

Etzab Tovah L'hadracha
**Wisdom for Good Counsel: A Path Towards
Jewish Growth and Counselor Development**

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Curriculum Rationale

“Counselors are the essential key to Jewish life and learning at camp.”¹ In their substantial study of Jewish camping Amy Sales and Leonard Saxe propose that counselors singularly animate the camp system that allows such a highly complex, planned, and constructed environment to create powerful magic. Counselors come away from a summer of hard work as more confident and mature individuals having gained new leadership and mentoring abilities. Yet few of them return to their homes and colleges with *new* Jewish knowledge that transfers into their own practice of Judaism. This curriculum guide seeks to redress the egregious and unnecessary fact that counselors’ own continued Jewish education as key members of the camp community “falls to the end of the list.”²

As research on the American Jewish community has noted, the Jewish camping field is enjoying increased capacity and development over the last two decades.³ Jewish camps serve larger populations and provide an ever-growing plethora of both secular and Jewish immersive experiences. Staff member recruitment, development, and training form the core of this growth process. Judaic education for staff should also flourish in this environment of growth and success, yet it does not.

Camping leadership must strive to address this deficiency. After all, camp is an environment where young Jewish adults enthusiastically flock in order to build relationships, immerse in Jewish living, and seek personal growth. This curriculum guide is a summer-long advising program that seeks to help camp directors fill the void of Jewish learning for staff members. Targeted at second year counselors, who have already acquired the basic skills needed to lead a cabin, this program will guide camp leadership in developing counselors to become connoisseurs of their own Judaism.

Counselors will explore and uncover content that is inherent in the Jewish environment they love most, the Jewish summer camp. This course will help learners reveal the rituals, customs, and values that shape camp’s Jewish life: Shabbat observance and ritual, prayer services, kashrut practice, Torah study, and the Jewish values by which the community lives.

¹ Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe, *"How Goodly Are Thy Tents": Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 97.

² Sales and Saxe, *"How Goodly"*, 133.

³ Amy L. Sales, Nicole Samuel and Matthew Boxer, *Limmud by the Lake Revisited: Growth and Change at Jewish Summer Camp*, Study, Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University (New York: The Avi Chai Foundation, 2011), 7.

Counselors will then be led to further explore these topics and build upon what they already know, deepen their understanding, and bring knowledge beyond camp to shape their lives during the rest of the year. On this level learners will seek to answer questions such as: what is the role of *mitzvot* in my life? How do I engage in personal prayer? How will Judaism inform my eating choices? How will I bring Shabbat into my life? As a Jew, what is my motivation for *tikkun olam*?

As the course culminates, counselors will become experts in Jewish topics of their own selection as teachers in the camp community. They will have the opportunity to engage campers through the creation of camp programming, become leaders for their peers through social media by sharing knowledge and encouraging acts of meaningful Jewish living, and offer proposals for improvements in their camp's observance of Jewish rituals.

At 19-20 years of age, counselors possess openness to new ideas and a curiosity to define who they are and what they believe. As Diane Tickton Schuster asserts, "adulthood is associated with the assumption of responsibility."⁴ At camp, counselors are fully responsible for the lives of others and themselves; why not also for their own learning and Jewish living? "Feeling 'grown up' as a Jew involves renegotiating one's concept of whose agenda is at the fore. It also involves recognizing that one can make an independent choice about whether to sustain (or develop) a Jewish identity or not."⁵

Summer camp becomes not only the best environment to socialize Jewish children, it also provides an ideal opportunity to address Jewish identity at a sensitive period for the camp's staff members.⁶ As the camping field continues to grow in complexity, capacity, and diversity, it is also in need of resources to meet the demands of the many learners involved. This guide serves as one such resource, designed with the questioning, curious, and even skeptical young adult learner in mind.

⁴ Diane Tickton Schuster, *Jewish Lives, Jewish Learning: Adult Jewish Learning in Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: UAH Press, 2003), 18.

⁵ Schuster, *Jewish Lives*, 19.

⁶ Maria Montessori hypothesized the existence of sensitive periods in human development where learners are predisposed to developing in a specific area, i.e., language, mathematics, artistic expression, etc.

Scope and Sequence

Introductory Unit: Pre-camp Meetings and Framing

- Help Wanted! - Sample Job Description, Personal Reflections, and Interview
 - Assessment: Social Media Post #1
- Late Spring Video Meeting – Charting the Course (Scripted)
 - Assessment: *Tiyul Nefesh* #1

Unit 1: Our Camp Community, Our Jewish Living: *What do we do and know by instinct?*

- Our Community – Who is a part of it? What is its purpose?
- Exploring Shabbat at Camp 1 – *Mah Yefeh Hayom* (Scripted)
 - Assessment: Camp Practices Blog Post
- Exploring Shabbat at Camp 2 - *Ki Eshmeira Shabbat, El yish'm'reini...*
- What's Happening in the Chadar Ohel?: Our Kashrut
 - Assessment: Camp Practices Blog Post
- T'fillah – Prayer at Camp: Intention vs. Actuality
- *Lilmod u'lilameid* – Learning and Teaching at Our Camp

Unit 2: On the Jewish Menu: Question What Is* *What does Judaism say in comparison?*

- Shabbat as a Taste of the Ideal World (Scripted)
- Prayer: *l'hitpalel* - Relating to Ourselves, Each Other, and to God
- *The Sacred Table*⁷: The Concept and Purpose of Kashrut
 - Assessment: Social Media Post #2
- Torah Study: The Jew as Eternal Student
- The Role of Community in Judaism (Can you be Jewish alone on an Island?)
- What have you learned? Teaching our peers and sharing with the broader community
 - Assessment: Camp Practices Blog Post
- Memorable Moment in Nature: Perspective and Time (Scripted)
 - Assessment: *Tiyul Nefesh* #2

⁷ The title of a book on liberal conceptions of kashrut edited by Mary Zamore and published by the CCAR Press in 2011.

* Question what is, Imagine what could be... A mission of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education. Use of this phrase is not cliché. Rather, this guide seeks to help young adults question the Jewish environment in which they work and imagine how they can work to shape their camp for the better.

Unit 3: Personal Meaning and Belief: Imagine What Could Be* *What do I want to try?*

- Becoming a Connoisseur – Identify Your Jewish Passions
 - Assessment: Social Media Post #3
- Sharing Your Knowledge with Others, Introducing the Final Assessment
- Creative Session I – Developing Project Ideas
 - Assessment: Culminating Project Work
- Creative Session II – Critical Friends Feedback on Project Ideas/Structured Work
 - Assessment: Culminating Project Work
- Mapping Your Own Ideal Jewish Practice
- Beginning With the End in Mind/Program Evaluation
 - Assessment: Social Media Post #4
- Project Reflection & Evaluation, Overview of Jewish Resources on Campus
- Siyyum of Summer Program

Post Camp Reflections and Conclusions

- Early Fall Video Meeting (before Rosh Hashanah) – *Tiyul Nefesh* #3 (Scripted)
- Mid-year Gathering/Reunion

Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions

Enduring understandings that inform this guide:

- Liberal Jews bear the responsibility of individual autonomy.
- In order to learn, one must be emotionally moved.
- An individual's actions define a community's values.
- The Jewish master story of revelation endures, in some form, in every Jewish person's life.

Overarching Goals:

- To develop counselors who think critically about the work they do at camp and are aware of the Jewish content they share with campers.
- To teach Jewish young adults how to deepen their study and practice of Judaism.
- To empower Jewish young adults as connoisseurs of their own Judaism (experts in knowing their own Jewish likes and dislikes).
- To further a culture of Jewish learning and development for camp counselors year-round.

Essential Questions for Unit One:

Our Camp Community, Our Jewish Living: *What do we do and know by instinct?*

- How do liberal Jews decide their Jewish practice?
- How is enculturation education?
- Who qualifies as a true role model?

Essential Questions for Unit Two:

On the Jewish Menu: Question What Is...*What does Judaism say in comparison?*

- How is the Torah authoritative for liberal Jews?
- What is authentic Jewish practice?
- What qualifies as an informed choice?
- How is revelation ongoing?

Essential Questions for Unit Three:

Personal Meaning and Belief: Imagine What Could Be...*What do I want to try?*

- Who qualifies as a true role model?
- Which Jewish values are most important?
- What is excellent experiential education?
- What is the relationship between individual autonomy and collective identity?

Assessment Descriptions

Social Media Posts (4 total)

Beginning from the start of the program, during the application and interview process for camp, second year counselors will be asked to make a public social media post about aspects of their experience. Counselors can use Facebook status updates, send a Tweet, or even be creative and illustrate their thoughts through an Instagram photo post. For example, at the end of the interview, candidates will be asked if they could post a status update about why they are applying to camp, or what skill they are excited to share this summer. This post becomes an informal and fun part of their interview. Descriptions of the other post topics can be found in the lessons where they are suggested.

The purpose of this assessment is to help counselors share camping among their peers to bring camp outside of the gates. Connecting their camp experience with the outside world begins to break down barriers that keep camp from translating into their lives the rest of the year.

Camp Practice Blog (3 posts)

There will be three opportunities for counselors to share insights they have gained about the craft of designing and leading camp programming. These blogs will be written in groups of 3-4 people teaming up to write a collaborative post. The program leader should create a Wordpress or other blog page, in cooperation with the camp leadership, and make the page publicized to other camp staff members throughout the camping movement. Sharing this process with the camping field serves to provide others with resources and encourage collaboration between camp staff members.

The first blog post (during Unit 1) will include observations and critique about an aspect of the Shabbat program at camp. The second post (during Unit 2) will highlight a new insight on a Jewish observance or custom that does not exist in your camp yet. Groups will propose how this custom could be incorporated into the camp program. The third blog post (near the end of Unit 3) will highlight a major programmatic success of the summer, detailing what the program was, why it was successful, and its impact on the constituents of the camp community.

***Tiyulei Nefesh* – Soulful Journeys (3): spring, mid-summer, and early fall**

Soulful Journeys: This assessment asks counselors to submit three one page written reflections to the program leader via email. The purpose of this assessment is for both the learner and the guide to gauge where the learner is in this yearlong process of growth.

General topics are as follows, with further descriptions in the lessons:

- #1 Creating personal goals for the summer
- #2 Review of personal goals, revision and reflection
- #3 Final self-evaluation based on personal goals, moving forward

Ongoing Counselor Notebook (Ongoing, private, and solely for the learner)

During many of the meeting sessions there are opportunities to write down short reflections, take a few notes, or make observations. It will be helpful for counselors in the program to keep a small notebook that they bring to the sessions for this purpose. Some counselors like to draw as well, to express their thoughts and ideas. Tech savvy counselors could also collect this information on iPhone/iPad “notes” application. This assessment is solely for the learner and will not be seen by the program leader. It would be a nice touch if the program leader arrived at the first session with gifts of good quality, small notebooks, and fun pens for this purpose.

Culminating Assessment: Knowledge Sharing Options (During Unit 3)

Option 1: A cabin or unit program

Counselors can choose to work in teams to prepare an experiential program for their camper’s unit. The venue for this program depends on the camp structure – it could be as small as a cabin program or as large as an entire unit. The topic is up to the counselors, but Jewish content should stem from the learning they did in Unit 2. Counselors should seek to enrich campers’ understanding of some aspect of Jewish life at camp, whether it is related to ritual, culture, study, or values.

Option 2: Contributing to a set of Jewish Action Tweets

This option allows counselors to share their expertise with a broad spectrum of their peers. In cooperation with the camping movement, create a Twitter account and use technology to schedule a set of tweets that will be sent out throughout the year, scheduled in advance. Counselors can choose whether their creation should relate to Shabbat, holidays, Jewish values, or other topics they wish to investigate.

Counselors explore the topic of their choice and come up with weekly or bi-weekly tweets that 1) inform their peers about a Jewish concept and 2) suggest a Jewish behavior or custom. For example: “R. Hillel said we should “count up” and end Chanukah full of light. Gather friends, say blessings, and celebrate light tonight #JewishTweets” For examples of this type of sharing see Rabbi Wolpe’s Facebook posts.

Option 3: Sharing knowledge with peers

This option is an opportunity to share something deep with the other staff members at your camp. Counselors could choose to write a staff program or lead a lunch and learn, sharing their learning directly with their peers at camp. Of the three options, this probably is the best for counselors who have strong background in Jewish study or show a drive to become experts on a topic. Perhaps, counselors could partner with faculty members to enrich their learning and create a deep experience for their peers.