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## ***Book Review***

### ***How Goodly Are Thy Tents: Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences by Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe (Brandeis University Press, 2004)***

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Amy Sales and Leonard Saxe's study of Jewish summer camps, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents*, offers a clear message and repeated refrain: The key component to the magic in camping is deliberate design of socialization opportunities within enclosed communities. While a tent might offer a transient, minimalist structure for ingathering, the education work implemented within is often complex, compelling, and effective.

The book presents overarching data on residential camps that fall under the rubric of Jewish and documents the researchers' examination of the range of Jewish experiences that the camps offer. Sales and Saxe carried out a national census of 191 camps serving 83,000 campers that met the following criteria: they have Jewish owners or are sponsored by a Jewish organization, at least half the campers are Jewish, and the camp identifies itself as a Jewish camp. In order to cultivate an insider's view of lived experiences, the researchers adopted the role of participant-observers within eighteen community, movement, and private camps. The resulting crafted anecdotes are powerful in communicating the variety of practices that lay across the backdrop of Jewish camping.

Some camps integrated Judaism during the day through continual educational programming, facilitated by knowledgeable counselors who consistently modeled Jewish values. Other camps compartmentalized and centralized Jewish education among a few staff members or a Camp Rabbi, and confined ritual practice to Shabbat and meals. While many camps

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embraced traditional Jewish observance as the means for expression, others drew upon Zionistic education, cultural programming, or private b'nei mitzvah tutoring as alternative avenues to Jewish connection. Some private camps did not exhibit any outward Jewish practice, but were included in the study because they met the criteria listed above.

Many types of dwellings fall within the expansive tent addressed by Sales and Saxe as Jewish camping experience. Moreover, as readers we understand that what counts as Jewish is particular to the traditions of the specific camp. In essence, campers become literate in the Jewish practices of the camp through experiential daily living. Campers learn and develop what Gee (2000) labels as Discourses, defined as "socioculturally meaningful 'dances' (recognizable coordinates of people, places, objects . . . and ways of speaking, listening, writing, reading, feeling, valuing, believing, etc.)" (p. 204). Discourses, shaped within communities of practice, involve "acting-interacting-thinking . . . in the 'appropriate way'" (Gee 1998, p. 17). The education work accomplished in these enclosed communities appears to be magic like because the discourses of being a Jewish Camper are swiftly adopted by campers who participate in repeated routines; campers are steadily learning what constitutes appropriate Jewish behavior within their camping communities. As the authors point out, campers have time to try on these Jewish ways of being through prolonged interactions with counselors, educators, specialists, and peers. The participants learn the Discourse of what it means to do Jewish in their camps through activities and rituals that are incorporated into the daily schedule. Judaism, in whatever form it takes in these camps, comes alive through initiation into camp traditions, as well as perpetual opportunities to exhibit behaviors associated with these traditions within a communal framework. Discourses are readily learned, as they are conduits to demonstrating a sense of integration and belonging.

The authors' inclusive definition of the Jewish Camp provokes the question of whether it is consequential that such diversity exists amid the Discourses of being a Jewish camper. Is the canopy of Jewish camping stretched too broadly? Should there be a baseline of Jewish practice to which educators might strive? In choosing to describe the full array of camps in which socialization takes on its distinct flavor within each community, Jewish educators may hesitate to draw conclusions as to whether some camps are more effective at promoting Jewish living. What is defined as Jewish Living differs according to the Discourses of each particular camp, and thus, educational goals of varied camps are incomparable. Moreover, it is possible that what makes the "culture islands" (p. 46) of camp unique in their abilities to educate, also renders change in practice as quite difficult, if not impossible. As Sales and Saxe highlight, it is the unwavering traditions within these communities that make them special places, where participants want to return as campers, and later, as staff. Group practice is well ingrained, and the members of the community may resist challenges

to traditions. They may be unwilling to break their Discourses of doing Jewish.

Thus, camp magic becomes both blessing and curse: it can be so very seductive and enduring, and equally resistant to change. Inevitably, we wonder if Jewish educators need to accept the camps as is or whether they can strive to elevate opportunities for education. One possible conclusion is that the challenge facing Jewish educators is to develop Jewish practice and programming that is aligned with the camp culture. For example, Zionist camps might seek opportunities for advancing Israel education, or the study of Hebrew language.

Additionally, educators might actively seek further occasions for enriching existing programming. Sales and Saxe describe moments when they witnessed what they refer to as “missed opportunities” (Sales and Saxe 2004, p. 72) for Jewish education, occasions during which knowledgeable staff overlooked openings for engaging campers in meaningful dialogue, or for role modeling of Jewish values and behaviors. In these contexts, the role of the educator is to deliberately seek out educative moments, and capitalize upon these fertile opportunities for engagement through multiple avenues. The authors point to the importance of the interaction with counselors throughout the day when prospects for “teachable moments” (p. 69) might arise. They state that the unique factors of camp allow young people to take part in a community that allows them to “try on” (p. 71) Jewish behaviors, and the setting of camp is ideal in that it allows for a removal from the everyday environment of participants’ lives. However, the authors further caution that while activities may appear to be spontaneous and “natural,” (p. 50) in reality, they need to be meaningfully designed or structured in order to have lasting educational impact upon campers. Camp offers countless opportunities within the structure of the day for multiple entrypoints into learning. Sales and Saxe bring forth examples from their data of Jewish learning through song, Hebrew language study, storytelling, dance, art, and sport. Opportunities for educative moments intensify as experienced staffers hook campers into learning through numerous enjoyable vehicles for exploration of Judaism and openings for connection-making to their lives outside of camp.

Can holistic learning options be extended outwards to other areas of Jewish education, beyond the safe, insulated goodly tents? How can we make all of Jewish education a natural, living, interactive endeavor? Sales and Saxe note that in the informal Jewish education realm of residential camping, the hidden curriculum is uncovered. In other words, the enculturation into a lived Judaism is not a secondary endeavor—it is *the* endeavor. Other forms of Jewish education cannot achieve what is possible in the supportive setting of “culture islands” in the “24/7” (p. 46) environment of camp. The authors conclude that the special nature of camp learning is that it occurs in a contained, vibrant community, and express doubt that the

magic of camp could be replicated other educational arenas. In contrast to camping, the authors describe the “troubled enterprise” (p. 9) of supplementary schooling. Distinctions are made between supplementary schools, which largely do not commit to socialization as a key priority, and camps, which are dedicated to experiential learning. For Sales and Saxe, what makes camp educationally singular is its provision of direct experiences, modeling and imitation of counselors, through an immersion in those experiences. The affective domain of Jewish education, the opportunity for trying on of behavior and feelings through direct experiences, may indeed be unique to Jewish residential programs. Indeed, *Tents* suggests that camping has a better chance of allowing for community building and social interactions than other forms of Jewish education. Perhaps supplementary schools are simply unable to grant students the opportunities that camps foster, as there is little time for development of shared discourses in Jewish living.

*Tents* offers a panoramic view of the landscape of Jewish camping, and the many discourses of the Jewish camper. It contributes invaluable to the paucity of social scientific scholarship in informal Jewish education. It is hopefully one of many more such studies that will help to sophisticate the discourse on experiential education, both in the context of camping, and of Jewish camping, in particular. How can we best educate young people towards Jewish behaviors and give them authentic opportunities for trying on these behaviors in supportive settings? How might further research explore the long-term outcomes of the camping experience, and its impact on subsequent Jewish lifestyle? The refrain of these authors’ camp song suggests that the power of camping does not arise supernaturally; it develops through planning of meaningful events in an environment that embraces Jewish living in its totality, as part of an intensive, multiweek program. As the field of informal Jewish education continues to develop, educators will be able to apply the insights of this work in order to better define the parameters of experiential, holistic learning; it is by so doing that we will make those tents goodly.

## REFERENCES

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