

# SHORESH

שורש

Congregation Etz Chayim  
Community News

SPRING 2023

אייר תשפ"ג | IYAR 5783

*Nigun Magic*

To Israel With Love

Returning to USY



Photo: Michal Soudack

# Hallel on Yom Ha'atzmaut

by Rabbi Kliel Rose

In the fall of 1995, just a few weeks after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, I arrived in Jerusalem where I spent the next seven months studying in an English-speaking Orthodox Yeshiva. For me, a young person not entirely clear about my future, this was a wonderful opportunity to think more carefully about my goals and what I was hoping to do with my life. I remain grateful for the time I spent learning and immersing myself in this magnificent, welcoming, and fiercely Torah-driven community. It was in this community where I experienced, firsthand, extremely welcoming hospitality, commitment to Torah learning, to *T'fillah* (prayer), and *Gemilut Chassadim* (acts of compassion).

By far, what stands out most for me was the absolute joy and love of Judaism modelled by my teachers and fellow students. This period of time was one of deep introspection and exploration and, like many young Diaspora Jews, I was searching for meaning and I passionately wanted that to be in a Jewish context. I believed that this Yeshiva would be an ideal environment for me to discover what I was searching for. Fortunately, I was also able to learn what did not work for me, given my worldview and my understanding of how Torah values needed to be implemented in the 21st century.

One of the "clarion calls" I received that year took place two days before *Yom Ha'atzmaut*—Independence day in Israel. A brilliant and revered Rabbi in our Yeshiva offered a session addressing the question of whether or not *Hallel* should be recited on *Yom Ha'atzmaut*. *Hallel* is a series of Psalms recited on Jewish holidays; it serves as an indicator that this day contains an element of holiness that is beyond the ordinary, making it a significant moment in Jewish history. There are many in the larger Orthodox community who insist that *Yom Ha'atzmaut* is a sacred Jewish holiday. However, for me to even learn that this might be a question for some was an anathema—for the modern state of Israel was integral to my Judaism. I am a product of this Jewish community, educated in Jewish day schools until the age of 15. It would never have dawned on me that a Jewish institution would not be in favour of reciting *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'atzmaut*.

The newly founded state of Israel was created in 1948 to be a Jewish democratic homeland, open to all Jews and to all people. In my humble opinion, what took place on May 14, 1948 was nothing short of a miracle. The fact that some might not feel the necessity to acknowledge the holiness of this day was beyond my comprehension. I felt, at the time, that even raising the question of whether or not to recite *Hallel* undermined the work, the blood, sweat, and tears that my ancestors invested in making this dream a reality.

I recognize the accomplishments this young country has offered to the world in the way of medicine, science, technology, and numerous other areas. Yet, as a fervent progressive-religious Zionist, I believe that one who supports Israel should also continue to ask questions related to whether or not Israel is living up to her mission, particularly in so far as it enables religious pluralism and it protects the rights of minorities, such as Arab-Israelis and foreign workers, to name two significant social issues.

I am proud of Israelis, especially those who work energetically to construct a society that truly embodies Theodor Herzl's vision of a just and righteous nation based on Jewish values. Israel, like every democratic country (including Canada), has its warts and certainly there is more to be done to improve the quality of life for all citizens, specifically its minority communities. Despite these real internal challenges, our joy in celebrating Israel's independence should not be negated.

*Yom Ha'atzmaut*, from a religious and secular Zionist perspective, is an event of epic proportions to be celebrated as a holiday, by all generations, just as we celebrate Passover, Chanukkah, and Rosh Hashanah. That is why we should, of course, recite the *Hallel* service.

We understand that Judaism is an organic and evolving tradition, adapting as the Jewish people meet new realities and challenges. As many have noted, the creation of an independent Jewish State is one of the greatest of all tests. Notwithstanding these, on Wednesday, April 26, I will recite a joyous rendition of *Hallel*, acknowledging my unconditional support for the existence of the State and expressing my sincere gratitude to God for enabling Israel to be an essential part of the reality of Jews all over the world. ■

*Hallel, a series of Psalms recited on Jewish holidays, serves as an indicator that this day contains an element of holiness beyond the ordinary, making it a significant moment in Jewish history.*

# Jewish Values and Community With a Side of Tradition

**N**atan Skladnik wants to help young Winnipeggers feel more comfortable in their own Jewish skin.

“My goal is to warm them up to Judaism,” says Natan, USY advisor for Congregation Etz Chayim. While this is a new role, Natan has worked with this age group of Jewish youth before, and he knows they come with varying levels of Jewish knowledge. “My job is to build on that,” says Natan, who is in year four of a Bachelor of Science degree with Honours in Neuroscience at U of W.

There are several good reasons why USY is an important experience for Jewish youth, Natan says. Firstly, integral to Judaism is that strong sense of community, he says. “The sense of identity, the sense of pride. Throughout history, Jews have been discriminated against, struggled to be ourselves. So, if I can provide kids with an opportunity to see there are others like them to have fun with, to have a social group of people like them, I think that is the ideal. That’s the biggest aspect, to help them feel comfortable with their Judaism.” He says learning to be part of a community taught him how to work together, and that is something he now wants to teach his young mentees.

Participation in USY also encourages young Jews to share their Jewish knowledge more broadly—another

“Our grandparents or great grandparents died for being Jewish and it’s important to honour the fact that we’re Jewish.”



Natan Skadnik

benefit of the experience. “It’s important to keep Judaism alive, to share it. Our grandparents or great grandparents died for being Jewish and it’s important to honour the fact that we’re Jewish, and to push our way through those societal guidelines so we can be our own Jewish people,” Natan says.

Through USY, kids learn some of Judaism’s core values, “what it takes to be a good person,” he says. “I would love to see a group go out to do some *tikkun olam* (repair of the world). I think it’s about instilling Jewish values and its sense of community with a side of Jewish tradition, rather than the other way around.”

While USY as a whole targets Jewish youth from grades 5 through 12, Natan says Etz Chayim is focusing on grades 5 through 7 for the first year. And while a mandate of USY is for there to be a focus on informal Jewish education, “I don’t plan on sitting kids down and going through a class about Tu BiShvat,” he

says. “Rather, finding a way to connect and talk about Judaism as a whole. The priority is for Jewish kids to get to know each other and have that sense of community with each other,” he says, particularly for young Jews who don’t attend Gray Academy, he adds.

The first full-fledged USY event—a laser tag program held at LaserTopia mid-February, was a wild success. “The program went great!” Natan says. “We had 44 people show up and we all had a blast. Everybody seemed really engaged and excited for what’s to come!” ■

**SHORESH**  
שורש

**6**  
**YEARS**  
**STRONG**

Shoresh is a community news publication of



123 Matheson Avenue East  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2W 0C3  
(204) 589-6305

www.congregationetzchayim.ca

Editor: Leslie Malkin  
Lesliemalkin@LofC.ca

Design: Grandesign

Advisory Committee:  
Jonathan Buchwald  
Mia Elfenbaum  
Monica Neiman  
Marvin Samphir  
Elana Schultz (chair)

Cover photo: 3D\_generator



**Re-New Mobility**  
HOME HEALTH CARE PRODUCTS

204-453-6473

NEW, USED & RENTAL PRODUCTS • SERVICE & INSTALLATION

**Pembina & Stafford**

# To Israel With Love

As Jews worldwide mark the 75th year of our nation state, Shoresh celebrates our homeland by sharing impressions of the Holy Land from four Congregation Etz Chayim young adults—each of whom recently visited Israel.

Visiting Israel is a lifetime longing for Jews worldwide, young or old. The land of our ancestors beckons, shining brightly, a beacon of hope, patiently awaiting our arrival. “Next year in Jerusalem” we sing twice a year, with the completion of the Passover Seder and again, at the end of Ne’ilah on Yom Kippur. We ask G-d for this blessing to come to us—next year in Jerusalem. And that’s exactly what played out for four Congregation Etz Chayim young adults, thanks to Birthright Israel.



Photo courtesy Sari Glow (left)

Birthright is a not-for-profit organization that gifts young Jewish adults (18-26) with free educational group trips to Israel. Participants travel throughout the country, exploring historic, cultural, and religious sites and experiencing some of the varied landscape and nature. The mission of Birthright is to strengthen young Diaspora Jews’ relationships with Israel and provide all young Jewish adults with “opportunities for transformative and immersive shared experiences in

Israel and a foundation for ongoing Jewish connection.” Those boxes were checked for Sari Glow, with her Birthright experience. “I met some incredible Jewish colleagues from across Canada who were from entirely different backgrounds and had varying connections to their Jewish heritage,” says Sari, who travelled to Israel in June/July 2022. “The connections I made are incredibly meaningful and regardless whether these relationships stand the test of time and distance, the moments and discussions we had on the streets of Jerusalem, around a firepit in a Bedouin village, and at the top of Masada will stay with me and continue to impact the way I live my life,” she says.

## Strengthening Jewish Identity

The goal of Birthright is “to ensure a vibrant future for the Jewish people by strengthening Jewish identity, Jewish communities, and connection with Israel.” Dafna Schultz travelled to Israel from late December 2022 through January 2023. Birthright helped her to rekindle a Jewish light within her. “The trip renewed my connection with Judaism, reminding me how I want to raise kids with a Jewish education, etcetera,” Dafna says, adding that the trip also gave her the confidence to wear her Judaism proudly, not to hide behind it.

“It’s easier to hide something that is foreign to others to avoid questions, but what’s easier isn’t necessarily what’s right,” says Dafna. “I’ve always felt a need to not publicize my religion, despite growing up in a Jewish community, at Jewish school and summer camp. This trip made me realize that I shouldn’t need to hide myself to feel protected, and I should be proud and open about all aspects of myself, including my religion.”

Matthew London, who took the Birthright trip during the summer of 2022, appreciated being amongst his own people in Israel. “It was really special to be surrounded by Jews everywhere. It was super cool to meet Jews from around the world and it’s something I appreciate now that I’m back in Winnipeg, where it’s a big city but relative to Tel Aviv, there’s not as many Jews.”

“It’s nice to just be around your own people,” he says.

## Making Israeli Friends

An important part of the Birthright Israel program is the Israeli component, called the *Mifgash* (encounter, in Hebrew). Israeli soldiers and young professionals join the Birthright group about halfway through the trip to give Diaspora participants a more intimate and personal experience of Israel. “It was an interesting way to make some Israeli connections and to integrate our perspectives of being Canadian versus Israeli Jews. I ended up getting close with one, and later in the summer when I was working through the Onward\* program, I ended up hanging out with Tzachy quite



Photo courtesy Maya Goldberg (left)



Photo courtesy Dafna Schultz (front row, third from right)

a few times. It was a cool way to make Israeli friends and share the Birthright experience,” says Matthew.

Maya Goldberg, who travelled to Israel in May of 2022, says the Israelis introduced her group to hidden gems they might otherwise have missed. “They offered us the experience of seeing restaurants, bakeries and less known sites in Israel we would have never gotten to see had we not been accompanied by locals,” she says.

Dafna says sharing the experience of visiting Mount Herzl memorial park and cemetery and Yad Vashem (the World Holocaust Remembrance Center) with Israeli peers was very special. “Some of them shared personal experiences of friends, family members, or just stories they had heard about lives lost, and it made the day that much more meaningful. One girl told us she’d never felt a strong connection to her country, and she had never been in the army. When she was at Yad Vashem she felt a connection between the museum and her own difficult past and found that the stories from the Holocaust were no longer just stories to her, but real people. When she walked outside and saw the view of Jerusalem, she felt hope and connection for the first time,” Dafna says.

That same night, her Birthright group went out on the town in Jerusalem, Dafna continues, visiting the *shuk* (market) which becomes clubs at night. “This was a fun way to unwind after an emotional and difficult day, and it was really fun to go out with locals,” she says.

“It made the experience of Birthright more special,” she continues. “We got to see young adults gain a new appreciation for their country as they saw it through the eyes of Diaspora Jews. They felt lucky to be part of the experience.”

Sari says the *Mifgash* gave her an opportunity to practice speaking Hebrew with locals. “Prior to the trip I was very self-conscious about my Hebrew-speaking skills and was afraid to try, to risk making mistakes, sounding dumb. The Israelis encouraged me and reassured me that it doesn’t matter if I make mistakes. I ended up making tremendous strides in my Hebrew skills and conversed in Hebrew when I went to restaurants and stores.”

## New Perspectives

Dafna says the Birthright trip gave her an appreciation for the resiliency of Israel and Israelis, and an understanding of the trauma experienced by people living under the peril of war their

Continues page 6

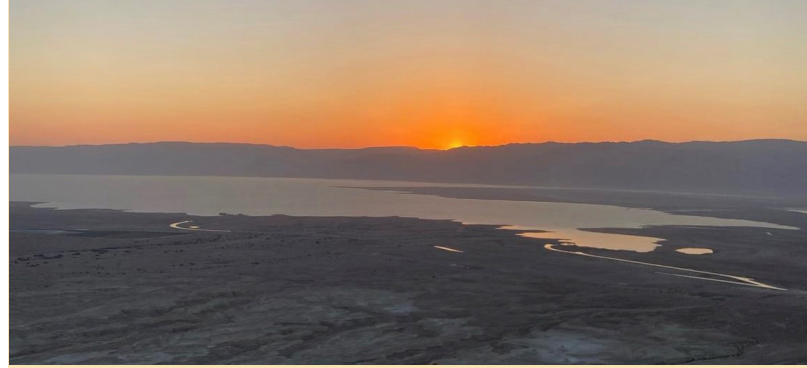


Photo courtesy Maya Goldberg

## \*Onward Israel for Future Professionals

Onward Israel, a division of Birthright Israel (after the two organizations merged in 2022), shares a similar goal to its parent: to strengthen young diaspora Jews’ relationship with Israel. Onward hosts immersive six-to ten-week work internship programs in Israel for post-secondary students, giving them valuable work experience in their field of study while being immersed in the culture amongst their Israeli peers. Following his Birthright experience, Matthew London interned with a tax law firm for eight weeks in Tel Aviv, Nimrod Yaron & Co., through Onward Israel.

“It was a great opportunity to have international work experience and meet people around the same age doing the same program as me and have an amazing summer living in Tel Aviv.”

Matthew, a law student at University of Manitoba, chose the law and entrepreneurship track of Onward, but he says there are many different tracks and themed programs for participants to choose from, depending on their studies and interests. The small firm he interned at was in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv and a quick bus ride from where he was living for the summer. “I worked four days a week, so I had three days to really do whatever I want,” he says.

Matthew says Birthright and Onward are very different from each other. Birthright is very structured and jam-packed with activity, he says, “you’re waking up early every day, touring and travelling on the bus all day every day except for Shabbat. You’re so busy for 10 days straight and you don’t have much time to sleep.” By contrast, he says, the purpose of Onward is “to give participants independence and show them what living is like on their own, in Israel.” Outside his work hours, each week, “the rest of the day after work, and your weekends over Shabbat, you’re really on your own,” he says. Onward provides many optional, “extra” opportunities on the weekend, he explains, like organized tours and city programs, and Shabbat opportunities for interested participants. None of these extras are mandatory, he says, except for one weekly speaker or day tour.

“That leaves a lot of time for exploring, beach time, travelling, and meeting people—literally doing anything you want.”

“I really enjoyed the independence,” Matthew says, adding that students interested in doing both programs should do Birthright first, since participation in an organized program such as Onward (first) makes a person ineligible for Birthright. ■



Photo courtesy Matthew London

entire lives. “I gained an appreciation for how I, as a Canadian, and others living outside the Middle East, can have our opinions on the conflict between Israel and Palestine but we’ll never truly understand the perspective of those living through it, on both sides. The anger felt by people living through the conflict introduces a bias that North Americans can never understand,” she says.

“I tried to expand my mind on the conflict in Israel through Birthright programming but also conversations with people on my trip from Canada and Israel.”

Matthew says visiting a community located very close to the Gaza border was enlightening. While on the Onward\* program, he had opportunity to visit Netiv HaAsara, a moshav “just on the north border of Gaza, incredibly close to the wall. You can see over the border and that was pretty eye opening, that there’s people in these communities living every day under this cloud of conflict,” he says. Maya, too, says she gained new insight from her recent trip to Israel.

“I gain new perspectives and a new appreciation for the country, influenced by the people I travel with—in the past, family, friends, school and now, other Jewish people my age from across Canada,” says Maya, who has been to Israel more than once.

As one would expect, each of the four has their own personal highlights from their Birthright experience. Maya enjoyed the progression of the trip in terms of geographical locations visited. “We started in the North amongst the greenery and made our way to the Negev,

a completely different landscape. We ended off in Tel Aviv, which was a nice contrast.” For Dafna, visiting the Dead Sea was memorable. “Although it wasn’t very warm, it was a really cool experience, as I had never been. We had seven Israelis join our trip that day, and they came into the sea with us. One of them had never been to the Dead Sea either,” she says.

For Matthew, a high point happened during an overnight at a Bedouin campsite near Masada, “waking up incredibly early, at 3 AM, to do a sunrise hike. It was a great experience.”

A highlight for Sari was stargazing in the Negev. “Our group spread out and looked at the stars in silence. It was an ethereal experience, being in a place as desolate and empty as the desert looking up at the infinite sky, and yet feeling wholly connected to myself and my ancestors,” she says.

No matter what their individual highlights were, what these folk share, following their combined experience, is a connection to their homeland, and reasons to return.

“Although I’ve been there before, each experience visiting (Israel) is completely unique,” says Maya. Dafna says that at the beginning of her trip, a representative told them they would leave the Birthright experience with even more questions than when we started, “which I believe was true,” she concludes. Sari says after Birthright she felt “connected to Israel as a land and as the place my ancestors came from.” And for Matthew, returning again in the future seems inevitable.

“I love Israel, he says. “I definitely want to go back.” ■

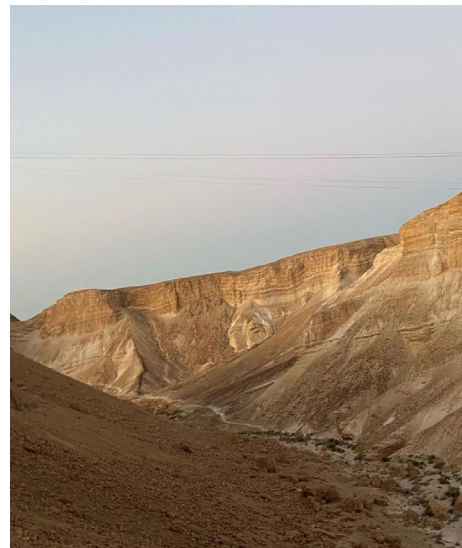


Photo courtesy Maya Goldberg

## Transitioning: Some Finer Points

It isn’t at all common for a synagogue congregation to pick up, pack up, and move across town. In fact, you could almost call Congregation Etz Chayim a pioneer in this regard. “We’re sort of in rarefied territory,” at least among North American Conservative Jewish congregations, says Myron Schultz, co-chair of the transition committee for Congregation Etz Chayim together with Kim Hirt. “What we’re doing is not a common thing and we’re learning something that others don’t really have much experience with,” he says, of the decision to list for sale Congregation Etz Chayim’s 123 Matheson home base and purchase new South-End digs at 1155 Wilkes.

Several months ago, members of Etz Chayim’s relocation committee had reached out to the USCJ (United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism), asking to be connected to any other North American congregation that had undergone a similar transition process.

“They didn’t have anybody they could link us to,” he says. The committee eventually found the Forest Hills Jewish Center, a congregation in Forest Hills, New York—which has been in the process of relocating for five years; while they’ve sold their building, it could still be years before they actually move (for various unspecified reasons). So, while she couldn’t offer specific guidance around the *relocation* process, Executive Director Deborah Gregor of the Forest Hills Jewish Center did have a couple general pieces of advice about *transition*, Myron explains: “One was, ‘make sure you are informing your congregation, keep them aware.’ And I think that’s something we’re already very much engaged in,” he says. Additionally, Gregor advised them to “use professionals to do the things that need to be done.” While Etz Chayim’s pockets are not as deep as Forest Hills’, the committee is well aware of this stance, Myron says.

“So there was reassurance that some of the things we’re thinking are correct.”

### Transition Team

A full team of volunteers is hard at work making sure every aspect of the

## Transition Team Leads



Kim Hirt, Co-chair  
Transition Committee



Myron Schultz, Co-chair  
Transition Committee

### FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS



Sabrina Bokser, Functional  
Analysis Subcommittee

### INVENTORY



Gord Steindel,  
Inventory Subcommittee

### HONOURING OUR PAST



Mel and Denny Hornstein,  
Honouring Our Past  
Subcommittee

### RITUAL



Steven Hyman,  
Ritual Subcommittee

move goes as smoothly as possible. The **functional analysis subcommittee** is led by Sabrina Bokser. This task force meets with each stakeholder within the congregation to determine what needs to happen for them to be functional in the new building. “For example, the clergy’s vision of how we are going to have our ritual and what kind of programming, so what we need to do to the spaces to be able to fulfill those functions and those programming requirements,” says Kim. She explains that information from each stakeholder will inform what is moved to the new space, and what has to be done to adjust or renovate the space. “Then it helps us with our vision: what is that space going to look like day 1 when we walk in, and what it’s going to look like on day 700. Functional analysis is key for us to be able to develop our vision,” she says.

The **inventory subcommittee**, led by Gord Steindel, is tasked to “go through the building and figure out all that the congregation has. They’re looking at things like the library downstairs, all those books,” the bronze plaques that flank the hallway walls on the main floor, tables and chairs, and many other stored away items, Kim explains. Another task for this subcommittee is to determine inventory for which the staff is responsible, she says, mentioning, as example, that office supplies are being inventoried by the office staff. From there, she says, the work is to “figure out what comes with us, what gets stored, what gets donated, what gets sent back into the community.”

“There’s some interesting stuff that they’ve come up with,” she adds, citing a collection of old papers that had once belonged to a former rabbi.

The **honouring our past committee**, chaired by Mel and Denny Hornstein, is responsible for organizing how Congregation Etz Chayim’s past is honoured by creating memories, “something to hold onto when we make the transition to the new space,” Kim says. In fact, in March, the couple had begun asking the Etz Chayim community for photos of 123 Matheson as well as the Bnay Abraham and the Beth Israel. This subcommittee is also planning a farewell event as well as a first event in the new space to celebrate the transition.

Led by Steven Hyman, the fourth is the **ritual subcommittee**, which connects

with all other subcommittees, Kim says. “For instance, they would be interested in the ritual items from the inventory committee, the number of *Sifrei Torah*, the *siddurim*, etcetera. They would be responsible for determining, from functional analysis, what is the ritual geography of the main hall? What would be the choreography and the geography of things in the auditorium to make it a sacred space? How do we make sacred spaces in this new building? What is the *halakha* (Jewish law) of leaving one sacred space and creating a new one?” she says.

Kim says they anticipate additional subcommittees being formed in the future. “There are lots of different things up in the air and we just have to be flexible and find people to fill the spaces as we need them.”

## New Ways of Thinking

Myron acknowledges that “change is the hardest thing.” But change can foster new opportunities too, as people start “thinking differently about something and, okay, now let’s see what this brings, what can we do? So we’re moving into a new space and it gives us new ways of thinking about who we are, what we do,” he says.

“We’re transitioning to a new space that gives us new opportunities and new possibilities for programming and connection with the community and connection with the congregation,” echoes Kim. “It’s more than simply picking up what we have and moving it to a different place. We’re also transitioning some of our ideas of what it means to be a congregation,” she says.

The relocation will be a big change, Myron says. “We’re going to demand a lot of our members in that sense. So we’re not going to throw surprises. We will prepare them for what things will look like, what they will feel like, what they will sound like, share the physical vision of when we first move in, our first service.

“For the most part, I think people are going to find that space far more comfortable than what we’ve been used to,” he says. ■

# Hearing Other People's Voices

## Breathing New Life Into Jewish Prayer

Congregation Etz Chayim Cantor Tracy Kasner believes a little space reorganization could transform how Winnipeg Jews pray. In decades past, many larger, North American, Conservative Jewish congregations have become accustomed to a certain style of synagogue with a particular kind of sanctuary layout, she says: a 'post-war,' auditorium-like space. For some, the space might feel, at times, theatre-like—with clergy up 'on stage' as if performing, the congregation sitting below, in rows, mostly observing. Many of us don't even consider, with this familiar setting at *shul*, that there could be others.

Cantor Tracy thinks the auditorium-like sanctuary could feel alienating and overbearing to synagogue-goers. And if that is the case, she says, we should not be surprised if attendance at *shul* services is dwindling.

She wants to resolve any potential estrangement resulting over generations from a less than welcoming sanctuary design. "We have set up, in that post-war synagogue, an us-and-them feeling, a hierarchy," she begins. But "it doesn't matter that I know the music more than you. Jews pray as community. In a generation before us, we may have turned a lot of people away because they felt like they weren't good enough to be a part of the service," she says. She would like to explore whether efforts to make the sanctuary space more inclusive and organically welcoming by making changes to the habitual layout might encourage some Winnipeg Jews who had been feeling alienated from *shul* to return, while at the same time breathe new life into Jewish prayer.

### Circling Back

Early in 2020, just weeks ahead of the coronavirus pandemic, Cantor Tracy had opportunity to visit Temple Beit Am in Los Angeles and join that community in prayer. She had registered for *Kol Tefilla*, a part-experiential, part-workshop Shabbaton hosted by Temple Beit Am, where she would be



Cantor Tracy Kasner - Photo by Kevin McIntyre Photography

exposed to new ideas and approaches to delivering and teaching prayer-life, which she could bring home to her Etz Chayim community.

"It was one of the most powerful experiences I've had in my life," she says, referring specifically to the experience of praying at Temple Beit Am. And while she insists the power in that experience did not originate with the physical building, she can't resist the opportunity to describe the recently remodelled synagogue, anyway.

"It is magnificent," says Cantor Tracy. "The pews are arched in concentric circles, with aisles in between and it's jaw-dropping. The ark is mostly glass, you see the *Sifrei Torah* inside and behind them, the trees."

"The ceiling of the sanctuary is all glass..." she continues, sidetracking briefly to share an amusing but unfortunate consequence of that particular design decision. (Because birds.) "But at night," she says, dreamily, "you look up, at *Kabbalat Shabbat*, and you see the stars."

### Layout Inspires Community Prayer

Cantor Tracy emphasizes, however, that the magnificence of the praying experience at Temple Beit Am has nothing to do with the beauty of the sanctuary. Instead, she attributes it to the way its layout inspires community prayer. She maintains that changing the way people are seated in a room (which doesn't have to be a glass sanctuary—in fact, not a sanctuary at all, she states) can transform how they participate. During regular services at Temple Beit Am, synagogue-goers sit in benches that arch around the *bimah* in concentric circles. Two or three strong singers make up the first



Temple Beit Am





Kevin McIntyre - Photo by Henriette Ivanans

concentric circle and carry melodic vocals for the rest of the room, she describes. Periodically, beginning with a familiar line from a prayer or song, like, "Oseh shalom bimromav...", chanters introduce tangents into the melody or add *nigunim* (improvised, often repetitive, wordless melodies, like "dai dai dai," or "bim-bim-bam" instead of lyrics), she describes.

And in no time, "their energy spills off to everybody else," she adds.

"It's very simple: It's because you're sitting in a circle," she maintains. Instead, we sit "in rows, none of us looking at each other, staring at the back of somebody else's head and looking at the rabbi and the cantor at the front of the sanctuary." But praying in the round is "toying with the idea that we're singing as a community,"

she claims, "we're not performing. Jews sing together," she reminds. "We should be, anyway, right?"

## Leveling the Playing Field

Cantor Tracy believes there's a correlation between the circular seating and the spontaneous musical tangents and meanderings that occur during prayer services at Temple Beit Am. "The circles change everything. The person on the other side (of the circle), when you see someone's face looking at you, you are distilled down to just a regular person singing in the service, and we all deserve to be here, and we're all praying together. It levels the playing field, it's amazing, I was awestruck," she marvels.

On the Shabbat morning of the Shabbaton, Cantor Tracy says a traditional Bat Mitzvah service was taking place in the main sanctuary at Temple Beit Am. For conference attendees, the service was across the way, in a gymnasium at a property shared with the Jewish daycare.

"So we left the synagogue proper and went into the gymnasium, and we were sitting in circles, a group of three people in the middle running the same kind of service with a guitar. And it worked just the same, in a plain, old, gym setting, with the basketball hoop overhead. It was incredible! And it proved that it doesn't matter how much money you spend on beauty. If I hadn't had those two experiences

back-to-back, I wouldn't have been totally sure, but now I am. It's about the *ta'am* (feeling) in the room, it's not about where you are. It's about the people and how the people are sitting so we can feed off each other."

She says another equalizer is inclusion of *nigunim* (singular: *nigun*) to the prayer or song melodies. "One of the keys is having parts of the music where there are no words, you're just, 'lai, lai, lai or dai, dai, dai,'" she says. "There's no roadblock to you feeling like you're worthy of this moment; as soon as you put someone in the room who doesn't know the words, they feel alienated from it."

But most people, even if they're not singers, end up singing 'lai, lai, lai', she says. "People start harmonizing and it's magical."

"It could change how Winnipeg Jews pray," she adds.

Cantor Tracy considers Congregation Etz Chayim's new home, where "perhaps it's not going to be the standard sanctuary that we're used to, yet. But we just need an open space, a bunch of chairs, a Torah, and a few people who want to be the seeds of this, and we've got a new way of praying together. It's not rocket science, why didn't we think of this before?"

## Hearing Other People's Voices

Congregation Etz Chayim member Kevin McIntyre has also attended *Kol Tefilla*. Having lived in LA for many years, he's had many opportunities to attend unconventional Jewish services. For several years Kevin has studied with Joey Weisenberg, a Jewish musician, *ba'al tefilah* (prayer leader), and teacher, who aspires to reenergize Jewish life and prayer through song.

"He travels around the world with Jewish music, some he's composed, and teaches synagogues how to re-evaluate their protocols for getting people excited again," Kevin explains. "Part of what he thinks gets people excited is singing and music and getting out of old setups in synagogues that are a *bimah*... (he pauses) and then the congregation. He talks about how ancient synagogues were in the round, people sat close together, the leaders and then the congregation in circles around.



Joey Weisenberg Singing Communities Intensive / Photo: Kevin McIntyre

"The idea is to hear other people's voices, to feel their presence."

Kevin shares one workshop activity that Joey conducts with participants: "He asks everybody to go to a different wall (in the room) and to start singing. And it sounds like a terrible mishmash. And the closer he brings people in, the clearer and the more beautiful it sounds, and the more together we are. So that's the concept: bringing your congregation together to pray and sing together, hear each other," he says.

## The Beauty of the Nigun

Kevin says it was Weisenberg who introduced him to the beauty of the *nigun*. "You'll sit in a room with 50 people, and you'll just hum and sing sometimes for 20 minutes at a time. And that's praying, to him. It's not necessarily about using words on a page, but the wordless melody. So you sit in a circle and he'll start, *ya da dum bai dum bai dum bai ya da dum bai dum bai dum...* and he'll teach it in sections and bits."

*Ba'al tefilah* himself and studying to become a cantor, Kevin leads an online service once a month for a community with a physical homebase in Baltimore, Maryland. That congregation includes meditations in every service, just before the *Amidah*.

"It's beautiful," Kevin says. "It's a time in the service where you're coming into personal prayers, so it's like a preparation to pray, take a moment to breathe and check in with each other," Kevin says, adding that as prayer leader, it's also an opportunity for him to catch his breath.

He says when he first started attending Burbank Temple Emanu El, the *shul* he would later belong to, while living in LA, the rabbi would move people from the larger sanctuary to the much smaller social hall. "The sanctuary was gigantic," he explains, "and there weren't a ton of people and he said, 'I don't want people sitting in the 30th row, I can't hear you, I can't see you,' so, for the first number of months we were in a social hall sitting on chairs in a circle," Kevin says.

## Having Prayer Options

Kevin is very clear: he loves the opportunities he has now in Winnipeg to pray with Congregation Etz Chayim and is happy the way things are. "I'm very fortunate to have options. If I'm in California (a professional portrait photographer, Kevin travels regularly to LA for photoshoots) and I want to go and sing in a circle, I can do that. If I want to listen to my friend Tracy lead a service (here), I can do that. So, for me, it's not a matter of right or wrong; it's just, there are other ways to approach prayer and synagogue," he says.

Like Cantor Tracy, Kevin believes singing brings people together. "I'm very drawn to this idea of bringing communities closer together and engaging people in a different way, so that you're not a spectator, you're a participant," he says. Cantor Tracy agrees, insisting all Jews are welcome to pray at synagogue, regardless of skill or talent. "You don't think you can sing? I don't care, G-d doesn't care. Try anyway, let us teach you how to do it. We're all equal here," she says. ■



# Westland Insurance

## We've got you covered

home • auto • business • travel

[westlandinsurance.ca](http://westlandinsurance.ca)

## SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

### MARCH

Selma Albersheim, Avrian Boroditsky, Albert Glow, Anne Katz, Doreen Merrick, Carolyn Rubin, Maury Steindel

### APRIL

Josh Eskin, Larry Rice, Shirley Rosenfeld, Simon Simkin, Alan Slusky, Jack Solomon, Sam Swire, Susan Tennenhouse, Sharon Zynoberg

### MAY

Fayanne Charach, Sharon Ganetsky, Mel Hornstein, Cathy Itscovich, Phil Kahanovitch, Debbie Mintz, Edie Shuster, Earl Standil, Harry Shapiro

### JUNE

Shawnee Greenberg, Howard Jesierski, Cheryl Katz, Sherill Levene, Ronald Reider, Elaine Schaffer, David Spigelman, Bernard Sucharov, Murray Trachtenberg

## SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

### APRIL

Shira Cohen and Stuart Slayen (25)  
Elaine and Allan Shinfield (65)

### MAY

Debra and Michael Bass (45)  
Jessica and Joel Cogan (25)  
Aneita Kogan-Gunn and Bernie Gunn (30)  
Denah and Frank Weinfeld (70)

### JUNE

Susan and Jonathan Buchwald (25)  
Phyllis and Aubrey Himmelstein (55)  
Joanne and Sam Katz (50)  
Rochelle and Harvey Litman (55)

Rita and Sheldon Margolis (55)  
Esther and Marvin Samphir (55)

## IN MEMORIAM

Jack Buchalter  
Joe Elfenbaum  
Dina Granove  
Susan Kahanovitch  
Elaine Lofchick  
Kenneth Mozersky  
Feiga Stern  
Harvey Tallman

## MAZEL TOVS

**Sarah and Dov Secter** on the Bat Mitzvah of their daughter **Sadie** on April 22

**Rachel and Maury Steindel** on their son **Aaron's** Bar Mitzvah on June 3

**Kathy Cobor** on her grandson **Aaron Steindel's** Bar Mitzvah

**Gordon Steindel** on his grandson **Aaron Steindel's** Bar Mitzvah

**Carly Shuler and Shane Kozlowich** on their daughter **Paula's** Bat Mitzvah on June 10

**Cindy Lazar and Joel Kay** on their son **Jack's** Bar Mitzvah on June 17

**Michael Conner and Evan Roitenberg** on being appointed as King's Counsel

**Congregation Etz Chayim** on the sixth anniversary of **Shoresh** magazine

KUZCO  
Modern Contemporary Lighting



MANITOBA'S LARGEST  
LIGHTING STORE

Visit our state of the art showroom  
located at 1040 Waverley Street

[www.superlite.com](http://www.superlite.com)



פ נ  
M. C. De Landes

Monuments & Memorials Inc.

927 Main St Winnipeg

204 - 947 - 3712

mcd@mcdelandes.ca www.mcdelandes.ca

WE SPECIALIZE IN ON-SITE CEMETERY INSCRIPTIONS

ת נ צ ב ה

**SERVICING WINNIPEG'S JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1938**