

The Jewish VOICE

Informing and Connecting Jews in El Paso-Las Cruces

Elul 5780/Tishrei 5781
September 2020

Happy New Year!



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Up Close: Nathan Stevens

This year's winner of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso's Bernard and Florence Schoichet Leadership Award is Nathan Stevens. He comes from a family of leaders: his parents, Scott and Bonny Stevens, were honored in the November issue of *The Jewish Voice* "Up Close" feature for their Jewish community leadership and volunteer work.

As is the tradition for this award, Nathan's selection was announced at the Federation's 2020 Annual Meeting – but there was nothing traditional about this year. Instead of accepting the award from a podium, Nathan spoke via Zoom from his living room, surrounded by his three sons – Jonathan, Mathew, and Jacob – and wife Letty, an active volunteer who helps Nathan carry out his ideas and plans. On September 19, the couple will celebrate their 16th wedding anniversary.

Just as Nathan learned from his family, he and Letty have become role models for their boys about the importance of participating in their Jewish community. "Jonathan is already looking forward to MSTY (Temple Mount Sinai's youth group) and hopes to make a difference in his community," Nathan says. "And the other day, Jacob said 'I miss Temple – I want to go!'"

Nathan's early years were spent in Bitburg, Germany, and El Paso as the Army took his father to both cities. In El Paso, he and his older brother, Joshua, grew up with six cousins, all grandchildren of Arthur and Rhoberta Leeser.

A couple of years after graduating from Coronado High School, he began washing cars at his Uncle Oscar's Hyundai car dealership. Nineteen years later, he still works for Oscar Leeser, but he has moved up to a managerial role in the dealer's large used car department.

Letty grew up Catholic but when it came time for the kids to go to Sunday School, they joined Temple Mount Sinai. The experience inspired them to get involved. "It was so different from when I grew up. I had good memories of Sunday School, with lots of activities," he recalls. "So I went to the people at Temple and asked what can I do to be help out."

He wanted to encourage connections that went beyond the building and he started a parents' group to get together while their children were in class. In 2017, he volunteered at the Sunday School's Chanukah festival fundraiser and in 2018 and 2019, he got the Horeem parents group to take over the planning and volunteering.

Hearing about fun sleepovers at Temple from the past, he reintroduced the event. "We had 45 Jewish kids at the last one," he says, "and we were glad to welcome people from other congregations," he says.

He's also started a family cooking class at Temple. "When families gather, they're usually around a plate of food," he laughs.

Temple Mount Sinai is putting Nathan's energy to good use: he's now the board's vice president for programs. Among his program ideas was the popular "Sip and Paint" series this summer with Rachel Eckman. "It's easier to say let's meet somewhere, let's do something, but now we have to hop on a computer to get together," he says. "With the pandemic, we're trying our best to stay involved and active. We can do this – and we'll work to keep people engaged."

Cindy Graff Cohen
Editor, *The Jewish Voice*



What do you value most in your friends?

Being genuine. Someone who is truly honest and comfortable with who they are makes it more comfortable being who I am.

What might we be surprised to learn about one of your interests or hobbies?

I really enjoy working with my hands and making things with the boys. I have (with help) made a bed, toy chest and an outdoor kitchen.

You like to camp or stay in an RV with your family. What's the first place you'll go when it's completely safe to travel again?

We can't wait! Our family has planned an extra-long road trip to see Mount Rushmore and Yellowstone Park for the first time. We should cover approximately 2,700 miles through five states. We intend to camp, hike, fish and enjoy nature.

Describe your favorite Rosh Hashanah memory.

I always remember the family dinners. Everyone came. It was like a Thanksgiving meal but you had to dress up.

You recently won the Schoichet Young Leadership Award. Why did you decide to take on leadership roles in the Jewish community?

It wasn't so much a decision as much as a result of inspiration. There was such a presence of involvement around me from my peers, role models and pillars of our community that it sparked me.

What would you say to encourage others to get involved with Jewish life in Greater El Paso?

I would tell someone that there is something out there for you. No matter how you choose to practice Judaism, there are many varied and meaningful ways to participate.

What's the best thing about being part of our Jewish community?

Connection and community. We all start with that one common thread, but when you start getting to know the people of our community you can appreciate that such different people can come together.

Birthplace: Bitburg, Germany

Wife: Letty Stevens

Children: Jonathan, 13; Mathew, 11; Jacob, 6

Parents: Scott and Bonny Stevens

Grandparents: Arthur and Rhoberta Leeser and Clyde and Molly Stevens

News from the Top: Pacesetters learn online

The Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso honored the Pacesetters this summer, inviting these cornerstone Annual Campaign supporters to an exceptional online program in late July. Co-chairs Robin Furman and Wendy Lanski kicked off the event and introduced two important leaders to share their views from the top: Eric Fingerhut, the new president of Jewish Federations of North America, and Dr. Richard Lange, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center president and dean of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine.

In a wide-ranging discussion and question-and-answer session facilitated by Robert French, JFED executive director, the event tackled issues surrounding the raging COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Fingerhut, who spoke from his home in Washington, D.C., brought a combination of perspectives. A former Ohio state senator and U.S. Representative with a

law degree from Stanford, he came to JFNA last year from Hillel International where he served as president and CEO.

Fingerhut shared the Federation system's response to the pandemic. Collectively, the JFNA's 146 Federations raised over \$175 million in emergency funds in the first three months of the crisis to support the unprecedented needs of our communities and Jewish communities around the world.

JFNA led the effort to include non-profits in the federal CARES Act which resulted in Paycheck Protection Program loans/grants to synagogues, JCCs, camps, schools and more, and we organized national funders to create even more funding resources for our struggling institutions. They have convened all the key organizations of Jewish life into an Emergency Pandemic Coalition that is working together on finding support, exchanging best practices, and now providing reopening support. JFNA purchased Personal Protective Equipment for agencies that cannot get it and supplied all manner of emergency relief.

Fingerhut also reflected on JFNA's response to the El Paso shooting last

year. Emergency response teams were deployed to El Paso and assisted victims and their families in crisis and grief counseling.

This work nationally and locally could not be done without the support of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso and emphasizes the importance of our local Federations.

"We were able to step up immediately and lead the communal response because

we were already there, organized, supporting our communities, year in and year out." Fingerhut described, "You can't create community in the middle of a crisis, but rather you must build, nurture and maintain community at all times. That is why we do what we do, and why we need

support."

Dr. Richard Lange joined the event from his office in El Paso to provide a detailed report on COVID infection in El Paso. He discussed local statistics, treatment plans, and vaccine trials. "Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso has partnered with our hospital partners to provide state-of-the art information and treatment, in addition to performing research," he emphasized. Dr. Lange also stressed the importance of getting a regular flu shot in the coming months.

Monica Kimball, JFED president,



concluded the event from her home in Las Cruces and offered calming words of unity, purpose, and the power of the collective, especially in these uncertain times.

*Dori Fenenbock
Small Federations Chair,
Executive Committee of the JFNA
President, 2014-16,
Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso*



Eric Fingerhut



Dr. Richard Lange



Humble Donut Co. created a special treat for the online Pacesetters to enjoy while listening to the two speakers

Todah Rabah to Our Volunteers

Café Europa Speakers

Gillian Baudo, Monika Kimball, Rabbi Bery Schumkler

Call Session Volunteers

Stephanie Calvo, Loree Furman, Debra Kanof, Harriet Roth

On-Call Volunteers

Haidi Appel, Michelle Blumenfeld, Aydyn Bush, Audrey Lavi, Noel Hollowell-Small, Camila Viana, Aaron Weislow

Pacesetters Update

Speakers: Eric Fingerhut and Dr. Richard Lange
Chairs: Robin Furman and Wendy Lanski

J-Scouts Summer Programming Task Force and Volunteers

Chair: Heidi Granger

Andrew Cabrera, Mindy Escobar-Leanse, Sandy Garza, Suzie Gibson, Sarah Heller-Peña, Noel Hollowell-Small, Jeanne Lipson, Riley Miner, Chenchie Schumkler, Nathan Stevens, Janet Wechter Emily Yehezkel, Rabbi Ben Zeidman

Borderland's Café Europa

11:30 a.m. Wednesday
Call-in and Lunch for Seniors 65+



Bob Kimball

September 16 -
"Sweet as Honey: The Inside Story of the Birds and the Bees"
with beekeeper Bob Kimball

September 30 -
"Does Size Matter?
Exploring the Symbolism of Sukkot"
with Rabbi Stephen Leon



Rabbi Steven Leon

Call-in: 346-248-7799

Zoom: ID 818 9321 5592

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The Jewish VOICE

A publication of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso

The Jewish Voice of El Paso, published ten times a year, is dedicated to informing, educating, and uniting the Jewish community by providing news items of local, national, Israeli and international concern.

The Jewish Voice will consider for publication any materials submitted that support the mission of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso and have relevance and appeal to the El Paso Jewish community. Articles are subject to editing at the editor's discretion and are subject to space limitations. Letters cannot be longer than 150 words and articles must be kept to a maximum of 300 words. Please email to thevoice@jfedelpaso.org

Opinions are those of individual writers and not necessarily those of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso. The Jewish Voice is not responsible for the kashrut of any product or eating establishment advertised herein.

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This year, the Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso marks its 18th year, an appropriate milestone for an entity designed to add life to the community it serves. Just as the numbered letters in chai add up to “living,” the dollars in the Foundation add up to our community’s future.

I know little to nothing about investments, and do not care to learn. Yet I do know the power of Ben Franklin’s penny saved, patience, and people pooling their resources for the common good. That’s the beauty of community

foundations: the multiplier effect of time and volume.

That effect is why years ago I established my own little fund to benefit animals at the El Paso Community Foundation. Today its interest is added in with income from other local funds for animals. I have the reward of knowing that, in a small way, I am helping more dogs, cats and other creatures get fed, healed, rescued, and protected.

This summer I decided it was chai – I mean high – time to invest in something else close to my heart: our unique Jewish community. While I contribute to the Federation’s annual campaign, I wanted to leave a contribution that would last beyond one year. The answer was as close as our Jewish Community Foundation.

After reading an article about others

in our community in The Jewish Voice who had established a fund, I called Robert French, Executive Director of both the Federation and the Foundation, to see how it works. Sue Bendalin, Director of Philanthropy (who is so much more than that to all of us), mailed me a two-page form to sign and include with my check. After Cliff Eisenberg, President of the Foundation, signed it, I had an official fund in the Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso.

Donors get to pick their fund’s name and purpose. The income of the Cindy Graff and Burton Cohen Fund is designated for Temple Mount Sinai. The name may sound cumbersome, but it comes from a running joke with Burton.

I’ve always been more comfortable

with my maiden name than without it. (I could share my “Handmaid’s Tale” name experience with author Margaret Atwood, but that’s another story.)

Burton said he didn’t want any part of this compound name thing. “If you say Burton and Cindy Graff Cohen,” he would say, “it sounds like I’m a Graff Cohen and I’m not.” Problem solved: my name would go first when we had to write something with both of our names.

This simple gift to Temple Mount Sinai through the Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso is comforting to me. I think Burton would approve of it and that is rewarding, as is knowing that in a small way I am helping the future of our Jewish community and my beloved synagogue. To life!

Cindy Graff Cohen

Congrats to Scholarship Winners



We are pleased to announce that the winners of the Beatrice L. Weisz Memorial Scholarship for 2020 are Emily Zenner and Julian Cohen.

Emily is the daughter of Elisa Kahn and the granddaughter of Dr. Stuart and Frances Kahn. She graduated from Coronado High School and will be attending Yale University in the fall.

Julian is the son of Debra and Alan Cohen and the grandson of Ken and Sandra

Levine. He graduated from Silva Health Magnet School and will be attending Texas Tech University.

The Beatrice L. Weisz Memorial Scholarship Fund was established in July of 2001, it was the wish of Ms. Weisz that proceeds from the fund would be given to a needy and worthy Jewish college student to enable him or her to pursue his or her studies. Applications for the 2021 Bea Weisz Scholarship Fund will be announced in early 2021.



Every summer has a story

“Every summer has a story”... was the tagline that got me interested in J-Scouts. My kids’ summer camp was closed for the summer and I knew I had to think quickly of ideas to keep them engaged. Fortunately, from July 12 to 31, the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso (JFED) teamed up with various local organizations – Chabad Las Cruces, The Cherry

Hill School, Congregation B’nai Zion, J-Center for Early Learning, PJ Library and Temple Mount Sinai – to provide an opportunity to motivate kids, like my own, in our community to still participate in summer camp-like activities.

J-Scouts provided the foundation with resources, the motivation and outlet for exploring different subjects

over a course of a month. With 13 badge options, including make your own badge, kids got to pick five badges or more to complete three projects each. While there were Zoom class options, most badges could be done offline and open to each kid doing it in their own way. Once the five badges were completed, each kid got a \$30 Barnes and Noble gift card, as well as a tie dye kit and shirt.

Completing the badges became a fun ongoing thing in my house. Using the badge tracker, I was able to keep track and plan new projects. When I was lost on what to do next, I could reach out to the JFED or look at the Jewish Federation resource page to find inspiration. Through J-Scouts, we studied both depths of the ocean - we learned that jellyfish have no brains, heart or blood —and outer space. NASA just launched its first solar powered flight attempt on another planet to arrive on Mars Spring 2021 on The Perseverance Rover, and we built a model of it out of marshmallows.

We watched live animal cams at the aquarium/zoo, found out there are African Penguins that don’t like

to swim when they molt their feathers in the summer. We virtually visited museums and checked out the first desktop calculator made out of wood and compared it to calculators of today. We also became a little more aware of the types of birds in our neighborhood and using upcycled materials: every day became an adventure of new discoveries.

In the beginning we had no intention of completing all 13 badges, but my son, Derrick, age six, would beg every day to do projects to complete his badges. With my daughter, Evelyn, age two, it was a bit trickier finding engaging projects, but she still managed to get seven badges.

We are most proud of participating in the El Paso Holocaust Museum’s Tour de Tolerance as a family, watching my son teach Shabbat songs to his younger sister and recording Shabbat prayers to share with the community. This was all done through the motivation of J-Scouts, volunteers, teens and the leadership of JFED and not allowing this unprecedented time to spoil our summertime fun.

Noel Hollowell Small



Winner of the iPad raffle for completing the Federation’s “Community Counts” Demographic Survey: Lauren Fenenbock!

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JCEL welcomes Judaics teacher

Learning about Jewish holidays, traditions and values is a focus for Judaics instruction this year at the J Center for Early Learning. Mindy Escobar-Leanse will be joining The J as a Judaics specialist. Mindy has relocated to her hometown of El Paso after spending 13 years in New York City. She has a degree from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and a passion for puppetry!

One of the first holidays she will teach about is Rosh Hashanah where she will focus on setting goals, thinking about positive actions, gratitude, and celebrations. She plans to share how the symbols of

apples and honey help us remember to bring in a sweet and healthy new year. She will read stories from our collection of PJ Library books to help children understand the significance of the holiday. The children will also be playing a game where they are the bees gathering honey to bring to our collective beehive (Dance of the Bees) and will make Shofars and learn about other instruments that are made from animals.

We are working with nationally known consultant Liz Paige to embed Jewish values and instruction about holidays into our preschool curriculum.

She holds three master's degrees, including one in Jewish Educational Leadership, and lives in Salt Lake City Utah where she is the Director of Ethics and Cultures at the McGillis School.

Our teachers were able to spend a complete afternoon working virtually with Liz to help them begin to think

and discuss how they can support the instruction of values and holidays in their own classrooms. All of us at The J look forward to an exciting year of experiences guided by these very talented people.

*Meg Birks
Head of School
J Center for Early Learning*



The Cherry Hill School opens its first academic year! The staff gathers outside the school to welcome the first class of first graders on an educational journey that “begins with a natural curiosity of the world around us and a desire to explore, discover, and create with imagination and play.” From left to right: Amanda Martin, office assistant and art teacher; Sandy Garza, head of school curriculum; Rachel Curtin, music teacher; Suzie Gibson, head of school administration; Austin Curtin, lead teacher - first grade; Mindy Leanse-science teacher, Judaics and Shabbat.

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Most of us wonder how we can help those less fortunate than we are during this devastating pandemic. Isaac Bencomo, a member of our Jewish community and the Federation's ElPasoConnect group, is putting his Jewish values to work by helping an especially vulnerable population: refugees stranded on our Border.

Isaac is a nurse practitioner who also works for GRM (Global Response Management), an NGO providing emergency medical care in high-risk, low-resource areas. Part of each

month, he's working at the Children's Hospital in San Antonio. The rest of the time he is on the border, helping to protect people hoping to immigrate from the coronavirus.

He recently moved to San Antonio to be closer to the GRM clinic in Matamoros serving 2,600 asylum seekers. "We work hard to implement prevention strategies: masks, handwashing, and six feet of social distance," he says. He also helps build mobile medical units, negotiate shipments of medical equipment across the border, and conduct needs assessments for Mexico's National Institute of Immigration.

Isaac says he can relate to being a migrant. "My experience of it was, I guess, from a place of privilege," reads a quote from him in a Newsweek article. "I can understand what it is to immigrate, to want to immigrate to a country with better opportunities. The children we're treating here could very well have been me."

Journey to Judaism

Born in Juarez in 1993, Isaac crossed

the Border daily to attend Catholic schools in El Paso. His father, an agricultural engineer, and his mother, a physician, wanted him to go to school in El Paso, but as a Mexican national, Isaac could not attend a public school. He went on to earn his B.S. in nursing at UTEP and his Master's as a Nurse Practitioner specializing in pediatrics.

His personal and professional life took an important turn when he began working at the Providence Hospital's pediatric emergency room with Dr. Steven Lanski, a former board member

On a medical level, Dr. Lanski inspired him toward the work that he's doing today, work that has led to important learning opportunities. Last fall he was one of four delegates representing Mexico at the global British Council meetings in Cambridge and London. They worked with members of Parliament on policy studies in health care.

His mentor also inspired him spiritually. Although his father was Jewish, Isaac says he was not brought up Jewish. He returned to his father's faith as a result of his friendship with Dr. Lanski. "Meeting him led to my first encounters to Jewish life," he adds.

Those encounters led to getting to know more Jewish people and studying Judaism with Rabbi Stephen Leon. He joined Temple Mount Sinai and enjoyed being with Jewish peers in their 20s, 30s, and 40s through ElPasoConnect get-togethers.

While the community misses him, Isaac's job brought him here in June to work in Juarez – and he says he expects to visit regularly: his sister Daphne attends UTEP.

*Cindy Graff Cohen
Editor, The Jewish Voice*



with the Jewish Federation and current board president for The Cherry Hill School. "I have so much admiration for him," Isaac says. "He was my mentor and like a second father to me."

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Rabbi Bery Schmukler

We are never really alone

This year as we prepare for High Holidays, there is a sense of sadness and disappointment. Many will be forced to celebrate the holidays alone without friends, family members or guests. This will mean going through the High Holidays all alone in the quietness and stillness of their home.

While it is certainly the right thing to do at this time, to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, it is still hard to imagine such a service being joyous or moving in any meaningful way.

For so many of us the month of Tishrei is an annual highlight, full of inspiring services and dinners with family and friends, plus an uplifting week enjoying the Mitzvah of a Sukkah. In the current

situation some of us will relive all this in our minds as we sit all alone thinking about the festivities of past years. But, perhaps a bit of perspective can empower us to make this year's circumstances meaningful and moving, and allow us to reclaim some of the inner joy that is available to us at this time.

For that, I turn to the climactic moment of Yom Kippur. Back in Temple times, the high priest would spend a full week in preparation for his Yom Kippur service in the holy temple and then spend the entire day of Yom Kippur itself together with his fellow priests in song and prayer. But the pinnacle of Yom Kippur was when he removed his golden ornaments and entered the Holy of Holies. All alone, he stood dressed in his simple linen garments offering a silent prayer in a private moment with G-d.

The liturgy of Yom Kippur describes the radiant and joyous glow emanating from the face of the high priest as he exited

from the Holy of Holies. It was at that point that the Jewish people knew the blessings of the coming year had been sealed for good. This joy reverberated throughout the land of Israel. It is so striking that it was that single lonely moment in the Holy of Holies that provided that joyous connection and feeling of deep closeness to G-d.

Perhaps as we are compelled this year to celebrate the High Holidays in a manner that is so similar to the lonely state of the high priest, we are also given the opportunity to feel that same joy and closeness he felt — not a joy from being surrounded by friends and family, but an inner joy that emanates from the feeling of a deep bond and personal connection to G-d.

The Midrash states: now that we no longer have the holy temple, our homes are like a miniature temple. Indeed, the Holy of Holies was about the size of an average dining room. This year as we

pray in our own mini-temple, we are empowered to appreciate that we are experiencing a high priest moment in the presence of G-d himself — focused, undistracted and connected. Certainly, this has the power to awaken an inner sense of joy and appreciation for the gift of this relationship.

The Torah's message is clear: We are never truly alone as G-d is always with us. This Tishrai, as we pray, fast and then sit in a Sukkah, may an inner joy fill our hearts as we celebrate in our personal holy of holies in the presence of G-d. Enjoy the moment - your heavenly guest will enjoy it as well.

This High Holiday season, Chabad of Las Cruces will be holding short, inspirational outdoor services with masks and social distancing. More info at www.chabadlc.org

*Rabbi Bery Schmukler
Chabad of Las Cruces*



Rabbi Yisrael Greenberg

How Covid changed us for the better

The month of Elul is the final month of the year and a time to review our books. But unlike December when we need to hire an accountant to review our financial books, Elul is a time for each individual to review his or her personal behavior books.

We have twenty-nine days to review the past twelve months, and approximately six of these past months have been vastly different from anything we have experienced and our review is going to reflect that in a big way. The long months of social distancing, with limited opportunities to gather in synagogues to pray and celebrate together, have certainly taken their toll, but I have come to notice a silver lining in all of this.

Maimonides writes that humanity is a social species. On a very basic level this describes the fact that society is set up in a way that one cannot survive without benefitting from the contributions of many others. We get bread from the baker, meat from the butcher and produce from the farmer. Medicine is administered by doctors, security is managed by the police force and highways and roads didn't just get there on their own.

Beyond that we are clustered together

as families, communities, cities and nations. Everyone belongs to a group and that's the way it has been since the dawn of creation. There is another type of social outlet which has become more available and popular fairly recently. Traveling around the world, seeing exquisite sights and experiencing different cultures is a novelty of our times. Today taking a vacation to far away exotic locations is no longer exotic, and for many is a routine part of life.

While this type of social engagement is wonderful, it comes with its downside. There is a tendency to see the "greener grass" in other places, become disappointed and disenfranchised with our hometown institutions and invest charity money in long distant causes.

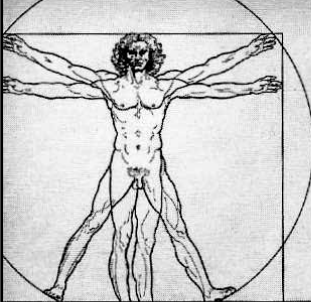
Torah teaches us that investing in local institutions takes precedence over all else.

When COVID reached our shores and everything changed, we all became

anchored locally in ways we've rarely experienced before. Being stuck at home knowing that there is a local community infrastructure we can depend on, emphasizes the need to "water our own grass" first.

As we enter the new year let us focus on nurturing and growing our local community and may we merit a good, healthy and sweet new year. Shana Tova!

*Rabbi Yisrael Greenberg
Chabad Lubavitch*



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Rabbi Scott Rosenberg

Revolving wheel of life: How quickly it turns

Rabbi Israel Ibn Al Nakawa lived in Toledo, Spain, in the 14th century. His favorite Talmudic phrase was: “There is a wheel that revolves in the world” (B. Shabbat 151b). Sadly, Rabbi Israel was familiar with the revolving wheel of human fortune. Earlier in the 14th century the Jews of his province were economically prosperous, culturally creative, and relatively free to pursue their faith with dignity. When the King, Don

Pedro, died and was succeeded by his eleven-year-old brother, the situation of the Jews deteriorated rapidly.

We, too, know how quickly this wheel can turn. These past months, Covid19 has challenged all of society and both our personal lives and our communal life have been impacted.

As the Hebrew month of Elul begins, we blow the shofar each morning as part of our services. According to our tradition, the shofar blasts that we hear symbolize the revolving wheel of our life. The joyous tekiah is followed by shevarim (literally broken pieces) and then teruah the sound of alarm, a signal we are no longer at peace - joy yields to brokenness and alarm.

This lesson is familiar to many of us. But this year I hope we can deepen our appreciation of the Jewish response by learning from Rabbi Israel Ibn Al Nakawa. What can Rabbi Israel teach us about living in such a world? On the edge of the abyss, with the present unfavorable and the future uncertain, what did he do? He wrote a guide for Jewish living.

The only surviving manuscript of that book is at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Rabbi Israel wrote about how to choose a mate and about marital responsibility. He wrote of the importance of maintaining honesty in business and of keeping the confidence of a friend. He wrote of morning and afternoon and evening

prayers and how to observe Sabbaths and holidays.

The wheel had turned, but Rabbi Israel refused to yield to the chaos. He refused to conclude: “nothing matters.” Instead, he turned to the core values of his faith and he wrote a book to guide his own and succeeding generations.

In the midst of shevarim (brokenness) and teruah (alarm) he responded as does our shofar this season, with a tekiah gedolah, a resounding reassertion of value, order and hope. May this be our response to the turmoil of our world and the brokenness of our lives.

Rabbi Scott Rosenberg
Congregation Bnai Zion



Rabbi Ben Zeidman

A different approach to High Holy Days this year

The High Holy Days are an annual confrontation with our own mortality. Something we may hardly “need” this

particular year. And yet, here they come regardless.

The words of Unetaneh Tokef ring a little differently this year. Though, perhaps, they sound a bit more like they did for generations past – generations who confronted death in physical proximity a lot more often than do we:

On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed - how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who in good time, and who by an untimely death, who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague... But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severity of the decree. (Attributed to Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, 11th century).

These words scare many of us into thinking that we hold on to life as if it were a thin thread, that we are less significant in the context of the cosmos than we may wish, that we are living small lives in a seemingly indifferent world. But these words mean exactly the opposite. They remind us that while the coming year may bring good and bad, what we do in the meantime matters.

This year of all years the Holy Days call to us. We have been confronting our mortality and the High Holy Days make us realize: We matter. What we do matters. Who we are to one another matters. How we behave matters. Our imperfections

challenge us, but repentance, self-correction, brings us closer to a world of kindness, decency, and compassion.

Though we “come from dust and return to dust,” and though we are “like a passing shadow and a vanishing cloud” in the eyes of the Eternal One, those words in the next paragraph of Unetaneh Tokef are meant to reassure us. Who are we who matter so much that the One whose vision is Eternal awaits our repentance?! Our lives are more than just skating by from year to year, clinging to whatever scrap of health we have while drifting uncaring through our days. Instead, we “number our days” (Psalm 90:12), recognizing that our lives are not weighed by length, but by how we live every moment.

The New Year approaches, the Day of Atonement follows, and the Festival of Sukkot comes quickly afterwards. However long each of us may have in this world, the holidays remind us to consider not “How will I die?” but “How will I live?”

Rabbi Ben Zeidman
Temple Mount Sinai

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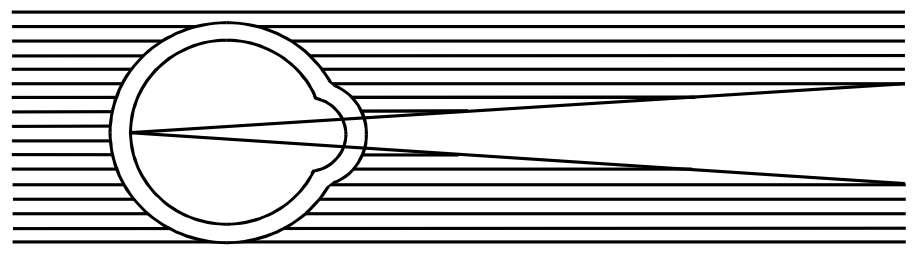
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Shofar Services On The Mountain Congregation B'nai Zion

12 Noon, Sunday, Sept. 20

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, the community is invited to gather in the parking lot at 805 Cherry Hill Lane in their cars and listen to the sounds of the Shofar



7:30 p.m., Monday, Sept. 28

To conclude the Day of Atonement, Congregation B'nai Zion and Temple Mount Sinai welcome all to the 805 Cherry Hill parking lot for the Tekiah Gedola, the Shofar blast that ends Yom Kippur.



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To check in with every Jewish community member in our files

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with **ElPasoConnect** (for those of us in our 20s/30s/40s)

LEARNED

about COVID-19 from Dr. Richard Lange, TTUHC President

LAUGHED with comedian Elon Gold
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