

SHORESH

שורש

Congregation Etz Chayim
Community News

SEPTEMBER 2020

תשבי תשפ"א | TISHREI 5781

Silver Linings for
the High Holidays
Teaching Through
Song
Lifeline in the Storm



Shanah Tovah Umetukah!

Elissa Abrams, Alex, Claudia, Ben, and Hannah Singer

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Diane and Richard Boroditsky and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Fayanne, Avrom, and Carli Charach

Wishing our family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Wendy, Alan, Laurie, and Jillian Daien

Wishing our family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Darlene and Jerry Davis

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Ethel and Zvi Dil

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Ann, Max, and Elie Feierstein

Wishing your families a year of gezunt, health, and wellbeing

Dina Frankel, and Gail, Ron, and Marlee Cantor

Wishing a happy and healthy New Year to all our family and friends

Norman Freedman and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Dina and Bruce Granove

May the coming year bring good health, strong connections, true peace, and safety to everyone

Kim Hirt, Jerry, Rachel and Bina Rubin

A sweet and happy New Year to all our family and friends

Lil and Ben Hirt

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Margaret Kasner and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year



Photo credit: Maglara

Terry and Jerry Katz Q.C.

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Brenda and Howard Keller and family

Wishing our family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Howard Kideckel

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Matthew and Nola, Ezra and Sonia, Yona, Galya, and Gilon Lazar

Shanah Tovah Umetukah

Estrid Mandel and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Evelyn Numerow and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Fay Reich

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Jane, Ronald, and Tiffany Reider

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Lorraine Reiner

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Sid and Joyce Rosenhek and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Colette Rubin

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Marvin and Esther Samphir and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Gwen Satran and Eugene Baron and family

Wishing family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Shayna and Merrill Shulman and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Mimi and Earl Singer and family

Wishing our family, friends, and congregation a healthy and happy New Year

Avery and Nata Spigelman, children Adam, David, Jenny, Deborah, and grandchildren Joshua and Connor

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Women's League of Congregation Etz Chayim

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy New Year

Tony Sorto and family

Wishing my friends a healthy and happy New Year



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Blowing the *Shofar*: A *Rosh Hashanah Mitzvah*

The *shofar* is one of the symbols we associate first with *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish new year, and blowing it is a *mitzvah* (Torah commandment). "The *shofar* was traditionally used to announce the start of festivals and events," says *baal tekiah* (master of *tekiah*) for *Etz Chayim* Avrom Charach. "*Rosh Hashanah* is one of these special times."

Rosh Hashanah commemorates the beginning of creation and is the first of 10 days of *teshuvah* (repentance) and a return to the path of righteousness for Jews. The *shofar* blast is a call to turn to *teshuvah*.

"It is said that blowing the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* confirms that *Hashem* (God) is king of the world as we enter a new year," Avrom says, acknowledging that many people don't realize we also blow the *shofar* every day during the month of *Elul* (except on *Shabbat*), the month preceding *Rosh Hashanah*, to prepare us for the High Holidays. We don't blow it on the last day of *Elul* so that it is more special on *Rosh Hashanah*, he adds.

A *shofar* is usually crafted from a ram's horn but can also be made from the horn of a goat, antelope, or gazelle. Once removed from the animal, the horn is hollowed out and a hole is made at the small end. There are four different sounds we make with the *shofar*, which awaken our spirit, help us to have better *kavanah* (intention) with our prayers, and bring us closer to *Hashem*, explains Avrom. The first sound, *tekiah*, means *blast*, and is one long, clear blast, two to three-seconds long. The second, *shevarim*, means *broken* and is three short calls—together the three blasts are as long as one *tekiah*. The third sound, *teruah*, means *alarm*, and is a rapid series of at least nine staccato notes which together equal one *tekiah*. We make the three sounds in different combinations on *Rosh Hashanah*; the series of blasts usually ends with the fourth sound, *tekiah gedolah* or great *tekiah*—one long *tekiah* blast lasting until the blower's breath runs out.

As *baal tekiah*, Avrom is entrusted with the *mitzvah* of blowing the *shofar* for Congregation *Etz Chayim*. (CEC members Alec Griner and Ari Hoult



Avrom Charach

share these duties over the month of *Elul* and *Rosh Hashanah*.) "It is a *mitzvah* that is central to *Rosh Hashanah*," Avrom says, "thus the person chosen to blow *shofar* should be well versed in Torah and *mitzvot*." He says a *baal tekiah* must understand the rules around *shofar* blowing and "should not be thinking of themselves or be trying to blow well for performance. It is all about the needs of the *kehilla*, the congregation."

Mostly self taught, Avrom says he has spent much time simply blowing, to learn to consistently get a sound. He also got tips from Bill Weissmann, *baal tekiah* for another *shul*. "I then went home and spent up to an hour a day for the next four weeks preparing. Every year, I practise 20 to 40 hours in the weeks before *Rosh Hashanah*, to be ready to perform the *mitzvah*."

Vibration is what makes the *shofar* sound, says Avrom, who has hosted *shofar*-blowing workshops in the past. "One of the most important things is to find a *shofar* that works for you. The embouchure (use of lips, tongue, teeth, and facial muscles in playing a wind instrument) that you have is your own, and each horn has a slightly different shape, so some *shofarot* work for one person but not another." It helps to make sure your lips are damp, he says, so that when you blow out, your lips vibrate to make the sound—one that rings with reverence and commands respect for

Blowing the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* confirms that *Hashem* is king of the world as we enter a new year.

the moment or occasion. In fact, walking to the lake with his photographer for the photo that accompanies this article, Avrom says, "we passed a gaggle of geese, and one started hissing at me. He started again on the way back, so I gave one quick *shofar* blast and they all looked at me with more respect (or was it fear)?" he jokes.

Avrom has an amusing companion (who doesn't quite hiss) when he practises *shofar* blowing at home. "A few years after I became *baal tekiah*, we welcomed a new dog into our family. I was blowing the *shofar* and suddenly I had a partner. Now, whenever I practise, Jett likes to sing along with me!" ■

Return to Shul Services

Outdoor Kabbalat Shabbat

It was a cloudless, blue-skied evening Friday June 12, when twenty-five Congregation Etz Chayim members came together for the first time since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, for a *Kabbalat Shabbat* service on the patio of their *shul*. It was phase 2 of Manitoba's reopening after a province-wide shutdown, so full capacity for registration (25) was reached within moments of opening it, says Claudia Griner, program director for Etz Chayim.

"Never in my life did I ever think I'd be so happy to hear the *Chatzi Kaddish* recited," said Rabbi Kliel, during the service. "It's been a while since we've been able to do it together."

Between recitations of *Kaddish* and other evening prayers, the usual background whispering of visiting Etz Chayim members was replaced with birds chirping and chipmunks chattering, and the warmth from the sun on your back was delicious. Rabbi Kliel even took pleasure from having the sun in his eyes.

"How beautiful it is to be together, as odd as this configuration is," he said, waving to passing cyclists. "I want you to delight in what I am hearing, which is unusual for me as a rabbi: I

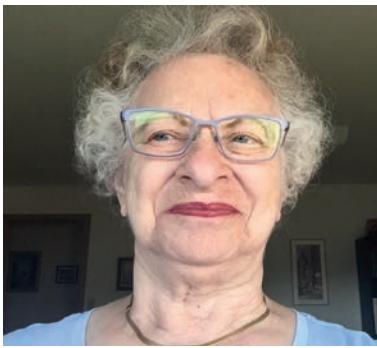
missed the personal interaction with people," she said, adding that the service was otherwise the same as the usual Friday night service. "It was a joy to hear Tracy's voice again."

Etz Chayim member Sharon Graham said, "the evening service was a real *mechaya* (pleasure). Seeing the clergy and the people of the *shul* was a relief after all the time apart. In regular times, we have so many options to get together as a community to *daven*. We don't realize how nice it is to be able to experience prayer communally until it is taken away," she said. She mentioned that while her family still had their usual Shabbat dinners and *Pesach* seders, it sometimes felt lonely. "It is possible to be a Jew alone or with a small family, but it's not optimal."

Sharon said holding services outside was wonderful and she hoped it would continue as a regular part of *shul* offerings when spring, summer, and fall weather allowed.

"Our buildings are beautiful and hold meaning, but *Kabbalat Shabbat* was designed as an outdoor service," she said.

She mentioned that ample room was left between chairs on the spacious Etz Chayim patio so that congregants could feel safe during



get to hear the birds in the trees behind us; they sound delightful," he said, acknowledging others who joined the service remotely, via Zoom, an online video communications platform.

"It's been so long since we've had an opportunity to lead the service with others, and we appreciate those of you who are here physically and those who are here remotely," Rabbi Kliel said. "I'm grateful, and I hope this is a Shabbat of relaxation, introspection, and healing for all."

Etz Chayim member Lil Hirt, who attended the service, said "congregants in attendance soaked up the spirituality." Cantor Tracy worded it a bit differently: "The people there gave off spiritual energy that ended up uplifting us all."

Lil said she found the joy exhibited by Rabbi Kliel especially heartwarming. "I think he

the service. She and her daughter wore masks, as did many others.

"I can't say that singing in a mask is as nice as singing without. But I'll wear my mask anyway. As someone with slight allergies (who sneezes), I could really make people nervous! I want these services to be as safe as possible, so that we can keep holding them."

Sharon said she would attend outdoor services until the snow flies. "Group *davening* is important to my spiritual health!"

Lil said she felt safe and comfortable at the outdoor service and was pleasantly surprised to see that 50 participants had registered for the service two weeks later. With Manitoba in phase 3 of reopening, on Friday June 26, fifty people came together again for *Kabbalat Shabbat* on the Etz Chayim patio. ■

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Cover photo:
Tovfla

Left to right: Sharon
Graham, Lil Hirt, Rabbi
Kliel Rose, Cantor Tracy
Kasner

Adaptations Create Silver Linings

The Covid-19 health crisis fueled some changes for Etz Chayim which are getting full points by CEC members.

When the world was hit by the global Covid-19 pandemic last March, Congregation Etz Chayim had to adjust quickly. Daily *shul* services moved online; the Branching Out program was created for staying connected with the congregation, particularly more isolated members (see page 10); and *Beit Chayim* was launched for members who wanted to continue to enhance their Jewish education.

Etz Chayim members say their synagogue adapted well. "Survival for Etz Chayim during the months of pandemic lockdown and recovery have required massive levels of adaptation," says Etz Chayim member Mel Hornstein. "*Kol Hakavod* (all the honours), to all who made it possible."

"I've been impressed with how CEC has pivoted during the pandemic: offering online services and classes on top of all the behind-the-scenes work of checking in with people," says Tyler Pearce, a newer member to Etz Chayim. "I've felt connected in ways I would not have thought possible at the beginning of this (pandemic). CEC's staff and volunteers should be commended for their efforts."

While the *shul* staff felt growing pains associated with the changes, transition was smoother for members. Etz Chayim member Kim Hirt points out that "CEC was already on a path of adaptation prior to Covid-19 by bringing programming beyond the walls of 123 Matheson," including Wednesday *minyan* services at the Simkin Centre, Lunch and Learn in the South End (every other class), and Torah on Tap (at Brazen Hall Kitchen and Brewery in Fort Rouge).

"I think the desire to reach out in different ways was already there. The pandemic forced a speedier re-tooling of some of those adaptations," says Kim.



Tyler Pearce



Rabbi Kliel Rose

Zoom Shul

When Manitoba entered a period of lockdown in March because of the pandemic, there was strong feeling that daily *minyan* services should continue, says Rabbi Kliel Rose. But, Etz Chayim did not yet have the sophisticated technology necessary to offer virtual services and programs, he says. The congregation remained patient, and thanks to some generous financial support from a few members, Etz Chayim quickly acquired the technology to provide everything the community needed.

"Initially, we had folks that were not so computer savvy. Suddenly, they're attending daily online services and classes," Rabbi Kliel marvels, crediting Etz Chayim leadership staff as well as CEC Vice President Avrom Charach and Barry Kay (Kirshenbaum, Cherry Tree Productions), who helped equip the *shul* with necessary technology updates. He also credits a willingness of many members to put themselves in places where they are not necessarily comfortable. "This is not a congregation that was exactly up on virtual offerings. We have learned quickly how to provide that for people. We've come a long way," he says.

When Etz Chayim decided to offer evening *minyan* services via Zoom (an online video communications platform), a new trend was noticed immediately—more people were attending services. In fact, compared to attendance prior to the start of

social distancing, numbers had doubled, in some cases, tripled, says Rabbi Kliel.

"That's a significant increase," he states.

Apart from two small 'live' Kabbalat Shabbat services hosted outdoors in June on the Etz Chayim patio (see page 5) and a small in-person Shabbat morning service in July, *shul* services have remained online since March. In July, Etz Chayim announced that most of the High Holiday services would also be virtual.

"I'm pleased with how far we've been able to come," says Rabbi Kliel.

Zoom School

Synagogue is about more than *davening*, and during the pandemic, members of Congregation Etz Chayim remained thirsty for the Jewish education opportunities they are accustomed to from their *shul*. *Beit Chayim*, Etz Chayim's online centre for Jewish life and learning, became a perfect complement to online *shul* services. Throughout May, June, and into August and September, *Beit Chayim* offered Etz Chayim members an array of virtual learning opportunities to satiate their thirst.

"We realized we had an opportunity to help people connect—on a social level, but also intellectually," says Rabbi Kliel, adding he thinks people have more desire to be in community now while we're living through challenging times. Cantor Tracy Kasner agrees:



Kim Hirt



Dina Granove



Mel Hornstein



Debbie Stern

"People realize how much they need connectivity with their synagogue," she says.

The opportunity mentioned by Rabbi Kiel didn't come without risk, though.

"We took a chance, and I'm proud of this," he says. "Like any risk, there's a financial element, and there's risk in figuring out whether something is the right fit and is appealing."

But enrolment was good, and Rabbi Kiel says he has been moved by positive feedback received from the community about *Beit Chayim*. CEC Member Dina Granove says *Beit Chayim* had a very positive personal impact.

"I am proud to say I have become quite a student of *Beit Chayim*. The arrival of Covid created an absence of structure in my life, an inability to have direct interaction with family and friends, and a loss of connection with my beloved synagogue community. *Beit Chayim* provided me with many options to compensate for these losses," she says. "*Beit Chayim* has expanded my interest to encompass learning about what makes me proud of being Jewish."

The lineup of June classes, all offered to Etz Chayim members via Zoom, included "Meditation Mondays" with Rabbi Kiel, "Seeking Spiritual Wisdom in the Time of the Pandemic" with New York Rabbi Amy Eilberg, "Cyber Lunch and Learn" with Rabbi Kiel, "Midrash and Mixology" with Minneapolis Rabbi Dr. Ryan Dulkin, and "Secret Codes and Other Modes" with Cantor Tracy.

Tyler Pearce participated in "Secret Codes and Other Modes," which provided context and nuance to the art of Torah cantillation. And the secrets? Tyler says one in particular

was personally enlightening: when it comes to Torah chanting, perfection is not part of the equation.

"We don't have to be perfect note-wise, or good singers. Instead, we have to be present, emotionally aware; attuned to the fact that by chanting Torah we are fulfilling a *mitzvah* for the congregation. It's perfect regardless of musical talent." Tyler, who had never chanted from the Torah before, says "the course definitely made me feel it's something I could (one day) do."

Cantor Tracy points out that "Secret Codes and Other Modes" (the adult version) was created for online use. "It is fun to be able to reach people when they really want to connect and we can use music to comfort and bring joy, not just theoretically but when we need it in actuality," says Cantor Tracy.

Mel Hornstein partook in "Cyber Lunch and Learn," calling it "a vibrant chance to learn from Rabbi Kiel."

"There is a world of discovery in *Torah*, *Talmud*, *Midrash*, and personal experience that cannot be duplicated by studying alone," he says. "Topics most often come from the *Parsha* (Torah reading) of the week and always reach into the reality of present day lives."

Pros and Cons of Cyber-Learning

There are, of course, downsides to learning online, like distractions from home and absence of interpersonal connection with the instructor and other students. In other classes Kim has taken, there was opportunity to share what was going on in each other's lives before class; afterwards, ideas and thoughts were often exchanged as participants headed back to their cars.

By chanting Torah we are fulfilling a *mitzvah* for the congregation. It's perfect regardless of musical talent.

"I miss those 'parking lot meetings,'" says Kim, adding, "You only see people from the shoulders up, so you miss a lot of body language. Eye contact is difficult because you tend to look at images on screen, not the camera. And the lecturer has a more difficult time trying to get feedback and comments from students, as we are all in our own little bubbles instead of a shared space."

Mel offers a solution to this drawback.

"Interaction has been limited, sometimes, and for some people this is positive, because it allows for focus on the lesson at hand. Perhaps in the future, time could be provided for chatting and supplementary conversations."

Debbie Stern participated in several classes and says she likes the convenience of the online format.

"You can still see everyone and talk to them, but when the class ends that's it," she says, adding "you don't have



Rabbi Amy Eilberg



Rabbi Dr. Ryan Dulkin

to waste time travelling" to get to and from class, which made it possible for her to sign up for more than one class. She says using Zoom isn't difficult once you know how, noting that cyber classes can be challenging for people without computers.

There are other benefits to cyber learning. "There's no limit to who could 'guest' lecture for the CEC community," says Elana Schultz, who participated in Rabbi Dulkin's "Midrash and Mixology," where each week, the rabbi began by offering a cocktail recipe which participants could also make at home; "then, we would turn to a text he had provided and read together and discuss the meaning."

Kim echoes Elana's comments: "I don't know if I ever would have had an opportunity to learn with Rabbi Dulkin or Rabbi Eilberg if it wasn't for this situation," she says, adding, "that also goes for sharing the class with students who are not local" (one Beit Chayim student was writer/educator Carol Rose, Rabbi Kliel's mother, who does not live in Winnipeg.)

"It's refreshing to hear different perspectives and meet new people," says Kim.

Although Zoom (and other online platforms) can present technical challenges ("What would a Zoom meeting be without technical challenges?" says Tyler), it has some inherent benefits: Elana says the Zoom "chat" function made it simple for participants to contribute to conversations, even if they were shy or not up to making a verbal contribution. And while it can be difficult to have a lively discussion on Zoom because only one person can talk at once, participants could interject using the chat function.

"Rabbi Dulkin would read a comment in the chat and then ask the person who wrote it to expand," she explains. "Most of the time when it was most lively, it was a combination between chat and audio."

Another pro to cyber learning for Kim was "the opportunity to inject fun and creativity with different Zoom backgrounds for the classes. When Rabbi Dulkin taught us to make Margaritas, I set up a background with a Fiesta," she says. Mel adds two more advantages to the list: "early distribution of source materials for those who wish to prepare their thoughts and focus," and the host being able to control monologue versus dialogue opportunities, which "makes it easier to maintain focus on the topic."

Elana says she has found herself with more time on her hands because of the pandemic. "Being able to participate in online learning has been great. Being able to participate in Zoom services is a nice way to see some other CEC people whom I have not seen since in-person services stopped."

Ongoing Contact with Clergy

Mel says, "during pandemic lockdown, having relevant Jewish content was a definite plus. Being able to fully partake without travel is a bonus. Ongoing contact with clergy and other excellent teachers is full of reward."

And while in person-classes and services are a priority for a *shul*, Mel would like to see online participation explored for the future.



Elana Schultz



Cantor Tracy Kasner

"Yes, there are challenges," he says. "There is also huge benefit for our continued viability. I feel that going back to business/prayer as things were pre-Covid would be a missed opportunity. Let's think about extending what we have been doing into an exciting, inclusive picture."

"I hope they continue with online learning, I prefer it," says Debbie, noting that she does miss the in-person "Lunch and Learn" program, which provided participants with a 10-dollar lunch.

"But I don't mind doing it on Zoom and making my own lunch," she says.

So, what does this mean for the future of synagogue communities?

"Once this pandemic is over and the fear of interacting has been eliminated, life won't look the same as it did before," says Rabbi Kliel. "Synagogues won't operate in the classic way they have, given the success of virtual programs. Convenience has become more of a feature for people in determining where they go, and if they join synagogues."

"The bottom line is, there will have to be a nice balance of catering to the needs of our membership, both in person as well as some virtual, remote options," he says. ■

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Branching Out: Lifeline in the Storm

One of the foundations of Jewish practice is a commitment to care for others within our own *kehillah*, our congregation or community. “For the Jewish people, reliance on each other is a defining characteristic of our strength and our purpose,” says Etz Chayim Cantor Tracy Kasner.

The Branching Out program is Congregation Etz Chayim’s way “of reaching out and connecting with those in need within our community; our *kehillah* nourishing through food, ritual meals, and connection,” says Cantor Tracy. The program was designed to ensure the congregation stayed in touch with one another, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Practical Support, Social Connections

“We wanted to offer social support, but also practical support like grocery shopping or other errands,” says Tyler Pearce, a member of Congregation Etz Chayim. Technology assistance (for example, help using Zoom or a new device) was also on the roster, as was help getting medication, she says.

Cantor Tracy says the Branching Out program was inspired by Tyler and Melanie Richters, another member, calling the pair “amazing congregants.” But Tyler is hesitant to steal the limelight.

“Linda and Tracy and Claudia were the superstars,” she says, adding, “I helped out

because I could. We need to act in ways that are how we want the world to be.”

Tyler’s “superstars” are Etz Chayim administrative staffer Linda Waldman, Cantor Tracy, and programming director Claudia Griner. Linda adds Margo Carr to the list to receive accolades, mentioning how the life cycle coordinator personally delivered all catered meals to recipients (except during Passover, when the need was greater and a team of volunteers helped to deliver the 49 “Seders in a box.”)

“When Covid-19 hit, we were scrambling to find a way to help people,” Margo says, adding that as Passover approached, many members felt isolated at home and couldn’t easily access what they needed for their Seders. “So, we created a way that they didn’t have to go shopping and try to find everything they needed (for a Seder). It was a huge success.”

“To help someone and to give is beautiful and is what Etz Chayim is about,” adds Margo, who, at time of writing, was still delivering food regularly to a 90-year-old member.

Finding Members in Need

To determine which Etz Chayim members should be approached for the Branching Out program, Linda Waldman says she went through the synagogue membership list, highlighting names of people she thought might need support during the health crisis. She telephoned those members, with help from the Branching Out committee, to identify what the needs were.

“Some needed help getting groceries. Many just wanted a friendly phone call.” Linda was working from home when the program launched, so she gave her home phone number to everyone she contacted, so they could reach her again if needed.

Linda says a few Etz Chayim members donated money to the *shul* to be used specifically for catered meals to those who needed them, adding that members on the receiving end of meals and other support were always appreciative.

Lifeline in the Storm

Melanie Richters says volunteering for Branching Out helped her feel some stability when the world around her felt unstable.

“When Covid came crashing down on us, I felt adrift, like the sands were constantly shifting out from under me, as one by one all the constants in my life were shutting down, including *shul*. There was just so much uncertainty. It was helpful to feel like there was something

Watermark image: Nick Nice

We need
to act
in ways
that are
how we
want
the world
to be.



Tyler Pearce



Margo Carr



Melanie Richters with Ryan and Michael Richters



Linda Waldman

I could do, something tangible that might make a difference—it gave me something to grasp onto.”

Echoing Melanie’s words, Tyler says she appreciated having “a tangible way to provide for others and solve a problem during this unsettling time.” She says asking for and accepting help is hard.

“We live in a larger culture that seems to equate needing help with weakness. I think this is totally wrong... it takes strength to accept help.”

The experience of reaching out, both to members in need as well as to those who wanted to help was telling, she continues. “Lots of people want to help, but we all may need to do some work on how to accept and welcome help,” she says, adding that often, the only ‘help’ required is a “connection—a social call or a conversation.”

“It’s tough,” she continues, “because in many ways, the physical space of the synagogue *is* our connection, and though we could move services and learning to online platforms, it’s tougher to do so with socializing.”

Tyler suggests that as the pandemic waxes and wanes, the Etz Chayim community might consider continuing the conversation about who is branching out, who is reaching in, “and how we can all participate on whatever ‘side’ our circumstances put us.”

This continued dialogue could also serve as a constant reminder of our commitment as Jews to help those within our *kehillah*.

“It’s important for us to look out for the most vulnerable among us. I am a big proponent of *davening*, but that’s only a small part of what it means to be a Jew,” says Melanie. ■

I am a big proponent of *davening*, but that's only a small part of what it means to be a Jew.

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Teaching Through Song

Two themes run unwaveringly through Gina Chodirk's life: music and teaching.

"Everything goes back to music for me," says the retired educator, who spent most of her teaching career (which spanned more than 25 years, from 1980 until 2006) in the English-Hebrew bilingual program at Margaret Park School. And while Gina attentively instructed her students in all grade school subjects, it was music and song that spoke to her soul.

"I love singing, and singing with kids. I learned the value of teaching through song," she says, mentioning she likes to incorporate teaching through song because people remember melodies. She muses about a former student, busy working on a Hebrew writing assignment, who asked what the Hebrew word for *corner* was.

"I started humming the Purim song 'Ha Covah Sheli' (*'ha covah sheli shalosh pinot'*...my hat has three corners) and the child figured it out quickly. Later, the student said, 'I wish everything had a song to it. It's much easier to remember.'

Gina says one of her favourite things about teaching was watching those "aha" moments in children.

"To see a child struggle with something and then suddenly get it—those are some of the gems of teaching. It's so gratifying. I love when kids succeed, that's just the best feeling."

B'nai Mitzvah Teacher

Gina teaches more than mathematics and Purim songs, though. A lover of synagogue liturgy, she has also taught a host of B'nai Mitzvah students Torah-reading skills and how to chant their *Haftaratot*, beginning with her own son, then a friend's son and her nephew. Word spread and soon, Gina found herself teaching two to three B'nai Mitzvah students each year. So, when Congregation Etz Chayim Cantor Tracy Kasner needed some time off, the *shul* asked Gina, a member of Etz Chayim, to step in and take over Tracy's students. Her most recent student lives in Toronto, but the geography doesn't concern Gina—in fact, she has embraced the technology.

"We have weekly Facetime Bat Mitzvah lessons, and I like doing it online. The idea that I can teach a student in Toronto when I'm here, and we can have everything exactly the same as if they were sitting in my kitchen with me, I think that's so cool," says Gina, who had her own Bat Mitzvah in 2000.

Gina learned to *daven Shachritas* as a member of Beth Israel synagogue. Now, if Cantor Tracy needs to be away, she'll sometimes ask Gina to step in.

"I really appreciate when she asks me because I love it. The liturgy goes right to my heart. It feels so much a part of me; it touches my soul in a very special way."

"The music really resonates," she continues. "Music gives me goosebumps; I get all choked up with it."



Gina with Emmy and Lyla

Fatherly Connections

Gina's father was a farmer who left home early in the morning, returning when the sun set. "So, we didn't have a lot of dad-time growing up. The one time we really connected with my dad was during the High Holidays," she says. "My dad loved the synagogue music. And when we went to the farm together and he got tired while driving, he would sing Hebrew songs, Yiddish songs, or liturgical music in the car to keep himself awake. So, I connect a lot of it with my dad."

"When my dad passed away," she continues, "and we were still going to Beth Israel, he was there." Gina says. "Every time I was in the synagogue, I could hear his singing, I could feel him there. It's very much a part of me."

Israeli Dance

Gina's teaching career extends even further. An enthusiast of Israeli dance, Gina has been passing on this talent to students since 2004. She offered a weekly Israeli dance drop-in class at the Rady Centre until it was temporarily cancelled with the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic.

"Many people say, 'I have two left feet, I can't dance.' So, I tell them, if you can walk, you can dance. We're not performing, we're there to have fun, to enjoy the music, and enjoy each other's company."

She says she teaches Israeli dance the way she learns it. She begins by watching a video of a dance; then she breaks down the dance into names—combinations or series of steps with names. For example, rather than instructing "step with your right to the right, then step left over right..." she simply tells students to do an "open *mayim* (water)"—the grapevine part of the "Hora."

"So, my students learn the vocabulary, and once you break it down into step names, it's much easier to learn the dance."

Again, it comes back to teaching through song. "When you hear the song, it makes sense in context. And once you learn the dance vocabulary, muscle memory comes in."

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song.

"I learned a lot about muscle memory from dancing," she continues. "Sometimes, we haven't done a dance for a while, and we'll start dancing and then I'll say, 'Wait, that doesn't feel right. My body's saying that's the wrong step.'"

"We all have muscle memory," Gina says. "Your body relates to the music, a connection to a particular song. Your body knows what it's supposed to be doing with that song."

Gina learned Israeli dance herself from two local instructors, at dance festivals, and on YouTube.

"And I finger dance," she says. When she was first learning, her instructor made recorded musical tapes that students could purchase for practising the dance at home.

"I'd play the tape in my car on the way home and I'd finger dance on the steering wheel so I wouldn't forget the dance. That's how I learn dances by watching; I learn them on my fingers first and transfer them to my feet later."

Spiritual Life

Synagogue is a big part of Gina's life, and the pandemic has resulted in a bit of a spiritual void for her.

"I miss going to *shul*, she says. "I haven't really been doing the online stuff. For me, it's about being there, the feeling of being in the *shul*." Gina's oldest granddaughter, Emmy, often joined her before in-person services were cancelled. "She loves coming to *shul* with me and often asks, 'Bubby, when are we going to *shul* again?' I go as often as I can, and I love taking her with me."

"I'm very spiritual," Gina says. "I love the feeling I get when I'm in *shul*, and I love the ritual. It definitely speaks to me."

Family and Other Devotions

Gina and husband Bernie, a geneticist, recently celebrated 40 years of marriage. Their three children all live in Winnipeg. "We are so lucky that our kids want to stay in Winnipeg," she says. Their eldest son, Aaron, is a manager at one of the Vision stores and is in two different bands, Dirty Catfish Brass Band and The Solutions. Their daughter, Cindy, is a chartered professional accountant with two daughters of her own: Emmy (5) and Lyla (nearly 2). Their younger son, Danny, studied sound design for visual media at Vancouver Film School and now works in location and post-production sound.

Other interests are golf, baking, yoga, aerobics, Zumba, and working with a personal trainer. Recently, Gina also started gardening and says she has grown to love it.

"Last summer, Emmy would come over almost every day to pick strawberries. I love those types of moments." This year, Gina is growing tomatoes, cucumbers, dill, strawberries, chives, leeks, basil, oregano, parsley, and lettuce, in addition to flowers. "It's very gratifying," says Gina, who went to Talmud Torah and Joseph Wolinsky, and has been to Israel—her second home—four times.

"I remember landing in Israel the first time, and I felt like I was home. I'd never been there, but it felt like home," she says.

"You're not a minority anymore," she continues. "It was so comfortable being Jewish in Israel."

With her various activities and busy family life, Gina says her life is very full. "I'm lucky," she says. "I have a very blessed life." ■

MEMBER NEWS

Member News and Life-Cycle Events

SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

AUGUST

Debi Bass, Carlos Benesdra, Susan Buchwald, Sandra Collerman, Aubrey Himelstein, Gustavo Lecman, Kathy Pinx, Marvin Shane

SEPTEMBER

Julius Anang, Jessica Cogan, Susan Cohen, Walter Ganetsky, Susan Goldstein, Norman Yusim

OCTOBER

James Chess, David Hoult, David Lerner, Marla Levene, Maylene Ludwig, Roslind Olin, Joel Samphir, Judy Schnoor, Samuel Searle, Tammy Singer, Norman Wolk

NOVEMBER

Leah Craven, Isabel Davis, Heather Gillman, Irene Marantz, Vivian Schutt, Shaaron Weinstein

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

AUGUST

Sharna and Ivor Berman (50); Harriet and Jack Cipilinski (45); Shawna and Allen Cogan (25); Debby and Brian Hirsch (40); Cheryl and Perry Moreau (30); Roslyn and Mickey Rosenberg (55); Janis and Ronald Silver (40)

SEPTEMBER

Debra and Lloyd Baker (30); Elaine and Herbert Grosney (55); Judy and Bill Mahon (30); Shery Singer and Kevin Segall (20)

OCTOBER

Phyllis and Benny Hochman (50); Carol and Leslie Litman (50); Susan and Arnold Permut (45); Glory and Robert Pudavick (45); Andrea Roitman and Hernan Popper (25)

NOVEMBER

Cynthia Aizenberg and Javier Gurfinkel (20)

IN MEMORIAM

Cheryl Lazar

Molly Shawna Sparber

Abe Simkin

Fritzi Telpner

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Sometimes, a novel concept just needs a kickstart and it takes off. An event or circumstance, perhaps unexpected, 'unprecedented,' launches the idea soaring out of the ballpark.

Like a global pandemic, for example. Take a new 3D-tour technology which is the *magnum opus* of Gryd, a national startup targeting the real estate industry. Gryd was one of the first companies in Canada to bring this technology into Canada and has even won a few innovation awards for utilizing it. But while the technology was officially adopted in 2016, it didn't catch on right away.

"It's a bit of a tricky concept, so there was a learning curve for both property managers and consumers," says Josh Glow who runs Gryd.

But the 3D-tour technology loomed large when the Coronavirus pandemic rocked the world earlier this year, Josh says. Gryd received an influx of orders for the product, which allows prospective tenants to virtually tour an office space or apartment available for lease or rent, from home. He offers two explanations for the uptick:

"Our client base, large property managers across Canada (and some in the US), didn't want people (even potential tenants) coming in and out of buildings with units for rent or lease, because it posed a risk to existing tenants and caretakers. More traffic equals more risk."

Plus, some property managers struggled to fill vacant suites during quarantine in Manitoba. Consumers were nervous about entering a rental unit and were demanding more immersive marketing for the suites before they actually visited them.

"Providing a potential tenant with an immersive marketing experience helps limit physical building tours to

Providing an immersive marketing experience helps limit physical building tours to the most interested individuals.

the most interested individuals," Josh explains. "Property managers wanted potential tenants to be qualified to a certain point before they came down to the unit in person. "So, we started shooting a lot of these 3D tours," he says, "and it allowed potential tenants to walk through apartments virtually." If they made it past that step and were still interested in the unit, they could come down to see it in person.

"It eliminated a large percentage of the traffic flowing in and out of a building but not actually renting," he explains, "and it saved administrative time, and decreased health and safety concerns."

Three Branches of Gryd

The Winnipeg company operates a trifecta of divisions under the Gryd name. The first is the specialized marketing agency catering to the national property management industry, with a team of Winnipeg employees facilitating media and marketing products and services for clients. "We collaborate with clients to provide marketing innovation using new and unique product mixes for the real estate sector," says Josh.

Gryd works with a partner network of more than 50 contract media and marketing professionals, operating in every city across Canada who support the 3D-tour technology, which is universal so works on any device. "We send someone into a space to 3D



Josh Glow

scan," Josh says; once complete, virtual interior designers can load virtual furniture into the space, making it look more attractive and livable to potential tenants.

"Many of the spaces we scan are empty, there's no furniture," he says, "so they don't sell. It can be expensive for a property manager to hold the space back from being rented, find an interior designer to stage the unit, rent furniture, hire a crew to move everything in, and then schedule a photographer to photograph it—all in hopes of finding a new tenant."

By the time all that's done, the unit may have sat vacant for an entire month; add to that the risk of damage to the space each time another person (interior designer, stager, mover) walks through the door, not to mention extra costs associated with all the traffic moving through (cleaners, security staff).

Once a space has been scanned (which takes about an hour), an interior designer can employ another technology within the suite of Gryd products, "augmented reality" or virtual staging, to furnish the space with virtual furniture.

"It's all about an immersive experience for the consumer."



Photo: Evan Swigart

Kosher Catering Service

Congregation Etz Chayim Catering is open for business, still offering a variety of Kosher takeout options such as Shabbat dinners and weekly specials. We also still cater home events, office meetings, shiva meals, and more. Let us know how we can help you: (204) 589-6305.



Virtually staged space



3D tour technology

The Truth About 3D-Tour Technology

Josh says property management has traditionally been a very old-school industry. "Traditionally, the industry has lagged in its marketing work, specifically related to visuals."

He says we live in an age where consumers demand more information, and they expect it to be the truth. "For so long, parts of marketing were about who can stretch the truth furthest from the consumer." He says it was the photography that could make it tricky. "You can hide cracks and make a room look bigger with tricky photography angles," Josh says. "But a 3D tour is a 3D tour. The user can walk through a space as they wish; they can zoom in or measure something. It gives the consumer a lot of tools to do their own exploring and really understand what they are looking at."

Apartment Web Search Platform

The second division of Gryd is an independent web search platform where property managers can list apartments for rent. "Think of it as Kijiji for apartments," Josh says. More of a startup than the first part, he says this division of Gryd has a lot of potential. "And it's been fun interacting with tenancy consumers that are looking for their next home," he adds.

Start-up + Real Estate + Sustainability

The third branch of Gryd is a property-management tech start-up merged with an environmentally sustainable business, says Josh. "I've been looking for a way to merge the start-up world with the real estate world with environmental sustainability. All three of my passions are coming together for this one, so I'm very excited about it."

This division of Gryd has not officially launched yet, so Josh is reluctant to divulge too many details prematurely. But, he says, "it's going to be a marketplace that Canada has never seen before."

Josh says a team of nine coders were busy working on the product at time of writing, as well as designers and project managers. A round of investment had been raised for the product, which Gryd planned to beta launch in Winnipeg in the fall. (*Beta launch* is a controlled release of a completed product to be tested and fine-tuned for general market availability, explains Josh).

The majority of Gryd's marketing suite has developed through service-sharing agreements with strategic partnerships globally; the company takes existing technologies and adapts or refines them for the property management market. Gryd has its own development team, however, and does some in-house development as well.

The Jewish Life

A graduate of Gray Academy of Jewish Education, Josh says his school experience helped shape him as an adult Jew. "It gave me a foundation to begin to forge my own path within Judaism. It helps to know all levels of Judaism. This will guide me to where I fit in on that spectrum. Everybody has a different level of observance," says Josh, who also has a Bachelor of Commerce degree.

He admits to being a bit unsure about where he does fit in on that spectrum. "I identify as a Jew, obviously, and I have attachment to Israel and to Etz Chayim. And I see value in going to *shul* and observance," says Josh, who participated in junior congregation at Etz Chayim as a kid, later worked as a volunteer JC leader during High Holidays, and attended BB camp for almost a decade, first as a camper and later as staff. "It was a good time," he says.

Always Moving

Josh enjoys spending time with his family—mom Leslie Singer, Dad Sheldon Glow, sister Sari, dog Andi, and grandparents Myrna and Herb Singer and Freda Glow—particularly at the family cabin in Gimli. Family trips were generally ski holidays, he says.

"I think that's partly because I can't sit still," he laughs; his parents chose holidays that could keep him busy. He describes his ski-holiday schedule: "The chairlift would open at eight, and I'd be waiting in line." When it closed for the night at 7 PM, Josh would hike with a group of others to toboggan down the ski hills until 10 PM. "I was going more than a full-time job," he says, mentioning an anecdote his mom enjoys sharing: visiting Josh's kindergarten class once upon a time, Leslie was surprised to discover her son's chair missing. "It was because I never actually sat on it, so they took it away," he laughs, adding "I have a standing desk today, I'm standing now to talk to you. I always like to be moving." ■



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