



The period between Purim and Pesach is a time of joy and celebration, a time when our holidays invite us to see the Jewish people as going from strength to strength. We can therefore think of no better time on the calendar for Ramah Berkshires to announce an exciting new stage in our growth as an institution as we too try to go from strength to strength. **We are thrilled to announce that we will formally be launching a Tikvah Program this fall at Ramah Berkshires.**

Three important things have happened to make this moment possible:

- (1) **We are honored that Eileen and Jerry Lieberman have made a lead gift for the establishment of this program and the construction of a new Tikvah building. The Liebermans have committed \$1,000,000: a \$500,000 initial gift plus an additional \$500,000 in matching funds that will be given as a 1:1 match for any gifts of \$50,000 or more for this project.**
- (2) Once we received the commitment from the Liebermans, we were eligible to apply for Foundation for Jewish Camp's Yashar Initiative, an effort to increase accessibility for campers with disabilities at Jewish summer camps. This incredible FJC initiative has been funded by The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. **We are grateful to have been awarded a Yashar grant of \$330,000**, \$300,000 for the capital additions we will be making for our Tikvah program, and \$30,000 for capacity building as we develop and launch the program itself.
- (3) As we prepare to make our Tikvah program a reality, we are delighted to announce that **we have hired Elisheva Layman to join our year-round team as our Tikvah Director.** Elisheva has many years of experience as a Special Education teacher and working with Ramah Tikvah programs. You can read more about Elisheva below; we look forward to welcoming her to our professional team this fall.

We are so excited about all of this wonderful progress towards the opening of our new Tikvah program. Please continue reading for more details.

BACKGROUND:

The first Ramah camp *Tikvah* program opened in 1970, and over the past fifty years, the Ramah Camping Movement has been a pioneer in the inclusion of Jewish campers with disabilities. Tikvah programs now operate in all Ramah camps across North America, offering the inspirational Ramah experience to Jewish children, teens, and young adults with a wide range of intellectual, developmental, or learning disabilities.

For many years, Camp Ramah in the Berkshires has offered our “*Breira B’Ramah*” program, designed to provide a supportive environment for children with special needs. This amazing program, which will continue under the Tikvah umbrella, has enabled hundreds of campers to have successful Ramah Berkshires experiences. Until this point, however, we have only been able to serve campers who are able to be a part of a full inclusion program (a program where campers with and without disabilities live in the same cabin and attend activities together).

In 2019, Ramah Berkshires went through a comprehensive organizational strategic planning process in order to identify our strategic goals and priorities for the next decade. A key goal articulated as a piece of this work was to "Create a robust special needs (*Tikvah*) program." The rationale behind this goal was a recognition that, as a best-of-class Jewish educational institution, we need to meet the needs of our entire community. A new *Tikvah* program will be both additive to our current camp community and environment, and will meet the needs of an important and underserved part of our community.

KEY PLAYERS:

Eileen and Jerry Lieberman, whose children attended Ramah Berkshires, and whose grandchildren -- Gesher '21 alum Samuel, Machon '22 camper Maya, and Tzeirim '22 camper Bela -- are current campers. The Liebermans have been passionate and dedicated supporters of the National Ramah Commission and the Ramah Tikvah network for decades. They have supported many important NRC initiatives, including the most recent national alumni study and affordability initiative. Notably, Eileen led the effort to make Ramah Israel Seminar an inclusive program, a change that enabled Tikvah program alumni to be a part of this culminating Ramah experience. We are so

grateful to the Liebermans for their transformative gift, a strong statement of their commitment to bringing a new and expanded Tikvah program to Ramah Berkshires.

Elisheva Layman has undergraduate and graduate degrees in Special Education, and she has worked for almost ten years as a Special Educator in the classroom at SINAI Schools and at The Shefa School. Elisheva grew up at Ramah New England, and has spent almost 20 summers as part of the Ramah New England community, including nine summers working in the Tikvah program at the Palmer overnight camp, and launching the Ramah DC Tikvah program.

WHAT'S NEXT:

The funding from Eileen and Jerry Lieberman and the Yashar Initiative has enabled us to engage an architect who is in the initial stages of designing our new Tikvah building. This building will include housing for both campers and staff, in addition to program space. The building will be designed and furnished in a way that allows for flexibility based on the unique needs of our campers each summer. It will be built as a fully winterized building, giving us the option to use it for off-season Tikvah camper and family programming. And, it will be fully accessible, and located in a central spot in camp, next to other camper bunks and close to the dining hall, the infirmary, as well as many of Camp's program and activity spaces.

We are of course looking for community members able to make gifts of \$50,000 and above to help us raise the \$500,000 in matching funds to receive the full \$1m from our lead donors. If you would like more information about supporting the launch of our Tikvah program, please be in touch.

There is a lot more to come, and we look forward to keeping our community updated as we move ahead with our plans to launch this important and exciting new program at our camp.

Thank you for your continued support of, and dedication to, Camp Ramah in the Berkshires!

Rabbi Ethan Linden
Director

Richard Friedman
President