

Shalom tzevet,

We are eagerly awaiting your arrival to camp in just a couple of weeks.

You, our tzevet, are our biggest and most powerful strength. Our chanichim look up to you and want to grow up to be just like you. This power can have a profound impact on the religious journeys of our chanichim.

Because of this incredible influence that you have, I want to ask you to help. Frankly, we need to make more progress on some of our religious priorities this summer. These areas include the wearing of kippot, tallit and tefilin, leadership roles during tefilot, our participation during tefilot and birkat hamazon, Shabbat observance and Tzniut.

Kippot: The policy of Camp Ramah is to require males to wear kippot while praying, eating or studying Torah. We encourage women to do the same.

We seem to spend a lot of time at meals having to remind chanichim and tzevet alike to wear kippot. This year, we will provide a Ziploc bag with labeled kippot for each chanich in each male tzrif. That Ziploc bag will reside in the chadar ochel. Any boy who does not bring their own kippah will then be able to use the one we have for him. Madrichim will collect those kippot at the end of the meal.

Our Request: We ask our tzevet, male and female alike, to consider wearing kippot full time during the summer. It is a wonderful experiment to try for a summer. If you are a woman who is uncomfortable with that, you might consider wearing a kippah during tefilot, Torah study and meals.

Tallit and Tefilin: The policy of Camp Ramah is to require males above the age of Bar Mitzvah to wear tefilin and either a tallit or tallit katan. We encourage women to do the same. We are currently collecting extra tefilin so that female chanichot and tzevet can experiment with wearing them during the summer.

Our Request: We would love to encourage all of our female staff to wear tallit and tefilin. In fact, we believe virtually all of our female staff wore tallitot at their b'not mitzvah and are likely to own one. This is a wonderful mitzvah that is worth trying. Bring your Tallit to camp and give it a try!

Leadership Roles during Tefilot: The policy of Camp Ramah is that anyone leading tefilot, male or female, needs to cover his/her head and wear a tallit. The Shaliach Tzibur (leader) can choose to add the Imahot except on Mondays (required) and Thursdays (not said) and Shabbat morning (required)/Musaf (not said) where we designate whether the Imahot are included or not.

Our Request: Consider adding the Imahot on non-designated days. Also, consider leading tefilot! If you don't feel that you know how to well enough, there are many people here to help you learn. What a

marvelous example you send when you challenge yourself and grow in front of your chanichim!

Participation during Tefilot and Birkat Hamazon: The policy of Camp Ramah is that EVERYONE must attend morning shachrit services. This includes tzevet that do not live in tzrifim. We need everyone to attend tefilot and to participate energetically. Additionally, during Birkat Hamazon we need EVERYONE to participate and to refrain from holding conversations during the prayer.

Shabbat Observance: The policy of Camp Ramah is that we are a Shomer Shabbat camp. Shabbat observance is neither a vote nor a choice for tzevet and chanichim alike. Shabbat policies will be reviewed during shavua hachanah, however, I want to emphasize that everyone must turn off and put away their cell phones and other electronics for the duration of Shabbat.

Tzniut: Dressing modestly is a Jewish value. There is tremendous social sexual pressure on our chanichim in virtually all areas of their lives. We strive to reduce that pressure at camp. Please review our dress code in the staff handbook and make good decisions when packing for the summer.

I am sure that there are many questions you might have about Judaism and religious practice. I also realize that individuals may have differing opinions. I welcome discussion on all these matters whether with me or other knowledgeable leaders in camp.

We have an amazing opportunity this Kayitz to change lives and to empower our chanichim to try new things in their religious practice and observance. Together, we can truly make a difference. I can't wait for the summer to begin!

Kol Tuv,

Rabbi Ed Gelb

Director, Camp Ramah in New England