

Pesach at Spa Ramah



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Pesach happening does that and more through spiritual sustenance; intellectual engagement; elegant, creative and abundant food; physical exercise; children's programs; the finest of arts; northeast Georgia adventures; and last but not least, Spa Ramah's famed masseur and masseuse. Additionally, this year we were blessed with phenomenal late March/early April weather, glorious days followed by chilly nights.

But it is the eclectic and open *kehillah* (community) we create anew each year that brings many of us back time and again: Jews of diverse ideologies and practices; southern, northern, eastern and western Americans; Israelis and Canadians; veterans and newbies; singles and clans; toddlers and octogenarians. And it is a *kehillah* that exemplifies the essence of Conservative Judaism: authentic and pluralistic, traditional yet modern. Moreover, there are always some guests that are new to the Ramah world. Our conversations with them indicate that they are moved by their positive impressions of the religious culture that we have created.

This year there was a lot of buzz about our scholar-in-residence, best-selling author and Conservative rabbi, Harold Kushner. He shared his infinite Torah wisdom with overflow crowds on eight (!) separate occasions. More remarkably, Rabbi Kushner remained accessible and approachable outside the classroom. He modeled the Ramah paradigm that was replicated by all of the staff – Jewish leaders that are part of, not apart from, the community.

The *sedarim* (seders) are impressive undertakings. At the communal *sedarim* we engage young and old through singing, dancing,

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Ramah Darom is affectionately known as Spa Ramah, and never is the moniker more deserving than during the annual Pesach Retreat. A good spa experience can resuscitate the body and invigorate the soul. Darom's



*Rabbi Noam Marans burns the last crumb of chametz.
Our meals were so delicious, we didn't even miss it.*

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interactive intellectual games and all the Pesach rituals. Some choose private *sedarim* so they can be away but feel like they are at home. With uncanny symbolism all seder attendees – communal and private – can see one another through the dining room glass doors, enabling unity within diversity. It is an inspiring sight, a symphony of Jewish voices. All of us were blown away by the participation and insights of the young children who answered the challenging questions we posed to them at the communal *sedarim*.

All participants have their own favorite Ramah Darom Pesach experience. For me it is exercising together with my wife while we reconnect with nature. Soon after dawn each day, Amy and I sneak out, leave the sleeping kids behind and briskly power walk two full circuits around the abundant perimeter of the camp. It is stirring to watch the sun peek out over Darom's imposing wooded hills. We repeat the ritual later in the day as well. It is a joy to put aside the challenges of everyday life for a week of remembering what it is all about.



Our tables are gussied up for seder.

The *haggadah* instructs us: "In each and every generation a person has to imagine as if he himself (or she herself) was liberated from Egypt." We all have Egypts from which we need to be freed, and at its best, Pesach at Ramah Darom puts a dent in our personal and individual enslavements.

People can't believe that adults go to a camp for Pesach. They don't realize that Ramah Darom is not your typical camp. It's a first-rate facility housing a heartwarming community. May the child within us keep bringing us back to camp. *Today rabbah* to the visionaries who founded and continue to sustain a state-of-the-art campus for the entire community complete with year-round accommodations that meet the needs of all, as well as the staff who understand the meaning of *kehillah* and make it a reality.

E'shanah ha-ba'ah birushalayim, next year in Jerusalem. But if not, next year in Clayton.