Coast to Coast Briefs

Inspiration Out West

For the last ten years, teenagers from across the globe have joined Camp Marabu in traveling out West to many of the national parks. The camp is run by Rabbi Raphael Mendlowitz, a mechanech for over two decades in Silver Spring, Maryland. Rabbi Mendlowitz's goal is to use nifleos haBorei to inspire today's youth in tefillah.

Before each tefillah, campers and staff check to see if there are Jews in the vicinity. Ten years ago, during Camp Marabu's first year, a group of 11 found themselves on top of Yosemite National Park facing Half Dome. Before Minchah, a young Israeli man with two children was asked to join the minyan and he asked to say Kaddish. He ended with Kaddish Yasom. When Rabbi Mendlowitz asked him why he had said Kaddish, he answered that he had forgotten that his father's yahrtzeit was that week.

"Last night, my father came to me in a dream and yelled at me! How could I be without a *minyan* and not say *Kaddish* on his yahrtzeit? He said, 'I will send you a minyan. Be sure to say Kaddish!'"

The next year at the same spot, Rabbi Mendlowitz told his campers: "We have sanctified this place as a *makom tefillah*. I am certain that before we start *Minchah*, another Jew will join "."

No sooner were these words uttered than a Jew from Florida asked if he could join the camp for *Minchah*.

This past summer, at Yosemite, the camp encountered a family from Eretz Yisrael. The mother became very excited when they were asked to join 36 campers for *Minchah*. She was on vacation with her husband and 14-year-old son. Their son had not wanted to join them on vacation as he had made a *kabbalah* at his bar mitz-vah to *daven tefillah b'tzibbur*; but his parents had insisted he join them for this trip. Now, he could *daven b'tzibbur* with Camp Marabu at Yosemite.

This is the power of kvius makom l'tefillah. The makom



Camp Marabu at Zion National Park, Utah.

becomes a source of *kedushah* and creates an environment of *mitz-vah goreres mitzvah*.

An exchange student from Germany was a member of the cleaning crew at a hotel in the Grand Canyon. The camp was concluding *Shacharis* as this young man stood with respect and awe, observing the young men finishing their prayers. After *davening*, Rabbi Mendlowitz thanked

the young man for waiting so patiently to enter the room. He told Rabbi Mendlowitz, "I'm sorry."

Rabbi Mendlowitz asked, "For what?"

"For what my grandfather did to your grandfather," said the young man.

Rabbi Mendlowitz suggested that upon his return to Germany, he should inform his family and friends about the Jews he had met and how respectful and dignified they were. That would render the apology truly meaningful. The young man shook Rabbi Mendlowitz's hand and promised to do so.

One of the camp's goals is to elevate the campers to become "Maasei Yadai lihispaer" — living examples of Hashem's glory.

Stories of *hashgachah pratis* and *kiddush Hashem* are experienced daily in Camp Marabu.

Davening Vasikin at the Grand Canyon is truly the most memorable and inspiring moment for campers. One day the campers were davening in a private area. Prior to Shemoneh Esrei, a group of seven Asians approached a camper and asked, "We don't know how to pray. Can we copy you as you say your prayers?"

The young camper took three steps back and then forward, and so did the Asians. He proceeded to bend his knees and then stand erect; they did so as well. He placed his hands overlapping each other and continued to *shuckel*



Rabbi Kohn, learning director of Camp Marabu, *leining* at the Grand Canyon.

during the *Amidah* and they did the same, while whispering words as they "followed the leader."

After Shemoneh Esrei, the campers shared this experience with Rabbi Mendlowitz. He told them, "Do you know we ask for this experience every day - three times a day - in our tefillos? In Aleinu L'shabei'ach, we express our yearning 'L'saken olam b'Malchus Shakai — to perfect the universe through the Sovereignty of the Alm-ghty. V'chol bnei basar yikre'u biShmecha - and all of the world's inhabitants will recognize and know You.' We experienced this today! We saw people who do not accept a Creator as we do. We were mekadesh es Hashem, we were the ohr lagoyim - a light unto the nations.'



Camp Marabu campers at Zion National Park, Utah.

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