
Michael Levin spent many years as a Ramah Poconos camper and staff member before making aliyah and joining the Israel Defense Forces. He lost his life in combat in Lebanon on August 1, 2006. On August 2, 2006, Rabbi Todd Zeff, the director of Camp Ramah in the Poconos, sent the following letter to the Ramah Poconos community.

With great sadness we write to tell you that Michael Levin, a long-time member of the Ramah Poconos community, who made aliyah and was serving in the army, was killed on Tuesday, August 1, in Lebanon. Michael had joined an elite combat unit of paratroopers who fought a fierce battle with Hezbollah terrorists in the southern Lebanese village of Ayta-al-Shaab. Michael was killed in battle, together with two other Israeli soldiers.

Michael was deeply connected to Camp Ramah, having attended as a camper for many years and having worked here until his aliyah after camp, in 2002. Mike also worked at the Ramah Day Camp in Philadelphia. Ramah and Conservative Judaism were central aspects of his life and the basis of so many of his friendships.

Michael came to visit Ramah Poconos on Visiting Day two weeks ago. His friends took such pride in his decision to live in Israel and fight to defend Israel from its enemies. He was a driven, wonderful young man who pursued his Zionist dreams. He had a wonderful, warm heart and an infectious smile. The impact of his life, and death, is reverberating throughout our camp and the wider Ramah community. He will be greatly missed.

Michael is survived by his parents, Mark and Harriet Levin, and by his two sisters, Dara and Elisa. Dara, his twin sister, has been working this summer at the Ramah Day Camp. Michael’s family and some close friends are traveling to Israel to attend his military funeral, which will take place at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. They will return home to continue shivah in the community.

Many staff members at both Ramah Poconos and Ramah Day Camp were shocked and saddened by the news of the death of their friend. Camp administrators, social workers, and rabbis came together to discuss the best ways of discussing Michael’s death with the camp population. Close friends have been given enough breathing space to mourn their loss, while many others who knew Michael have been discussing his bravery, his heroism, and his
commitment to Israel. As the camp enters the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, Tish'ah Be'av, many will be contemplating Michael’s role as a link in a long chain of those who have given their lives to defend the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

According to Michael’s long-time close friend from Ramah, Lital Rashi, Mike was such a good friend. His community was made up of friends from Ramah and USY, as well as the new friends he made in Israel. Mike believed in the Jewish community and our need to dedicate ourselves to our future. I can’t believe that he’s gone.

Kevin Waloff, another close friend, said, “Mike did what he believed in. We should all be so fortunate to follow our dreams and pursue our Judaism passionately.”

In Michael’s Nativ yearbook, he is pictured with an Israeli flag, with the quote, “You can’t fulfill your dream unless you dare to risk it all.”

As the campers at the Ramah Day Camp and Camp Ramah in the Poconos continue to laugh and sing and enjoy everything about Camp Ramah as Michael once did, many in these communities will recall, with great sadness, the ultimate sacrifice made by a close friend.

To read more about Michael, see Yossi Katz’s contribution in the Reflections section of this volume.

BURTON COHEN

*Louis Newman, z"l (1918–2007)*

*Histories of the Ramah Camping Movement* show that Louis Newman served the Ramah camps formally in three capacities: director of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin (1951–53), director of Camp Ramah in Connecticut (1955), and director of the Mador (National Ramah Counselor Training Program, located at Camp Ramah in the Poconos, 1963–64). His achievements in these important positions within the movement would certainly suffice to establish his role as an important figure in the development of Ramah camping. However, his influence extended far beyond the acts of administrative and educational leadership that he performed at these three locations.