

When All the Chips are Down

By Josh Coran—An Excerpt from his [Summer of Zen](#) Blog

Editors Note: Josh Coran just finished his 12th summer at Camp Avoda. Starting in 1995, he soon rose through the ranks at camp as a winning Color War Captain and All-Around Athlete. This summer he served as Athletic Director, Senior Hoops Coach, and a Color War Head Judge. Josh started his blog, “The Summer of Zen,” in 2010. Josh currently lives in Sharon, MA and during the off season he is a senior at Curry College. To learn more about Josh’s blog, read back issues, and/or to subscribe, go to www.summerofzen.wordpress.com.

I never liked the 4th of July until I came to Avoda. Before my first summer, the holiday never meant much to me. All I saw was a lot of flag-waving and fireworks. Once I started learning about the actual meaning behind Independence Day, I began to appreciate it more, but at camp those definitions are thrown out the window.

At Avoda, we turn the patriotism of July 4th into a celebration of Avodianism. I think I just made up a word.

The daytime looks much like the rest of the country — carnival rides, afternoon barbecues, slushie machines, and 100-degree heat. We usually cap the day off with a Mud Wrestling extravaganza. It used to be Jello Wrestling, but...well, that’s another story for another day. The oldest campers in Bunk 14 spend the day away from the rest of the camp, building a gigantic bonfire for the main event, the Chip Ceremony. And that’s where a national holiday becomes a day that’s all our own.

On the surface, the Chip Ceremony is just a bonfire. The 14ers slave over it all day, destroy countless trees and dressers to complete it, give it a name like “The Towering Inferno” or “Hell’s Kitchen,” and then immediately burn it to the ground. As the sun goes down and the mosquitoes come out, the entire camp gathers on the beach to watch it light up. One by one, each bunk sends a representative up in front of the fire to talk about camp — what they like, what they love, why they come back, and what it all means to them. When they’re done, they throw a chip into the fire to hopefully keep it going longer. As the speakers get older, the speeches get deeper. Less kitschy and more heart-felt. Bunk 14 goes up as one to bask in their glory, followed by the C.I.T.’s, J.C.’s, 1st-year S.C.’s, and so on. What never fails is that as the years go up, the numbers go down, so by the time the most senior staff is standing there, their numbers are painfully low(count-on-one-hand).



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Newsletter Editor

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President's Letter

So there I am in Tel Aviv on my first trip to Israel with my family. We're sitting in Independence Hall listening to a woman speak about the history of Israel's independence while Ben-Gurion's speech plays in the background. It was a pretty intense and moving experience. For me, it was one of those moments when I could do nothing but sit and think about my Jewish identity. We are lucky to live in a free country that encourages everyone to retain (and enjoy) their cultural heritage. Simply put, I sat there thinking that I'm proud to be Jewish, proud of Israel, and proud to be an American.

I'm guessing, but I think that most of you developed your Jewish identity at Avoda. No question that was the case for me (alright growing up in Randolph and travelling to Queens to visit my grandmother every other month had a little to do with it). Camp Avoda is a place that somehow fosters Jewish pride without pushing it in your face. I can't put my finger on it, but there is a pervasive attitude that was there in the 70's when guys like Jay Epstein would tell us about his recent trip to Israel while showing us pictures of what was going on in Jerusalem as we sat there in "Education". Jay reminded us of what we were made of and that helped build our pride.

I didn't say it to anyone then, but I remember thinking that it was so cool that "we" fought to establish and sustain a Jewish state (instead, I acted bored like you are supposed to when you're thirteen). However, ideas like that become subtly emblazoned in my youthful subconscious. When that happens at a place like Avoda... you start to get into your "Jewishness" and then find yourself walking around camp humming Jewish prayers and wearing a beanie "for no reason at all (where else would a reform Jew do this?)." Why? Because at Avoda you are able to connect with your Jewish identity in the most easy going and comfortable setting. Yet another great thing about Avoda.

Small experiences like that help bond us and somehow strengthen our Jewish pride. Today, I'm not even sure if "Education" still exists at camp, but I do know that through the current camp programming around Judaism and our Jewish heritage kids still develop the same connection to "being Jewish" that we experienced. We, the alumni, should be proud that we are involved in camp today and are contributing to help foster a safe, fun, and thriving Jewish environment. In doing so, we help create a positive Jewish identity amongst our kids. This undoubtedly helps sustain our culture (and love of Jewish humor and food) and helps build strong personalities that (experience has shown) become leaders in the community as time goes on.

Being in Independence Hall allowed me to realize just how intense it must have been to have fought to establish a Jewish state. I'm halfway across the world thinking about my upbringing and how Avoda helped shape my adult mindset. And then, ironically, I look across the hall and, of course, behind a row of benches, I see an old friend from Avoda, David Berkowitz (1976 Bunk 14), who is there with his wife and kids as well. Running into a friend from Avoda who I had not seen in twenty years, at that moment, in a historical setting like Independence Hall was surprising but somehow expected. Its moments like that when you actually feel things come around full circle and all the connections seem to make sense. Another confirmation that the Avoda connection is never too far away.



Members of the 1995 Bunk 14 from left to right: Aaron Kaswell, Mike Brown, Andrew Rubin, Matt Bridges, Adam Hatch, Matt Nannis, Mike Kreppel, David Charton

Mike "Morty" Roth
Attended Avoda 1974-1985

First Annual Avoda Grandparents Day

On a Sunday in July, more than 85 grandparents (several alums themselves) of Avodian campers traveled to Middleboro to watch their grandsons participate in morning activities followed by a packed Mess Hall for lunch (no grilled cheese and tomato soup for this crowd). Coming from as far away as New York, nothing was going to stop these grandparents for a chance to visit with their grandsons at camp for a first ever “Grandparents Day” – a day just for *them* without the campers’ parents on hand.



Grandparents watch their grandsons swim, canoe, sail, water ski, fish, & kayak

Called to start at 10:00 AM, in true grandparent style they started arriving at 9:15. One CIT helping with parking said “I have never seen so many Mercury Marquis cars in one place before!” With the help of Alumni Association board members Rich Lefkowitz, David Wertheim, and Seth Fox, Camp board members Jeff Keselman and Jim Singer, and Camp staff Mr. Davis, Jill Shifman (staff by marriage to the Camp Director Ken), and Tom Leavitt, registration began.

At 10:30 orientation was held in the Grove as grandparents were given their second and third period assignments for the morning. From there groups were escorted by CITs to the waterfront and rec hall, to the tennis, basketball, and hockey courts, to the athletic field, to the archery range and ropes course, and to program cabins such as arts and crafts, woodworking, and film and video. Grandparents enjoyed viewing their grandsons in all their regular morning activities as they cheered equally for all Avoda campers.



Grandparents enjoy time in the Woodshop while a camper works on building a table

At the end of the third morning period grandparents and grandsons met for some brief together time in the Grove and then it was on to lunch (beans in hand) for a rousing family style meal. Mr. Davis and Ken Shifman led the camp in the traditional “Avoda Welcome Song” and the prayer before the meal. After lunch, grandparents and grandsons said their good-byes as all walked together to the parking lot. The reaction from grandparents could not have been more positive about

their Avoda Experience. Not only were they thrilled to see their grandsons but they delighted in seeing the camp “up-close-and-personal”— some for the very first time. A good time was had by all.

Footnote:

A week after Grandparents Day one camper parent told the following story about his parents: *“My parents arrived from Newton really early for Grandparents Day. So to kill some time, they stopped at a local breakfast joint next to a Middleboro gun shop and motorcycle dealer. I think my mother was a little nervous about ‘being in the country.’ At one point during breakfast she slowly leaned forward to my father and quietly said, ‘Look honey, one of those men has a shirt on that says You Kill Us. After my father looked at the local wearing the shirt, he rolled his eyes as he turned to my mother and said, ‘No dear, is says Youkilis-as in Kevin!!!”*”

Alumni Weekend 2010-*The Torch Has Been Passed*



Sixty-eight of the more than 100 alumni who attended events from Friday to Sunday afternoon

By Seth Jacobs

It was the weekend we look forward to most. Alumni Weekend 2010. This year Aaron Agulnek, Barry Morgan, and Greg Lazaroff took the helm from Jeff Vetstein and Kenny “Bubblehead” Freeman. Vet and Bubbles are to Alumni Weekend as Ted DiBiase was to millions of dollars. They go hand-in-hand. And it goes without saying that like the greats Sandy Koufax, Jerry Seinfeld, and Oil Can Boyd, Vet and Bubbles went out on top - by bringing the legendary Jon Valby to Avoda last summer.

And so the torch has been passed. On paper it may look like Muggsy Bogues trying to fill Shaq’s shoes or perhaps it’s more like Carrot Top taking over for Johnny Carson? The new crew represents a new generation of Avodians. There were those who could never leave camp in the 1970s for a day off or long night, the oil embargo keeping their Pintos and Datsuns on empty. To these old schoolers, these new men staffed Avoda in the excess and decadence of the late 1990s and early 2000s. They had never known what it was like to go a summer without Dairy Queen, Fireside, Seven Star Liquors, or even Kurt’s Korner. But despite the misgivings, Ron, Barry, and Laz were up to the task.

Friday night brought the usual pomp and even some circumstance. A rec hall gathering brought old friends together. Kegs, tables, and ping pong balls were all that was needed to entertain most of the crew. Outside, Chef Jimmy Sklaver and Grill Master Sam “Mamu” Mirkin set up a BBQ grill that seemingly stretched from the backstop to the beach. Hearty steaks and delicious chicken rolled off the grill for all to enjoy. The Phantom Gourmet himself, after finding relief in the large bushes out front, declared that the duo had achieved “Gourmet Greatness.”

Saturday saw the introduction of the 1st annual Bunk-O tournament. Some have alleged that PED’s were responsible for the outburst of Bunk-O’s in the late 1990s. A few theorists blame the significant growth of Rob the Tree. Others believed that the softballs purchased by the athletic staff were simply too soft. Whatever the reason, the event demonstrated that Bunk-O’s were no longer so easy to come by. Some early contestants such as Aaron Kaswell and Rich Vetstein could never get in a groove. Mark Solomon was granted a first round bye, but his power was down, and he returned to the small crafts department where he wouldn’t be outplayed. The final between Jeff Vetstein and Dave Chella was more dramatic, with Chella taking the crown after powering several Rec-Os. A poignant moment occurred Saturday afternoon when Dave Charton returned to the soccer field four years after suffering what many believed to be a career ending injury.

The band Eddie’s Show has now become a Saturday afternoon staple of Alumni Weekend. They rocked out great hits in classic jam band fashion. They’re a soothing cross between Steve Winwood and The Grateful Dead. Meanwhile, a tent was set up to watch the US-Ghana World Cup Match (with two of our Ghanaian kitchen boys). Some Avodians actually consider soccer a sport and watched

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the game on the edge of their benches with great trepidation. To the shock of these alumni, the US fell to the great African team.

Nighttime brought poker games in the mess hall and the usual fun and faire to the rec hall. It was Saturday night of alumni weekend, likely the greatest night of the year for any of us. Some men recall moments of satisfaction in the kitchen, where Josh "Moose" Schneider cooked his famous un-grilled cheese sandwiches. Others recall sharing stories of the good old days in front of the bunks. Some told stories about the history of the Cosby Show. For most, it was a blur, where a good time was had by all. Some hit the sack early for the 3 on 3 basketball tournament while others went to bed all too late.

The highlight for many is always the 3 on 3 basketball tournament. As a former champion, yours truly knows how it feels to still be standing after the grueling tournament. It is a great moment that stands out in my otherwise pathetic existence. It would be hard to out perform the great battle of last year's bloodbath final. The early favorite was the Dan Gollinger-Andy Geller team, but due to a late scratch, this juggernaut was broken up, and the field became wide open. A Dark Horse emerged as a savvy team of veterans and a rookie played outstanding (or less ugly) basketball. Mike "Rollo" Ross, an old school, short shorts wearing ABA style point guard from the 70s; David Forman, an athletic and follically gifted man from the 1988 Bunk 14; and Ethan Davis, a bright young man and soon to be senior at Brandeis joined forces in a team that played with brains, hustle, and good looks. The runners up, led by the always determined Bubblehead, forced a second game against the trio but they could not overcome Davis' sharpshooting, Rollo's hustle, and Forman's handsome play down low.

And so another alumni weekend has come and gone. As I drive out of Gibbs Road I couldn't help but think how I was returning to the real world of mortgage payments, deadlines, and three cats. Between alumni weekends we return to our jobs and our families and our daily routine. The years continue to go by but Alumni Weekend will always be there for those who want to reconnect and for a couple of days relive the greatness of childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and return to glory.

Camp Avoda Senior Class Reunion: 1930s-1970s



First Row L to R: Jared Fogel, Irving Kessler, Herb Fogel, Mike Lipson, Morris Satloff, Kurt Kleinmann, Herb Bamel, Larry Kellem, Mel Hyman, Ken Schlossberg, Steve Zaidman, **Middle Row L to R:** Jim Singer, Gary Epstein, Norm Plotkin, Rob Cohen, Jason Meyer, Bill Kleinmann, Bill Radnor, David Bamel, Bill Bamel, Ira Rosenberg, Marshall Lukoff, Jim Horvitz, Saul Lieberman, Marv Peiken, Fred Landy, David Sobell, David Rubin. **Top Row L to R:** Phil Lukoff, Steve Black, David Nollman, Paul G. Davis, Steve Israel, Jon Bamel, Mike Roth, Lou Dennis, David Satloff, Tom Leavitt, Jeff Keselman, David Wertheim, Ken Shifman, Seth Fox, Carl Goldberg, Phil Greenspan.

On Sunday, July 18, nearly fifty alumni attended a special reunion at dear old A-V-O-D-A. Ranging in age from the mid 30's to the late 80's, Avodians and their guests descended on camp from near and far for one more memorable day. For some it was an opportunity to see bunk mates they hadn't seen since their days together at camp generations earlier. For others still it was a time to reconnect with friends whose paths hadn't crossed in decades.

The afternoon started with alumni of all generations exchanging stories about Color Wars gone by, nights out on the town, pranks played on each other, the hoisting of a nurse's underwear up the flag pole, bunk raids, trips to the Red Sox, Melody Tent, and Lincoln Park, the polio epidemic, the old bunks, meeting the train with the kids from New York, Mrs. Meyers and her tuna fish, arts and crafts projects, adventures of days off thumbing to the Cape or Boston, swimming to the rock and back, the JNF dancers, trophies won and lost, who was the best athlete, and more. The memories and stories flowed with crystal clarity as though they had been experienced yesterday. And all the stories could have really taken place during any time at camp, during any generation, and even today.

Time was spent in the Thomas Leavitt Camp Avoda Archive looking through old *Avodians* and photos, watching the "Judge's Camp Movies" which chronicle camp life from the 1920's to the early 1960's, and seeing all the old staff and Color War shirts and memora-

AVODA MEMORIES

Collected through personal interviews conducted by alumnus David Nollman (CA 1958-1965)

When I think of Avoda...

I think of an everlasting bond of friendship and shared experiences. There is a special bond between everyone who has spent time on the shores of Lake Tispaquin. It is a place where you grow to understand and appreciate the beauty of nature and friendship. Where you become a "band of brothers" with your bunkmates, teammates and seasoned counselors. Where everyone is excited about the first flag rush and color war, but is able to also find his own niche and develop his character in his special activity. Like soldiers who have been through war together (and who fight for their "buddies" even more than for their country) we share a common experience that can only be realized by "going through it". Unlike the soldiers, however, we revel in those memories. There is warmth in the support given by fellow campers, counselors and alumni that is intangible but real. Avodians share a love for friendship and Jewish experiences "together". (Where else can the Jewish kid not always be "the last pick?") Like a fiddler on the roof Avoda has its traditions which are shared by all who were ever privileged enough to spend a summer there.

Simply put, the word "mensh" and Avodian seem interchangeable.

--Michael "Schinny the Pig" Schindler, M.D.
Camp Avoda 1968-1976

...it truly puts a smile on my face. I remember all the things we did some 50 years later. It was a great experience which I will never forget. They called me Squirmy because when it came to flag rushes no one could catch me. The nickname still follows me to this day. When my son went to Avoda 20 years later they gave him the same nickname and called him Squirmy Jr. I spent 10 years at Avoda. I must have started around 1957--6 years as a camper and 4 years on the Staff as the 2nd Cook to Mrs. Myers. My last year of camp Paul Davis was my bunk mate in the Head Councilors Cabin it was Paul's 1st year at Avoda he was the Head Councilor.

--Norm "Squirmy" Plotkin
Camp Avoda 1957-1966

I was a NYC kid, so Camp represented what 'nature' was and life outside of busy streets. Although I had a standard Jewish education (Sunday school, then bar mitzvah lessons) Avoda gave me a view of Judaism without the backward-looking traditions. I could conceive of tradition meaning the counselors playing fast impressive volleyball, or hitting softballs over the Rec Hall.

At camp, I appreciated the opportunities to conceive of alternate personalities – nature boy, arts & crafts guy (I can still twist together a mean 6-strand lanyard of gimp), as well as athlete. The magic of singing our hearts out for Color War and the Camp anthem at the end to bring us all together.

For me the fun did not end with Bunk 14. I was a CIT, then JC, then a SC. There were days-off hitching out onto Cape Cod (all the way to P-town) or into Boston. The camp administration was pretty chaotic during my years. The director would change every year or two. I lived through the year when 6 or 7 campers came down with polio (I think some of them died).

Just a jumble of very warm and comforting thoughts.

--Andy Russakoff
Camp Avoda 1948-1960

I think of comradery(brotherhood) and summer friends who I never saw away from Camp Avoda even though we all lived in New England. I was in Bunks 1, 2 ,3, 8, 10, 12, 14 & a kitchen boy with Mrs. Meyer and assistant cook Normie "Squirmy" Plotkin.

--Eddie Adler
Camp Avoda 1957-1965

I remember a great summer. It was so long ago, that's all I remember. I seem to think I was there in 1930 or 1931 but my memories don't last that long. I just remember a great summer.

--Jay Esterkes
Camp Avoda 1931

When All the Chips are Down (continued from page 1)

What is so striking about the bonfire is how open and honest everyone allows themselves to be. The armor that so many guys coat themselves in for most of the summer is stripped away for a few fleeting moments. At the end of the day, we're at an all-boys camp, and there's very little room for sensitivity. But with the flames crackling and the night sky illuminated in the background, even the toughest counselors are reduced to tears as they recount their fondest memories and proudest times at camp. In that moment, we reveal who we truly are, because we know we can't do it anywhere else. When it's all over, Mr. Davis tells an old Avoda ghost story — whether it be “Wheelchair Mary,” “Green Eyes,” or “The Tispaquin Loony” — and then shares his own feelings. Bomb pops are passed out, we sing the camp Alma Mater, and that's that. Day is done. Gone the sun.

These are the moments that have dictated many of my summers. Sharing this night with your camp friends is an experience you can only have at Avoda. And because the meaning of today only makes sense to those who have been here, it is that much more special. Nights like tonight are what make Avoda a true brotherhood. The bonds that are formed are what solidify us as a family. This place is our little secret, 50 acres of land hidden away in a small town 30 minutes from the Cape. It's ours and no one else's. And when it's all over, we'll be sad, but we'll always have nights like July 4th to look back on with full hearts.

So to all my alumni friends reading this, enjoy your holiday. Enjoy the fireworks and barbecues and slushies. And although you're not here and it's not the same as it once was, please know that you're not forgotten. We're all here because of those who came before us. That Avoda bond is eternal whether you're 10 or 40. I'll be thinking of you all tonight, as I step in front of the fire to say my final words. This chip is for you.

Avoda to Launch New Website

Watch for an email (be sure we have your current email address, see below) announcing the new Camp Avoda website. While in its early stage, eventually alumni and others will be able access photos and literature from their generations. *Watch for details.*

Your Contact Info

Don't think or know for sure if we have your current email address? Send it along with your current address, phone, and the year(s) you were at Avoda to Tom Leavitt, 35 Waterfall Dr., Suite J, Canton, MA 02021 or email tom@campavoda.org

Camp Avoda Alumni Association does not share or provide its alumni database or related information with any other organizations, businesses, or institutions.



2010 Annual Alumni Scholarship Fundraising Drive



Because of donors like you, this summer the Camp Avoda Alumni Community provided direct camper tuition scholarship assistance to families-in-need of more than \$30,000. This represents a more than 30% increase in support donated just last year. And this year's effort was given an added boost by a matching gift challenge offered by generous alum and fulfilled by the Alumni Association. This year's campaign started in the spring with a direct mail appeal, continued through Alumni Weekend and the summer, and will finish the year with our fall Phone-A-Thon. Watch for details of the Phone-A-Thon and information on gifts you can receive* for donations made during that time. To make a gift now email tom@campavoda.org or send you donation to Camp Avoda, 35 Waterfall Drive, Suite J, Canton, MA 02021.

*For qualifying gifts while supplies last.

Senior Class Reunion (continued from page 5)

bilia. While many alums spotted themselves in photos from the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's others tried to remember the names of their bunk mates or what Color War teams they were on or the director's name in their day or who their counselors were. And there was also a lot of "Hey, does anyone remember....?" and "Does anyone know whatever happened to...?"

During the afternoon many alumni took the opportunity to share their experiences and memories in one-on-one video interviews. They talked about their Avoda past but also of the role Avoda played in developing their character to making them the men they are today. These stories are both rich with Avoda history and deeply emotional as alums reflected on the skills Avoda provided them for life. The program book created for the day contained many alumni interviews captured earlier this year completing the sentence "When I think of Avoda..." Some of those personal interviews are printed in this newsletter edition with more likely to follow in future issues.



Dinner in the Mess Hall with alumni left- to-right Marv Peikin, Saul Lieberman, Phil Greenspan, Marshall Lukoff, and Phil Lukoff

Clearly the highlight of the day was watching the video presentation "Of All the Camps Passing By" created, written, directed, and edited for this occasion by alum David Nollman (CA 1958-1965). His film chronicled camp and life from the 1920's to 1979 with comments from alums of each generation. Not wanting to reveal its ending, David captured beautifully the Avoda spirit and traditions of the past and answered the question do they remain intact today. At the film's conclusion alums and their guests immediately jumped to their feet cheering (with many weeping) followed by lots of group hugs. In his liner notes of the film, David writes:

For those who wonder what would bring these men, many of them in their seventies and eighties, to such an event (the July 18 Senior Class Reunion), we invite you to watch. Their words provide the answer and at the same time provide a vibrant feel for the traditions still tightly woven into the fabric of the camp's every day activity. They also reveal a unique connection between generations and sense of the history of the times during which they attended. It is in fact as much a treatise on the bonds that bind us all in our quickly moving, ever-changing world as it is a history of a single summer camp.

A group photo(much like the all-camp photos of days gone by with stacked benches and all) followed and then into the Mess Hall with today's campers and staff for dinner, the Bunks 14 and 1 Alma Maters, and good-byes until we meet again on the shores of Lake Tispaquin where "we hoist our banners to the sky and pledge our 'llegiance true."