CAMPSICK
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There is a program in Newfoundland that for a small fee allows you to go back to kindergarten for a day. For 6 hours you can wear mismatched socks, finger paint, play with blocks, drink apple juice, eat graham crackers and have nap time.

They have a waiting list 3 months long.

Robert Fulghum's often cited essay "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" comes to mind when I think about this program back east. The other thing that it reminds me of is the extra reason why we gather together on this, one of the last shabbatot of the summer, our “welcome back from camp shabbat”.

Camp, like kindergarten, is a magical place where children really are the most important people! A place where you eat generally terrible food but look forward to the meal

time just the same, the cheers, the songs, sitting with your bunkmates, seeing your friends.

Camp is a place where you can totally be yourself, wear whatever you want, comb your hair or not, showering is optional until its not and where the closest thing to parental supervision is a university age counselor who themselves may still be learning to make their bed, keep track of their things and not stay up too late.

At camp you make friends, learn social skills, gain independence and, of course, have hours of outdoor fun. Color wars, capture the flag, swimming and more, sleep-away camps help Jewish youths establish strong friendships, ethics and pride, all of which contribute to a lasting sense of community.

Community is found in every corner of camp — by the lake, in the dining hall, during elective activities and in the bunks. One camper once described camp to me this way, She said:, “It’s like having a sleepover with all your friends

for like … a long time. I'm really close to my friends at home, but most of my camp friends I'm closer with. If you go to sleep-away camp, you're guaranteed to make at least one good friend. I have like, so many best friends … basically everyone in our bunk."

Camp is awesome. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once called shabbat, "a palace in time" - for most non-orthodox Jews his description more closely fits the few weeks they spend at summer camp each summer, where the whole experience from shabbat to maccabiah feels like a palace in time.

Then camp is over and the tears really begin. If you want to understand mourning and sadness, stand on the basketball court during the closing friendship circle on the last morning of camp. The hugs, the wailing, the promises to never forget your bunkmates, the bargaining with parents to just wait a little longer before you load the car. Every summer I get a refresher course in my pastoral care

counseling skills as we drive out the camp gate and the hours long drive home.

Of course this too is by design, we want camp to be so magical, transformative and special that our children appreciate the experiences they had to the point of mourning their inevitable and necessary conclusion.

We mourn those things that we will miss, that are important to us. Logic, reason, time - all of the factors that will ultimately help us work through our sadness are irrelevant in that moment, be it camp or the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship - the bigger our tears the bigger that thing we mourn meant to us. There is so often a direct correlation.

The psalmist proclaims, “Teach us to number our days so that we can attain wisdom” - we need experiences at every age that are finite and precious so that we can appreciate what we have while we have it and experience it.

One measure of maturity is our ability to realize this in real time, as it's happening or even before it's happening. This is true at any age, maturity is not chronological, it's experiential. The more and varied our experiences and the effort we make to reflect on those experiences the greater wisdom and empathy we gain.

Camp for all its frivolity and silliness is actually a maturity accelerator, it helps children value and evaluate their life choices and circumstances. Taking our children out of the bubble of the carefully curated childhood and letting them practice many of the social and emotional skills they will need for the rest of their life.

As a parent of camp age children I have often joked that summer sleepaway camp is really a gift that parents give themselves; a few precious weeks in the summer without the daily responsibility of parenting your children, a break from the schlepping, cooking, cleaning, limit setting and constant monitoring. There is certainly some truth in that;

but we know its really not about us as parents, the investment is in them as children and future adults.

And yet I want to suggest that the lessons learned by our kids at summer camp, about the value of experiences, the freedom to be ourselves, to express who we are, how we are during those precious summer weeks are not only for children but for parents as well.

There is a saying about camp, “you live 10 months for 2”. We have 10 months till that magical summer time for our children of any age comes again. If we are parents of camp age children then we have 10 months to plan how we will use their time at camp to grow, recharge our relationships with our partners and friends. If you are grandparents, who are often today the ones who make sleepaway camp financially accessible, you too have 10 months to think about how you will use that time when your adult children are not pulled in two directions to renew and reimagine your relationship with them.

For adults and children here and watching from home, just as we use the month of Elul to reflect and prepare for the New Year that comes with Rosh Hashanah in just a few weeks; we can use this time in the shadow of camp, the “dog days of summer” to think about how we grew and were changed by the experiences of the last few months of summer, whether they were spent at camp, or far removed from camp. How will we live and prioritize the next 10 months, till we return to that magical place again, that island in time where we can be free of the constraints and burdens of life without camp? Further still, how can we, like with shabbat, create an island of sacred time and space, call it “day camp” if you will, during these coming months so that we can have a taste of camp life and time without having to wait till next summer?

They say one more thing about camp and time that is worth learning a lesson from. At camp we say, “the days are like weeks and the weeks are like days”. It all goes very fast from one day to the next but when you are intentionally immersed in your experiences and

relationships those daily moments can last forever, they can last a lifetime.

Like going back to kindergarten - I think we would all like to feel that way again; if only for a few hours or days.