

Belonging, Behaving, Believing ... and Becoming at Camp Havaya

In Mordecai Kaplan's basic understanding of Peoplehood Reconstructionism suggests that being a member of the Jewish community is about belonging and behaving before it is about believing. While creating the Camp JRF culture the formation of the group collective identity was foremost in our early theory for one does not (and perhaps cannot) have a strong and connected belief in Jewish theology without first belonging to the community in some way and behaving as such..

First comes **Belonging**. In order to have a successful camp program, there must be committed and involved participants. The camp community of staff and campers need to feel that they are part of something greater than themselves, and the first programs of the camp season begin by bringing all members into an environment where they can make a place for themselves. In our very first season there was a creation of a community brit (covenantal agreement) of how the members of our community committed the aims of the group. Group collective understanding of this value of our involvement is the underlying value of the Camp JRF concept of how we are connected first in the *kehillah*.

Behaving like a member of the community comes only after our participants are invested in being part of that community. Campers can focus on behaving by taking responsibility for the way the camp community lives and interacts, and as part of a Jewish camp they can see how these behaviors take on larger meanings as they leave camp and bring them into their everyday lives. We take our texts from Mishnaic sources like Pirkei Avot which show how we interact with others to create by our behavior this holy community. Camp programs focus on what it means to act as a Jew in a typically secular world and why it is important to be part of a Jewish community in the 21st Century.

Programming can begin to focus on **Believing** only after there is a core group of youth who are committed to and invested in the camp community and who have a sense of what it means to behave as part of that community. At this point programs can focus on issues of spirituality, belief, practice, and other topics that might be considered "religious." By waiting until this point in the process, the youth are given plenty of time to build a community in which they feel safe to share these personal ideas with their peers. Believing does not necessarily mean that all members of the community must have the same commitment to Jewish spirituality and theology. Believing means taking a vested interest in the future success of the camp program, allowing new youth to be engaged in their own similar processes of belonging, behaving, and believing. More than this, believing ensures the future involvement of the youth in personally meaningful Jewish experiences.

After the above 3 B's set by Kaplan's theory Camp evolved with a fourth—**Becoming**. What does it mean to create a movement camp and not infuse the future ideas of the movement? Becoming Reconstructionists was our fourth year's theme where we took the basic elements of Kaplan from *Living in Two Civilizations*, *The Past has a vote not a veto*, *The Process that makes for salvation and the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish People* and expose our central theories critically and experientially for our community to wrestle with. We even learned to highlight specific learning days as we created each Civilization to experience a given topic, a key focus of Kaplan's understanding of Judaism as a Civilization.