



May our camps be a shelter of peace and respite.  
 May we soon see an end to all this suffering and grief.

**URJ Camps & Immersives Turn Heartache into Hope:  
 A Story of Love and Resilience  
 September 2024 | Elul 5784**

As we enter the month of Elul, a time for reflection and introspection, I am reminded of the incredible journey URJ camps and immersives have undertaken this past year. Despite the challenges and heartache that have affected us all, our communities came together to create a summer that was truly sensational, inspirational, joyful, *ruach*-filled and meaningful.

**From Anxiety to Awe**

The journey to this summer was not easy. Anxiety and fear permeated our planning, as we wondered how camps would support hundreds of Israeli staff and campers, as well as thousands impacted by the war. We turned this anxiety into awe, by being planful and intentional in our pre-summer preparations, by communicating our plans and our principles clearly and ahead of the summer, and then creating communities of belonging that welcomed, embraced, and nurtured all who joined us in our holy spaces. Camps were filled with *awe-inspiring* stories, magical moments, and programs that celebrated Israel and Judaism with joy and time-bound sacred values. The relational Judaism that happened in real time will surely add to the continuity of Jewish peoplehood for generations to come. The ability to send teens to Israel this summer was truly a gift, and the teens and staff who had that experience have been inspired and impacted in transformative ways.

**From Fear to Faith**

Fear faced our camp leaders, and we turned this *fear into faith*. Faith in our incredible people, especially our year-round professionals and summer staff, who with their skills, humility, grit, professionalism, and courage opted to lean in, learn, and re-create once again, all with open minds and open hearts. We had faith in humanity and especially in the Israelis and the rest of the camp communities that would come together to build Jewish life, *panim el panim* (face to face).

## From Longing to Love

These post-COVID years (and especially since October 7<sup>th</sup>) have been daunting, leaving many camp leaders longing for the essence of camp. Over the past many months, highlighted by this past summer, camps converted *longing into love*. Story after story is being told of the joy and love of summer 2024 – joyful Judaism, steeped in friendship, community, connection, and love. This love came alive through rituals that welcomed, honored, embraced, and nurtured Israeli staff and campers with their diaspora peers and others at moments across the entire arc of human emotion. As one camper remarked in their end of session survey, “*My favorite part of Shabbat at camp is how we all feel together, and it makes me feel like there is hope for the war in Israel.*”

## It Takes a Village

We witnessed the incredible value of the village, the community coming together to support each other. URJ professionals, lay leaders, and broader Reform Movement friends and partners stepped up, along with the philanthropic community and critical partners in Israel, such as The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and the Israel Movement for Reform & Progressive Judaism (IMPJ). The Foundation for Jewish Camp, JCamp180, Mosaic United, RootOne, generous anonymous donors, and many others responded to the call.

As we look towards summer 2025 and the year ahead, we are filled with excitement and gratitude. Camps will continue the summer magic throughout the year with family camps, specialty gatherings, reunions, and other forms of engagement and enrichment that align with our Jewish values. The thousands of sacred relationships fostered, strengthened, and nurtured will multiply until we are all *panim el panim* (face to face) again. To reminisce with a glimpse of the awe, faith, and love created by URJ camps and immersives summer 2024, I encourage you to visit their social media and websites.

With deep gratitude and blessings,



Ruben Arquilevich  
Vice President, URJ Camps and Immersives



**URJ Greene Family Camp**

**URJ Camp Harlam**

**URJ Camp Newman**

**Illustration Credit:** The beautiful image at the top of this letter is an illustration created by Rabbi Allie Fischman, Camp Director of [URJ Camp Newman](#), in Santa Rosa, CA.