

# Tikvah Means Hope

GLEN SPEY, N.Y.--A mongoloid boy of thirteen slowly dons tefillin (phylacteries) with a minimum amount of difficulty and a newly discovered reverence; an emotionally disturbed miss of fourteen calmly manages to kindle the Sabbath candles as her group joins her in the Sabbath Blessing; and a perceptually handicapped boy of twelve recited Bar Mitzvah lessons,

somewhat haltingly but confidently, as a peer instructor, by his side, patiently prompts him.

These are typical moments of an exciting, newly found religious experience among a group of Jewish youngsters too long forgotten by religious educational institutions, special children with minimal mental and learning disabilities to whom the Tikvah Program has opened a door and its heart. It is a pilot project of the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education in cooperation with Camp Ramah in Glen Spey, N.Y. Twenty-four adolescents are enrolled this season, including seven of the eight who composed last year's initial group.

A first anniversary seminar at Glen Spey, N.Y. focused on the achievements and progress of the program which is being conducted at the Conservative Movement's Camp Ramah. The seminar was designed to illustrate the personal growth of the adolescents--aged eleven through eighteen--beyond the camp experience.

Over one hundred educators in the specialized field of dealing with youngsters having learning deficiencies attended the seminar which included video tapes of the youngsters in action, and special children escorting small groups in tours of the camp. A highlight was the performance of a scene from "Fiddler on the Roof" with the youngsters vocally belting out with no sign of shyness and a touch of Broadway flair, --while in another area, a comparably talented class was adroitly executing an Israeli Hora led by an Israeli counselor.

Significantly, while these were the special children performing, on a daily basis Tikvah youngsters are fully integrated with the Camp Ramah peers, on the basis of chronological age. The educational classes are based on the individualized levels of competence in different areas with recognition of the youngsters personal interests, Herbert A. Greenberg, Director of the project, said.

Interestingly, in the full translation of Jewish ethics which stress aid to one's neighbors, the Ramah youth coach, train, and assist their "special" brothers and sisters on a regular schedule in areas of religious learning and ritual. Mealtime they merge as one dinner party. Shabbat, the Ramah community takes turns at hosting Tikvah youth. Guests -- visitors

meet all the youngsters without distinction, Rabbi Elliot Rosen, Educational Director of Tikvah, proudly noted.

Edya Arzt who, with her husband Rabbi David Arzt of Baldwin, N.Y., help guide the project, observed the confidence that is being built in the Tikvah young.

One often asked query is: "Why did God make me less a person than others?"

The reply: "You've not completed growth yet. There's still time for you to change..." Tikvah means hope...and these young know it.

# SHALOM



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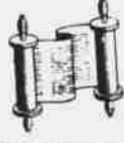
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