

## Camp Morasha

15 hrs ·

This was hard to write, but we feel that it's the only path forward. Our message to our camp community tonight:

Dear Parents, Staff, and Alumni,

I vividly recall being dropped off at the bus for my first summer at camp. As a third grader, it was no doubt an intimidating and emotional experience. As I said goodbye to my parents with tears in my eyes, they turned to me and said: "We promise you – once you get to camp, you'll never want to leave." They couldn't have known how right they would be. It's been almost 30 years since that moment, and I haven't left camp since.

Camp quickly became the gravitational force around which everything revolved. At a young age, I could see my Jewish identity being formed through camp and closest friendships forged at camp. When choosing a career, I knew that nothing would be more fulfilling than to help create this experience for future generations of children – and for the past decade I have been fortunate to do so in the capacity of Camp Director. Each summer brings its own unique challenges, but every summer provides the nachat of watching children grow in their Jewish values, self-esteem, and confidence.

I know I'm not alone in living "10-for-2" and recognizing the importance of camp. This is true in any standard year, exponentially more so in the time we find ourselves now. The fact that our kids and families need camp now more than ever made the decision for Summer 2020 all the more difficult, and ultimately all the more devastating. After months of deliberation, alternative planning, reviewing all available policies from the CDC, ACA and the State of Pennsylvania, in addition to receiving guidance from medical experts and Rabbinic poskim, it is with deep sadness that we inform you that Camp Morasha will not be operating our various programming – Camp, Kollel, Yachad, Sulam and Mania – for the upcoming 2020 Season.

### WHY THIS DECISION

Our parents have come to appreciate complete transparency in our communications and so I feel compelled to share the various factors that led to this incredibly difficult decision. These concerns are based on facts and guidance already issued from the CDC and ACA, for the entire summer:

(1) Safety is our #1 Priority: Each night in camp, our leadership team goes to sleep (the nights we get to sleep!) carrying the heaviest of responsibilities: ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of over 1,600 neshamot. We constantly communicate that 'Safety is our #1 priority' – and that value is reflected in our staff, programming, and policies. At this point in time, I simply do not feel that I can communicate this with complete confidence for the upcoming summer – not because of what we know, but more so because of what we do not yet know about this virus. The science and studies seem to be rapidly changing, testing is not yet 100% accurate nor is it widely available for on-site testing at summer camps and, I believe, that any goal to create a 'camp bubble' is filled with many holes. I cannot in good conscience take a chance on our children's safety and no signed waiver will make me more comfortable doing so. It's not about what might be safer for our kids this summer, but rather whether we can ensure complete safety for every individual in our care. This achrayut has been and will always be our #1 priority.

(2) The Camp that Kids Love: Camp is about community and camaraderie, boundless fun and friendship. I do not believe that the social distancing restrictions expected from camp this summer will be practical in a camp setting, remotely feasible to enforce or pleasant for our campers. What does camp look like with social distance swimming and no contact sports? How can we possibly expect friends within the same age group not to meaningfully interact in one room or at one activity? Can we actually enforce siblings in camp or staff working with various age groups not to naturally engage with one another? Is it practical to expect campers to wear masks when indoors and staff to be masked all day? How can we send home a camper or staff member and ALL those who had contact with them every time someone exhibits COVID-like symptoms? These symptoms (fever, cough, runny nose) are seen on a daily basis in a normal summer! I believe our kids

want to go to the camp they love. This is not it and will not be the 'return to normalcy' that we all crave for our children. If anything, it will most likely prove to be a frustrating experience for them.

(3) Kiddush Hashem: We appreciate that our decisions carry with them the awesome responsibility of Kiddush Hashem. The relationships with our neighbors and local hospital in Wayne County are critical to our continued success as a camp. Similar to communities expressing their legitimate concerns regarding guests traveling across state lines for Pesach, our local community's perspective must be equally considered. I also deeply fear that, despite our best efforts, we will simply be unable to ensure complete compliance with the guidelines and restrictions imposed upon us. This might very well lead to Chillul Hashem, not to mention the potential of having to send home hundreds of both symptomatic and asymptomatic campers and staff back into communities across the country.

(4) Travel Restrictions: We have no realistic indication that our Sulam campers will be able to fly to Israel this summer and, if permitted, what the protocols might be upon arrival. We also have concerns regarding what guidelines Israel might impose if a COVID case would surface on a program like Sulam. Additionally, travel restrictions currently in place prevent 100+ international staff members from joining us at camp this summer.

(5) Legal Ability to Open: In addition to the concerns listed above, we have not yet received a green light from State of Pennsylvania to operate camp and it remains unclear if and when such permission is forthcoming. We have already seen neighboring states limit their camp operations to Day Camps only. Furthermore, it is not yet confirmed that even if camp can ultimately open, whether there will be limitations to only allow campers and staff to attend camp from regions with similar level of community spread (as per CDC guidelines), which would exclude virtually all of our communities. We are unsure of the timeline for this guidance but, at this time, feel that it may be somewhat irrelevant due to the more fundamental issues outlined above.

In the event that all the concerns noted above can be addressed within the next few weeks and we feel we can operate any of our programs safely, even for a shortened amount of time, we will notify our parents immediately. In the meantime, I want to thank our parents for their continued support and input throughout this entire process. I know how hard it's been and how much we have all been praying for a different conclusion – we hope our sharing this decision at this time offers you a greater ability and clarity to plan ahead. Additionally, I want to thank my colleagues from other camps and travel programs with whom I've been in touch on a near daily basis. While we'll each be reaching our own individual decisions in our own timeframes, their support and friendship has been invaluable.

#### MOVING FORWARD

Coming to this decision was gut-wrenching for us, and we recognize that it will be the same for our campers and community. It's heartbreaking – there's no two ways about it. As we look ahead, here are a few things to keep in mind:

**Support for Children:** Know that we are here to help in any way we can. I will be communicating this decision directly to our campers through a video being posted shortly, and will be sharing information on camper-centric sessions to give our children the opportunity to comfort one another and celebrate all that is magical about Morasha. Until then, our staff is here in any way we can to help as our campers digest this difficult news.

**Support for Parents:** We are all in this together, as a camp family and community. If you have any questions or concerns not otherwise covered in this letter, I am always available and would love to hear from you. You can reach me any time over email or by phone.

**Camp Payments & Refunds:** Canceling camp this summer is a decision based on our values, with health and safety as our top priority. Offering a full tuition refund is also consistent with our values, sending a clear message that we are here for our families during these difficult times. This is the right decision, even though it will leave the camp with a crushing deficit. A separate email will be sent next week outlining the options available for families.

**Summer 2020 Programming:** I know you trust that we have explored every possible scenario to make camp happen this summer. In addition to evaluating a delayed summer, abbreviated summer, and multi-sessions

for various age groups, we also explored two alternative campuses in Connecticut to host (or split) the camp, designed a concept for 'Family Camp' at Morasha, and even researched running a destination Kosher summer family trip in villas for camp families. Unfortunately, the aforementioned concerns rendered these impossible. That said, we are hopeful that as restrictions ease, possible programming opportunities may emerge. We are currently working with the Orthodox Union to explore meaningful and creative programming ideas to provide real structure to our children's summer days. We will continue to monitor these possibilities as the weeks progress while we line up events throughout the summer for our camp family to reunite and enjoy. We've also begun to discuss how this impacts future summer programming, including a post-11th grade Sulam experience for our current 10th graders for Summer 2021.

As I write this email, I find myself welling up with tears once again – but this time because I won't be providing that opportunity for campers and staff to board those buses to enjoy the transformative and joyful experience of summer camp. As camp people, we know how to weather storms. It's what we do. Since our camp's founding in 1964, we've had our fair-share of challenges – but that's never stopped us from recommitting ourselves to our camp's mission of instilling our core Jewish values through the vehicle of unparalleled fun, creative, and dynamic programming. This is no doubt an unprecedented challenge, but we will get through it, together, with resilience and courage, as we always do.

With hope for better days ahead,  
Jeremy Jozef  
Director, Camp Morasha

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94

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