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“RABBI’S MUSINGS (& AMUSINGS)”

*Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Chukas*

*6 Tamuz 5777/ June 30, 2017 - Avos Perek 5*

This week, the Staum family has made its annual pilgrimage to East Stroudsburg, PA, to our summer home at Camp Dora Golding.

When making the announcements after davening last Shabbos, our shul President, R' Yossi Goldman, quipped: “Some people send their children off to camp; we send our Rabbi off to camp!”

If I counted correctly – which, to be honest, would be unusual for me - I am now beginning my twenty-fifth summer at Camp Dora Golding. This includes years as a camper, masmid, Junior Counselor, Counselor, Rebbe, Head Waiter, and, my current position for the last decade, as a Division Head.

Camp has grown in many ways during that time. The grounds are stunning, and b’h the camp is at capacity. But the ruach and excitement of camp has not changed in all the years.

Working as part of the camp administration is not always easy. However, it is always a gratifying and wonderful experience, which our family feels very blessed to enjoy and to be part of.

Each summer, for two days prior to the arrival of the campers on opening day, there is “staff orientation”. Staff members arrive a couple of days before the campers, for a mini ‘training’ of expectations and protocols, to help the summer go as smoothly as possible.

One of the salient points mentioned during orientation each summer, is that every staff member must realize that there are campers looking up to him, aspiring to do his job, and to be like him one day. The staff member may only find out about it years later, or he may likely never know about it. But the influence remains.

If being a role model necessitates behaving accordingly, it remains true even if the person being looked up to feels he is not worthy of that image. If others may likely imitate his behavior, the fact that he personally feels unworthy of that admiration is irrelevant. Regardless of his current level, he has a responsibility to try to act the part.

Sadly, there have been numerous sports icons and celebrities who have acted inappropriately on occasion. When asked how they could behave in such a crass and immature manner when so many youngsters look up to them, their inane response was, “I never asked to be a role model”.

Being a role model is not a matter of choice, it's a matter of responsibility! If there is even a chance that others may be imitating us, we have a responsibility to do our utmost to fulfill that role appropriately.

Each morning in shachris, just prior to Shema, we daven that Hashem grant us wisdom “to learn and to teach, to safeguard and to perform, and to fulfill all the words of Your Torah with love.”

Reb Moshe Feinstein zt"l questioned why this prayer is recited by everyone. Most people are not teachers, so why should they pray for the ability to teach with love?

Reb Moshe explained that no matter what capacity one has, every person is a teacher. Others view our behavior and learn from what we say and do, whether we realize it or not.

In that sense, we are all teachers and, therefore, have a responsibility to act accordingly.

It's an idea that is not only applicable to staff members working in summer camp. We can never know the effect and influence our behavior has on others. And that means that we have a responsibility to do the best we can, if not for ourselves, then for those who may be influenced by our example.

Shabbat Shalom & Good Shabbos,

R’ Dani and Chani Staum