is disbanding. We

do not have the right to separate from the bonds we have started here at camp. **What are ways that we will sustain camp in our lives now that this summer is coming to a close?**

Last Week of Camp

36. Pleasant To Be Together

"Hineh mah tov" Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers [& sisters] dwell together (Psalms 133:1)

►Sometimes there are no words. It is just nice to be around each other. We cannot deny that it is difficult to say goodbye. We associate being together with the sacred space and holy work we

have shared here at camp. The greatest present is just your presence. Camp is good and pleasant.

When are we going to get together next with our holy brothers and sisters?

NOTE

Hopefully this primer will help leadership tell stories that invites the staff members and therefore campers to share their own stories. Connecting the work of building Jewish community today to the stories of the Torah ensures that we are telling our national story. This contributing to a larger work entitled "From Mediocre to *Mitzuyan*: Torah Talking Points for Camp Supervisors". If you would like to add to this project or are seeking other educational resources do not hesitate to be in touch with Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow the Director of Jewish Education at the Foundation for Jewish Camp at avi@jewishcamp.org or 646-278-4535.

By Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow, Debra Fricano and Josh Satok

Building Meaning at Jewish Camp

By Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow

We all know the force that camp has to socialize our campers, but have we realized the full potential of camp as an educational institution? Camp is fun and therefore we are reticent to think of it as educational. Education is a planned formal process of acquiring knowledge or skills and developing the powers of reasoning and judgment. In contrast, we think that socialization is what happens in the in-between-moments of our lives. We are taught to think that socialization is an informal process which involves our getting in touch with our inner selves and how to get along with others. We are taught to think that formal education is serious while camp is fun. In fact the dichotomy between education and socialization is misplaced. Effective formal education is not nearly as planned as we might think. Effective socialization needs to be much more methodical in planning spontaneity.

In Hebrew we translate the word education as *chinuch*, but the reverse is not true. *Chinuch* cannot be translated simply into English as education. Proverbs instructs us *Chanuch¹ LaNaar al Pi Darko* - to “Initiate a child in his way so when the child is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Alternatively, when you move into a new house, you would invite people over to join you in celebrating a *Chanukat¹ HaBayit*, - a dedication of your new house. As we learn from *Rashi* – the premier Medieval Rabbinic Commentator – “the root *ChaNaCh¹* means the beginning of the entry of a person or an implement into the craft in which he/it is destined to stay” (*Rashi* on Genesis 14:14). It follows that *Chinuch*- Jewish education – is truly about dedication and initiation.

Camp is a special learning environment with a very tight “learning loop”, holistic cycle where the camper pays attention to the counselor because the camper wants to follow the counselor’s example and join the camp’s staff in the near future. In this sense the *chanichim¹*- campers- are truly initiates to the larger learning project of camp. The goal of camp is to train the next generation of *madrichim*- counselors. The *chanichim* are being socialized to become educators.

In retrospect, the transformative experiences that the *chanichim* remember seem to transcend the mundane formal dynamics of camp. *Madrichim*, especially those who were themselves initiates, are loathsome to look under the hood and understand the mechanics of how these experiences are engineered. If we are brave enough to reflect on what drives these transcendent experiences, we will find four main dynamics of how camp works. Role modeling, relationship building, rituals, and a how we create context are important ways in which we communicate meaning in the educational platform we call camp.

Role Modeling

This learning “learning Loop” is founded in the campers wanting to imitate the staff. It is critical that the staff exemplify the camp’s values. This is a tremendous power in camping that needs to be used responsibly. *Chanichim* know if the people are crafting their experience from whole cloth. The staff is the fabric of camp. It is essential to hire, orient, and train staff according to the camp’s philosophy and Jewish Identity.²

Relationships

While the *chanichim* look up to the staff; their peers are going to be their community for life. Building and maintaining healthy relationships that reinforce the values of the camp are critical to sustaining the camp community among both campers and staff. The *Limud by the Lake* study by Dr. Amy Sales argued that relationships are essential elements of the camp experience.³ The recent study by Dr. Sales shows that ten years later this is diminished, but still a very significant factor.⁴

Ritual

¹ Same root as *chinuch*

² To see great research into this within the Ramah system see Dr. Zachary Adam Lasker’s dissertation *The Camp Counselor as Educator and Role Model for the Core Jewish Values and Practices of the Conservative Movement* (2009).

³ Sales, Amy and Leonard Sax. (2002) *Limud by the Lake: Fulfilling the Educational Potential of Jewish Summer Camp*. New York, NY: The Avi Chai Foundation.

⁴ Look for Dr. Sales soon to be published a reflection on ten years after *Limud By the Lake* which will be titled *Extending the Tent and Strengthening the Tent Stakes: Growth and Change in Jewish Summer Camp*.

While we tend to associate ritual with religion, camping is replete with its own rituals. While these camp rituals are not necessarily sacramental in nature it does not mean that they are devoid of meaning. Are we using camp ritual to communicate the values of the camp? In understanding, creating, and enacting effective camp ritual, tradition and programming it is essential that the staff are intentional in their planning, designing, implementing and facilitating programs that challenge their campers to learn, grow, and develop as Jewish people.

Jewish “ConText”⁵

Anyone who has spent any time at camp has experienced a certain degree of sanctity of space. There are other ways of creating meaning beyond reliance on the hallowed ground of the place where we do Havdalah or sports field. We also create a holy context by invoking our collective memory. Each of us needs a working knowledge and comfort in accessing Jewish history, culture, and textual traditions to effectively get our *chanichim* to join us in this “ConText”. In many ways the simulated Jewish ConText has a more significant educational outcome than just relying on the physical context; these experiences that play with reality create life long memories.

While excellence in these dynamics might be second nature to some *madrichim*, the aspiration is that every camp professional consistently achieves excellence. Understanding how these dynamics work in camp enable the camp professional to utilize the platform of camp to communicate the values of their camp. Being disciplined in designing camp with the outcomes in mind will help make a good staff member into a great educator. Excellence in camp education will happen when we make the shift from intuition to intention.

In addition, if we share a common language for how camp works as an educational institution we will be able to share best practices across ideological and cultural divides more effectively. This sharing is not an effort to create homogeneity of Jewish camps or in their staff. Just as the variety of camps expands our capacity to connect with a larger range of families, the variety of camp staff members expands a camp’s opportunity to connect with more campers. Having an appreciation of the palate of how to paint does not mean we will all paint the same thing. On the contrary this sharing will help camp professionals deepen and differentiate experiences for the *chanichim*. Understanding the techniques without an understanding of camp’s mission, and vision is not helpful. For camp to be truly educational the staff needs to have a real appreciation and a sense of ownership of the objectives of the experience.

Perhaps the story of the Stone Cutters of Salisbury Cathedral best underscores the significance of putting the mission first. One version of the story goes:

On a foggy autumn day nearly 800 years ago a traveler happened upon a large group of workers adjacent to the River Avon. Despite being tardy for an important rendezvous curiosity convinced the traveler that he should inquire about their work. With a slight detour he moved toward the first of the three tradesmen and said “my dear fellow what is it that you are doing?” The man continued his work and grumbled, “I am cutting stones.” Realizing that the mason did not wish to engage in a conversation the traveler moved toward the second of the three and repeated the question. To the traveler’s delight this time the man stopped his work, ever so briefly, and stated that he was a stonecutter. He then added “I came to Salisbury from the north to work but as soon as I earn ten quid I will return home.” The traveler thanked the second mason, wished him a safe journey home and began to head to the third of the trio. When he reached the third worker he once again asked the original question. This time the worker paused, glanced at the traveler until they made eye contact and then looked skyward drawing the traveler’s eyes upward. The third mason replied, “I am a mason and I am building a cathedral.” He continued, “I have journeyed many miles to be part of the team that is constructing this magnificent cathedral. I have spent many months away from my family and I miss them dearly. However, I know how important Salisbury Cathedral will be one day and I know how many people will find sanctuary and solace here. I know this because the Bishop once told me his vision for this great place. He described how people would come from all parts to worship here. He also told that the Cathedral would not be completed in our days but that the future depends on our hard work.” He paused and then said, “So I am prepared to be away from my family because I know it is the right thing to do. I hope that one day my son will continue in my footsteps and perhaps even his son if need be.”⁶ It is a special stone cutter who understands that he is building the Salisbury Cathedral. It is a special *madrich* who understands that she is preparing a child for life. *Chinuch* is not about building temples or limited to imparting or acquiring of extrinsic

⁵ The Foundation for Jewish Camp sees Jewish text writ large as being a critical component to building meaningful Jewish experiences so we accent the text in creating “ConText”.

⁶ Girard J.P. and Lambert S (2007) “The Story of Knowledge: Writing Stories that Guide Organizations into the Future” *The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management* Volume 5 Issue 2, pp 161-172.

knowledge, rather, it is a discovery of intrinsic wisdom. It was already there it is just the process of awakening our awareness of its presence. *Chinuch* is truly helping the initiate dedicate him/herself to a cause. In camp the *chanich* is rarely motivated by the authority of the educator; rather they are moved by their role models, relationships, rituals, and life lived in a Jewish ConText to dedicate her/himself to live meaningful lives infused with Jewish values. To this end, the *madrich* needs to model connecting to his/her own “passion-based learning”.⁷

Though some *madrichim* loath to see themselves as educators, but if they have the vision of the stone cutter building the Salisbury Cathedral they can be an unmatched as educators. In Hallel⁸ we read:

Even maasu habonim, hayta le'rosh pina.

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (Psalms 118:22)

Even if initially they might have rejected being educators, excellent *madrichim* understand that *chinuch* at camp is serious fun. They use these four dynamics of camping to communicate Jewish values to their *chanichim*. Together they build temples of meaning that last their whole lives. For every single *chanich* there should be a *madrich* who can become that cornerstone⁹.

⁷ Brown, John Seely and Richard P. Adler. (2008) Minds on Fire: Open Education, the Long Tail, and Learning 2.0 Available at http://forumnova.files.wordpress.com/2007/12/minds_on_fire.pdf

⁸ Hallel is a liturgical prayer of praise and thanksgiving

⁹ Started in 2003 the Cornerstone Fellowship, made possible by the generosity of the AVI CHAI Foundation, empowers third-year Jewish bunk counselors to view themselves as experiential Jewish educators.