

## Spirituality and Jewish Community in the Camp

The children in Shalhevet are resilient and less likely to become miserable in the rain when camping than I am, of that I am sure. However, something even more special happened while we were camping, the connection made between the great and mighty outdoors and Jewish identity. Matthew asked the children to wait until everyone was served before eating each meal. He then asked the children to share with the group anything for which they were grateful. The children expressed gratitude for: the camping experience, the rain, the sunshine, swimming in the lake, the hot showers at the comfort centre, the food, that the tornado did not disturb us and that our tents were dry. We all symbolically washed our hands and gave thanks for our food with the traditional blessings.

Matthew asked Cody, Aaron and Eduardo to seek out a holy place for us to pray. They chose an enchanting spot with large boulders, surrounded by ferns and canopied by the lush green trees. Here we sang T'fillah in soft rain to Matthew's guitar and Jacob Saraga's and Jaden's drumming. Matthew asked us what did we find challenging about the trip and how did we overcome it. Again the children's answers were genuine and thoughtful and yes included "mosquitoes," but most chose to express gratitude again.

It might be strange to include so many blessings and prayers on a family camping trip, and near impossible to set up tents as a community according to the guidelines of the Torah (unless you have 22 people in your family). On this trip, everything spiritual felt appropriate and inspiring. The children shared, ate together, laughed, sang, set up shelters and prepared meals for the community. It was a unique experience of belonging and responding to the elements over which we have no control. I am so grateful to Matthew for bringing his Judaic knowledge, music

and thoughtful spirituality to this camping experience. I am so sure that all the children who participated feel a stronger connection to their community and greater reverence for the beautiful world in which we live.