



ISSUE 6

# Beyond the Bunk

Camper Name: **Eliana G.**  
Current Age: 18  
Hometown: Houston, TX  
Years as a Camper: 2021,  
2022

*Stories of campers who took their camp experience and built Jewish futures.*

## From Once A Year To Everyday: How Camp Inspired Active Judaism

Before seventh grade, Eliana knew she was Jewish, but in a distant, cultural sense. Her family celebrated the High Holidays, and she attended Hebrew school, but Judaism felt more like a tradition than a personal connection. “We knew we were Jewish,” she said, “but I didn’t really know what that meant.”



Eliana (second from left) as a camper in 2022

That began to change when her local Chabad shlucha suggested she attend Camp Gan Israel Poconos for the summer. At first, Eliana was unsure. The idea of going to a religious overnight camp—away from home, without knowing anyone—felt overwhelming. “I actually said no at first,” she admits. “I didn’t think it was for me.”

But something pulled her to reconsider. And that decision, though reluctant at first, turned out to be life-changing.

From the moment she arrived at CGI Poconos, Eliana felt something magical in the air. There was a warmth, an energy, and a sisterhood that she had never experienced before. But it wasn’t just the friendships or the activities that left a mark—it was the meaning. She learned about mitzvos, davening, the beauty of Shabbos, and the power of her Jewish soul. “I discovered things I never even knew existed in Judaism,” she said. “It made me feel proud to be Jewish for the first time.”

*continued on reverse*

“It wasn’t just about being Jewish at camp anymore,” Eliana explained.  
“It became who I am, every single day—how I wake up, how I go to sleep, how I live.”

*continued from reverse*

Eliana returned the following summer with excitement and a deeper thirst to learn and grow. Her second summer was even more transformative. Surrounded by role models and surrounded by authentic Jewish life, she built a connection to Yiddishkeit that felt like home.

When Eliana returned home, she began incorporating mitzvos into her daily life, starting every morning with Modeh Ani and washing Negel Vasser, and ending each day with Shema. These practices, once foreign, quickly became anchors of her identity.

That growth inspired her to become a CTeen leader in her community, seeking out and encouraging the few other Jewish girls she met in public school. She also now teaches at Hebrew school almost every Sunday, sharing what she's learned and helping others build their own connection. Eliana lives the Rebbe's message, "If you know aleph, teach aleph." She doesn't wait until she knows everything—she shares from the heart, just as camp taught her.

Now, as she prepares to head off to university, Eliana's Jewish identity is not just intact—it's thriving. "Before I submitted my application, I made sure there was a Chabad on campus," she said. "Because CGI Poconos didn't just give me a great summer—it gave me the tools to live as a proud Jew, every day."

***Eliana's journey shows the lasting power of camp. CGI Poconos didn't just shape one summer—it sparked a lifelong commitment to Yiddishkeit.***

## Eliana's Journey at a Glance:

- 2021** – First summer at CGI Poconos
- 2022** – Second summer at camp sparks resolutions for new Mitzvos
- 2023** – Becomes CTeen leader at local Chabad and starts teaching Hebrew school
- 2024** – Bring newly met Jewish friend to attend CTeen Shabbaton
- 2025** – Eliana encourages girls in her community to attend CGI Poconos



Eliana in 2025

***CKids Gan Israel Poconos was founded in 2012 to provide Jewish girls—regardless of background or affiliation—with an immersive experience of Jewish joy, pride, and connection. Over the past 13 years, we've welcomed more than 800 campers from 26 states and 8 countries, igniting a lifelong passion for Yiddishkeit.***



## Camp Gan Israel Poconos

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