מיכה
TEMPLE MICAH
# Vine
MAY/JUNE 2020
IYAR/SIVAN/TAMMUZ 5780

**FROM RABBI ZEMEL**

## A TIME TO DOUBLE DOWN ON GENEROSITY AND COMPASSION, ACTIVISM AND OUTRAGE

DEAR FRIENDS,

In the Torah, early warnings of impending, havoc-wreaking, natural phenomena come through dreams.

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams about the healthy and sickly cows and the healthy and spindly ears of corn to predict years of plenty and years of drought. Egypt prepares, and famine is averted.

Deuteronomy warns the owner of a house to build a parapet along the roof to prevent someone from falling and the homeowner from being "guilty of bloodshed." (Deuteronomy 22:8)

I am clearly looking for a Jewish way to think about the worldwide pandemic that has hit our beloved country especially hard.

It is true that modern science has replaced biblical dreams for predicting the future. And I realize that an entire nation is not the same as an individual home, though we do have a department named specifically to secure the homeland. Yet I wonder whether there are some lessons to be learned from our ancient text. Are there any useful parallels to be drawn?

I believe there are.

There is no substitute for planning. Wisdom entails heeding the warnings of those whose expertise gives them the ability to predict. The Pharaoh of Joseph's day knew that. He took the appropriate actions, and famine was averted.

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# Incoming Micah President Truly Is An "Ironman"

By Fran Dauth

Incoming Micah Board President Joshua Berman says the music is part of what he and his wife were looking for when they decided to join Temple Micah.

"I attended Reform Jewish camps as a kid in California where I grew up and we sing some of those same tunes and prayers today at Micah, Berman noted.

He and his family "all love the beautiful music we experience at the temple – from Meryl (Weiner), Debra (Winter), Teddy (Klaus), the choir and others," he said.

Berman and his wife Amy and sons Seth and Eli joined Temple Micah about nine years ago.

Berman has been on the synagogue's board of directors for the past three years, most recently as vice president. He now succeeds Marcia Silcox, the

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## INSIDE THIS VINE: Micah Voices on the Pandemic

"Every person shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree with no one to make him afraid."
MICAH, CHAPTER 4, VERSE 4

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**PRESIDENT'S COLUMN**

# SEEKING PERMANENCE IN A WORLD THAT IS CHANGING IN EPIC WAYS

By Marcia Fine Silcox

At each Temple Micah board meeting, one of the rabbis presents a short d'var Torah. In our May meeting, Rabbi Zemel provided a virtual handout with some readings. I was struck by this sentence from Columbia University physicist Brian Greene:

"Our human narrative will tell them who we are."

That seems to sum up so much about our time, especially now.

I had to look up Brian Greene, and found that he authored a most prescient book earlier this year, "Until the End of Time: Mind, Matter, and Our Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe."

Greene presents "his own grand unified theory of human endeavor... that we want to transcend death by attaching ourselves to something permanent, that will outlast us: art, science, our families..." Dennis Overbye wrote in a review in The New York Times in February.

In these mind-numbing days, we are all grabbing for that permanence.

We do manage to hold fast to our families, the arts we can access, the comforts of home, but many of our beloved institutions have vanished, possibly forever.

But some institutions are clamoring to remain, to innovate, to improve, to be relevant, to connect, in short to enhance the human narrative.

Can you think of a better example than Temple Micah, and the Judaism it represents?

We have no bayit or home currently that we can access with our feet, but the home that we step in to with our faces and minds is wide open as we move to Zoom and other tech platforms for worship, learning, and community.

We made early and sound decisions to reduce our personal contact, and the worship, music and office staffs quickly gained proficiency in our new media. It's hard not to marvel at the smooth transitions and deep content of our new Shabbat services. Be amazed when you look at the number of participants, and thrill to see how many households are engaged.

Our deeply knowledgeable congregants have been generous with their time and wisdom in evening lectures and advice, and we are thankful. They provide a connection to science, and the universe beyond our screens.

Our board members, rabbis, staff, and committees have reached out to individual households, hoping to ensure safety and well-being. Because the pandemic is far from over, we will maintain efforts to link congregants with the resources that they may need.

We reached outside our virtual walls with financial support for five local organizations meeting the challenge of food insecurity. We look for ways to do more because we know how much more is needed.

In short, Micah has, with its actions, made an emphatic case that it will remain the vibrant, adaptive, introspective and outward facing congregation that we always envisioned, even in uncertain and frightening times

Like all parts of the synagogue during these times of epic change, the board will evolve to overcome new challenges and seize new opportunities. There is no guide as capable as incoming Board President Joshua Berman to lead Micah on this journey.

Our search for meaning in this universe starts and ends here. We will outlast these times, by relying on Micah and our Judaism to outlast us.

# Will We View the 2020 Pandemic As a Time Religious Affiliation Increased or Declined in the U.S.?

By Alan Cooperman

In 2010-2011, a series of earthquakes struck Christchurch, the second largest city in New Zealand. The most devastating tremor came on Feb. 22, 2011, at lunchtime on a summer day when the streets were full of people.

A statue of the city's founder fell over. Pipes burst, flooding the streets. Both of Christchurch's cathedrals – Anglican and Roman Catholic – suffered heavy damage, and many other buildings collapsed, killing more than 180 people and injuring thousands.

Though the government declared a national emergency, most of the country was untouched. The quakes caused almost no damage outside of Canterbury, the region around Christchurch on New Zealand's South Island. Also, somewhat freakishly, the earth shook between two phases of a national longitudinal survey.

The result is what social scientists call a "natural experiment" – something akin to a controlled study, though no panel of ethicists would ever allow such treatment of human subjects in a planned experiment.

When researchers looked at the results of the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study, they saw a small but statistically significant rise in religious affiliation in the Canterbury region between 2009 and 2011, while religious affiliation dropped across the rest of New Zealand, continuing a downward trend.

Though careful not to claim that the earthquakes must be the cause, the researchers described the "overall increase in religious faith" in Canterbury as "remarkable."

A few years from now, social scientists may look back on the COVID-19 pandemic as another natural experiment, testing on a nearly global scale the theory that religiousness tends to rise when people experience an increase in "existential insecurity" – when natural disasters, wars, economic collapses, or outbreaks of disease fill us with uncertainty and dread.

Most Americans may be familiar with some variant of this theory, even if they don't read social science journals. It's a not-too-distant cousin of the Marxist idea that religion can act as an opiate, numbing the pain of a proletarian existence.

In recent years, political scientists have used the existential insecurity thesis to explain varying degrees of secularization around the world – the basic idea being that as societies in places like Western Europe provide citizens with steadily rising levels of physical and psychological security, their need for religion gradually declines.

One of many controversies surrounding this theory is whether it is inherently *anti*-religious. Some religious people may consider the equation of religion with insecurity to be simplistic, even offensive. On the other hand, many religious people surely also must feel that their rituals, traditions, philosophies and institutions can help individuals and communities in times of dire need.

In either case, it's far from certain that religion really does thrive in hard times. In the history of ideas, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 still looms much larger than the Christchurch earthquake of 2011; it fueled the skepticism of Enlightenment thinkers about the proposition that God sends disasters and plagues to punish humanity with indiscriminate cruelty, burying babies along with hypocrites – a set of explanations for suffering that, in Voltaire's words, "do not console me, but embitter me."

Clearly, misfortune can turn people away from religion, not just toward it.

Perhaps that's why, in early May, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, based in Madison, Wis., placed a full-page ad in the New York Times arguing that "nothing fails like prayer" and "we need reason, not prayer, to combat the coronavirus."

The mysteries of the *Unetaneh Tokef* – who by fire and who by water, who by famine and who by pestilence – may be impervious to scientific study. Our lives are not lived in laboratories. Disasters are often accompanied by so many confounding events that it is impossible to know what caused what.

But my colleagues and I, at the Pew Research Center, are watching closely for signs of religious revival or decline in the time of COVID-19. So far, we've found that 24 percent of U.S. adults say their religious faith has grown stronger because of the pandemic, while just 2 percent say it has grown weaker. But most Americans say their faith hasn't changed much or they weren't religious to begin with. And many of the 24 percent who say the pandemic has strengthened their faith were already very highly religious, raising the possibility that their levels of religious practice have not changed in a measurable way.

On the other hand, for some years now the United States has been in a period of overall religious decline, at least by standard measures such as self-reported rates of religious affiliation, prayer, belief in God, and attendance at religious services. Physical attendance at services is now restricted; 91 percent of regular attenders told us in an April survey that their congregations are temporarily closed. But if a variety of other indicators begin to rise during the pandemic – if, indeed, religion thrives in hard times – the change will stand out. ◆

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*Micah member Alan Cooperman is director of religion research at the Pew Research Center in Washington. He co-authored the Center's 2013 "Portrait of Jewish Americans" and is working on another nationwide survey of U.S. Jews, among other projects.*

# PATHOGENS DON'T RESPECT BORDERS

## AND OTHER INSIGHTS FROM AN EXPERT

**Micah member Manya Magnus is a professor in and associate chair of the Department of Epidemiology at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. She has a PhD and MPH in Epidemiology.**

**Magnus was one of the experts on Temple Micah's YouTube broadcast of "A Deep Look at the COVID-19 Pandemic" on April 7. She recently agreed to expand on some of her comments for The Vine.**

**Q. You mentioned briefly at the end of your presentation that despite the terrible toll, many good things were happening in the scientific and public health fields in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.**

A. Despite the obviously very negative and tragic elements of this pandemic, I do try and see silver linings, at least as much as is possible. One of these is the rapid global scientific collaboration and information sharing.

For example, had there not been public sharing of the genetic sequence of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19), we would not have had diagnostic testing ability nearly as quickly as we have or had the incredibly important understanding of the viral structure that we have.

We collectively need to commit ourselves to this ongoing global collaboration if we want to tackle this virus. Pathogens don't respect borders, so we must be able to reach across them if we want to overcome this pandemic (and prepare for the next one).

**Q. Could you cite some other examples of sharing best practices globally, and how the scientific, medical and public health communities continue to lead?**

A. That we have highly sensitive diagnostic tests available now, rapid tests somewhat available, antibody tests (to see if a person had an immune response to the virus in the past), is remarkable. In early May the first antigen test was FDA approved so we are all experiencing daily increases in knowledge that will pave the way toward addressing this virus.

That we have clinical trials for treatment and prevention in progress so quickly is a testament to the investment we have made as a global society in science and our willingness to share data and information during the early days of the pandemic.

Hopefully we can continue to share information and collaborate globally into the future. The US has not shown the leadership or political will to increase testing and ensure equitable access to care, services, and treatment to all of our citizens that many of us hoped for. And yet, I remain cautiously optimistic the scientific, public health, and medical communities that have been working so hard to share information across borders will prevail and that, with a shared sense of vision and commitment, we will globally overcome this virus while preparing for the next one.

In terms of the rapidity of knowledge accrual, HIV is a useful comparison as it is a virus that has caused a global pandemic, albeit with characteristics quite distinct from COVID-19. The first cases of what later became known as AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) were in 1981 and a test for HIV was not FDA approved until 1985! Even then, the test was being used primarily to test the blood supply. A rapid test for HIV was not available until 1992; and rapid tests were not available for point-of-care fingerstick testing in the community until 2003. Not to mention that these early tests were not very sensitive (able to identify cases among those who did have HIV). The investment we made in HIV-related research and many other conditions is being leveraged for COVID-19 treatment and vaccine trials that are already underway, representing some of the speediest times from disease recognition to clinical trials. But none of this would have happened if information had not been shared globally right away.

**Q. You also cited the response by states to the public health urgency. Most of us are familiar with New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's efforts. Are there other states that have reacted with some speed and efficacy?**

A. Many individual states have shown initiative in their application of shelter-in-place orders, which prioritized the health and safety of their citizens. It is great to see a number of state governors are putting the health of their citizens first.

California Gov. Newsom is another example of strong facts-based leadership as he guides the safety and health of a similarly large state. I have been so impressed with what is happening there, including some of the innovative initiatives to help homeless people at high risk of disease access otherwise empty hotels.

The first real test will be how states open up; the second one will be how they react when there are future waves of the virus. I am hopeful that our leaders dedicate themselves to science-based approaches to protecting our citizens.

I am hopeful that the states continue to monitor and grapple with SARS-CoV-2 in effective ways and eventually get the federal support they need. Without federal support, even the most informed governors won't be able to do enough.

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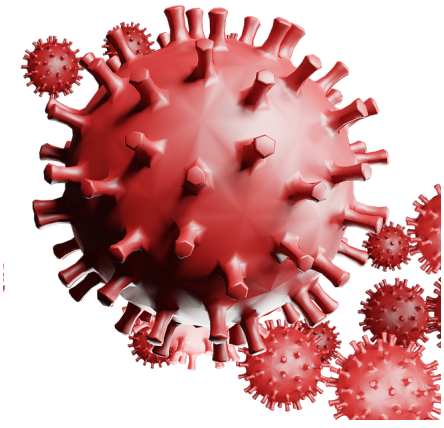

# She Lives in Manhattan, Is Quarantined in N.J., and Interning at Micah

By Fran Dauth

It's safe to say Temple Micah has never had a summer rabbinic intern like Rebecca Jaye. That's because Jaye will work from New Jersey where she is quarantined in her parents' home.

Yes, she will meet and interact with Micah members, not in person, but on Zoom.

"Rebecca Jaye joining us as a Zoom intern is simply the latest example of our all living in what seems an alternative reality," Rabbi Zemel said. "Every summer intern has contributed in some meaningful way to the life of our community. I know that Rebecca will make her own special Zoom impact," he added.

If there were no pandemic, no lockdown, no Zoom, Jaye would still be a fairly unusual intern.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Jaye, 31, who earned a bachelor's degree in American studies at Yale College and a master's degree in religion at Yale Divinity School, now attends Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York.

She lived and worked in China as a Yale China Teaching Fellow.

She says her interest in religion stems from growing up in an inter-faith household. "My mother is Christian and belongs to a Korean Methodist Church and my father is Jewish," Jaye explained, adding that she and her older sister grew up familiar with the religion of both parents.

"My parents, after allowing us to learn from both religions, left the choice of religion, if we wanted to make it, up to us," she said.

Jaye, who prefers to be called Becky, said she "embarked on her rabbinic studies in large part to learn more about the ways in which we may utilize Jewish values, traditions and history to bridge gaps in communication along religious, racial and ethnic boundaries."

Jaye's husband, Miguel Martin-Romero, is a consultant with the international management-consulting firm, Oliver Wyman. He was in Spain visiting family when borders closed due to the pandemic and has been unable to come home. When together the two enjoy cooking, discussing politics and walking their dogs, Mao and Thor. ◆

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**Rabbi's Message** FROM PAGE 1 ▶

Our nation's pandemic deaths, in the tens of thousands at the time of this writing, are climbing daily. This cannot be nobody's responsibility. The Bible says, "The blood is on the owner's hands." The prophet Nathan pointed a finger at his unaware and untroubled king, David, and shouted, "You are the guilty man." There are times when biblical insights make themselves painfully obvious.

The story becomes more heart wrenching and more complicated when you look beneath the national numbers to see who is suffering the most. The COVID-19 infection rate among minorities and immigrant groups is far higher than the rate for whites and the fatality rate for these communities is nearly double. The infection and death rates also are staggering in rural communities among the largely minority and immigrant populations working in high-density, industrial facilities.

We know that much of the pain and the death could have been avoided had our leaders listened to the admonitions of scientists – of the people with the expertise. Yet there remain many among us who yearn to re-open the economy no matter the cost. The biblical admonition to care for the poor, the widow, the stranger, the one most at risk does not appear to be resonating with many of those in authority.

People are rightfully scared about their jobs, their businesses, their futures. Frustrations are understandably high. We all want to get back to some semblance of "normal." But at what cost? Whose lives are we willing to sacrifice? Our own? Those of our family members? Too many of us are ignoring the suffering and death that surrounds us, but is so often on the "other side of the tracks." This lack of empathy – lack of humanity — reminds me of Europe under Nazi rule, when otherwise good people pulled down the shades as Jews were taken from their homes.

I ask:

Where is our national fabric?

Where is the moral outrage?

Where is our leadership?

If Jewish teachings mean anything, it is this: Never lose your moral compass. Never!

Often, these days, I think of the Talmudic tale of the rabbi at the gladiator games who stands up each and every time, against the will of the crowd, in order to vote to save the life of a vanquished warrior. To be a Jew is to always, in every situation, advocate to save even one life.

The norms that have held our society together are being ripped asunder. Each one of us is called to be Nathan before the king, the rabbi in the coliseum. "If not now, when?"(Pirke Avot 1:14).

We are, therefore, asked to pull more than our weight. It is for our community to double down on generosity and compassion. It is for our community to double down on activism and outrage. It is for our community to double down in support of the vulnerable and their caretakers. It is for each of us to thank the health care workers, the first responders and all those who are putting their lives on the line every single day. It is for all of us to laud the journalists who report the facts, the scientists who work in the labs and the dedicated government workers who struggle to keep our civic system from being completely shredded.

Our moral compass has guided us since Sinai. It is durable. It is within us. When we are asked "if not now, when?" we know how we must respond.

Shalom,

Daniel G. Zemel

# TELL ME AGAIN, WHERE DO I FIND MUTE?

By Fran Dauth

It was March 12 when the first email notice went out to Temple Micah members canceling in person Shabbat services, all classes plus meetings for all groups through at least March 31. That's what it said.

But hardly anything was ever canceled, because when Micah closed its doors on Wisconsin Avenue, Micah went live online.

Those among us who didn't know Instagram from Instant Pot soon learned all about joining or even hosting Zoom meetings.

Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, live-streaming on Micah's website, and even that old way of getting in touch, the telephone, became part of a daily virtual life for Micah.

As Rabbi Zemel said early on via Zoom, "We are flying the airplane even as we are designing and building it."

Since then nearly every group and committee has found a way to get together, mostly in a Zoom meeting. Friday night Shabbat services are on Zoom, so was the daily counting of the Omer with Pirkei Avot study. Adult Hebrew classes? On Zoom. Wise Aging? On Zoom.

Machon Micah went online. Boker Tov became Boker Tov Live, not that it wasn't always very lively. Even before the pandemic one-on-one tutoring was available for students in grades 3-7.

Relatives and friends watched home b'nai mitzvah rituals on Zoom.

Panel discussions on COVID-19 ranging from the role of news coverage of the pandemic to medical and epidemiological issues to the underserved in quarantine were live on Micah's YouTube channel.

None of this just happened, of course.

Debra Winter, Micah's worship music artist, set up all of the required Zoom licenses, accounts, the settings for meetings and worship. She taught two Zoom 101 classes, trained all of the staff, and created materials for group leaders and those who acted as Zoom hosts.

Micah Executive Director Rachel Gross assumed the role of technical support and online production for Shabbat evening and morning services. She became the behind-the-scenes person for every service, managing who is on the screen, who can be heard when, sharing screen shots.

She and Winter meet virtually each week to discuss what aspects of the services worked and what needs to be tweaked.

Jeannelle D'Isa provided tech support for the Monday Morning, Downtown Discussion and Book groups. Staff members Amy Lokoff and Maya Sungold work on the Micah website and myriad other online projects, particularly social media.

Others who have been instrumental in getting Wise Aging, Torah Study and other groups online are Ed Grossman, Ivan Sindell and David Diskin.

Asked how she became an online savant, Winter explained that as a touring musician, part of her life before she came to Temple Micah, involved working with national and international Jewish organizations.

"As their employee base is spread out across the country and around the world, most of their work takes place over Zoom and has for many years," Winter said.

Over the past five to 10 years, she said, she has been "a user, then a leader and a manager of Zoom meetings and accounts before ever there was a Coronavirus pandemic."

Winter said she has seen as many as "160 devices on a standard Friday night, many of which are actually representative of several people." She added that "some of our Shabbat morning YouTube video broadcasts of b'nai mitzvah have been viewed by as many as 500 plus."

The work that she and others have done to get Micah online has not gone unnoticed.

"The entire Micah community benefits from the creative, innovative, and diligent efforts of the staff to maintain our sacred connections," Micah President Marcia Silcox said.

"Members keep letting us know that they are aware of the hard work, unusual circumstances," Silcox noted.

D'Isa also commented on the congregation's response. "One thing I have really appreciated is the incredible support from all corners of our congregation. It's been really valuable and touching to get so many messages of support from such a variety of folks."

Of course technology can't replace the human touch. Who better to express it than the inimitable Jeannelle D'Isa:

"One heartbreaking thing for me is that we're having to find new ways to support congregants as they grieve. I think the Jewish way of death and its traditions are really effective and beneficial the way they're built, and they're so deeply rooted that they're hard to reinvent.

"(But) I want to hug people! I want to make sure they're fed and comforted and I want to sit with them when they're sad and bring them fizzy water! And I can't."

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**Berman** FROM PAGE 1 ▶

outgoing president.

Amy Berman is the president of the Micah House board. Seth has just finished his sophomore year of high school. He became bar mitzvah in February 2017. Eli, who just completed seventh grade, became bar mitzvah last September.

Berman, a former federal prosecutor in New York and then in the District, also served as Deputy Counsel General of the Commerce Department at the end of the Obama administration.

As a federal prosecutor, Berman said, he "investigated, prosecuted and tried all kinds of interesting cases." He described those cases as ones involving "terrorism, espionage, gangs, corruption and insider trading."

"For the better part of the past 16 years I've been on the private side, at law firms, representing companies and individuals in their battles with the U.S. government," he said.

Berman is a partner at the Clifford Chance law firm in the District. He earned his law degree at the University of Michigan, where he was editor of the University of Michigan Law Review. He got his bachelor's degree from Cornell University.

Berman also serves on the board of the University of Michigan National

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# WAITING FOR THE HUM OF BASEBALL ON MY CAR RADIO TO DROWN OUT THE NEW SEASON OF SILENCE

By Dan Steinberg

A few weeks ago, I told a co-worker that I was surprised by how little I miss sports.

That may have been peculiar to my own very particular circumstances. Having worked as a newspaper sportswriter and editor for two decades, maybe I was due for a break.

Plus, my son Leo was born just as North American sports were shuttered (on the Ides of March during a global pandemic, no less – good luck, kid).

With a toddler also stuck at home, my attention has turned to diapers rather than Diaper Dandies, to spit up rather than batters up, to nap time instead of game time and sippy cups instead of the Stanley Cup. (Also, did you realize that "Bris" is just "RBIs" rearranged?)

Then mid-April arrived. Sunshine interrupted the cold and rain. And I decided that I DO miss sports, but not necessarily March Madness or the Masters, the NBA or NHL playoffs, racing horses or racing cars or racing humans.

What I miss are those mundane moments when you jump in the car to run an errand on some breezy spring evening, and there's that inimitable hum of a ball game meandering out of your car speakers.

Yes, I'm pandering to my audience here. A passionate love of baseball appears to be a requirement of Micah membership; if I'm remembering correctly, Rabbi Zemel's first words to me upon returning from his recent sabbatical concerned top White Sox prospect Luis Robert.

I don't think the Nats have a more reliable demographic than D.C.-area synagogue members; it's a wonder shuls haven't started including the starting pitchers underneath the weekly Torah portion in Shabbat inserts.

Still, I happen to be telling the truth. It's the constancy and reliability of baseball that makes it perhaps our most comforting and comfortable sport. The background buzz of the crowd between pitches. The way you can cook a meal, read the paper and put the kids to bed during nine untimed innings, glancing at the television in between your life to catch a half-inning here, a big at-bat there. And the sound of the baseball radio broadcast, unlike any other in sports.

Dave Jageler, one of the Nationals' long-time radiomen, refers to the span between the last Nats game of the fall and the first of the spring as the "Season of Silence," and it works for the same reason all those gushy baseball metaphors have always worked. The sport hibernates during the colorless winter and returns as nature does in the spring, and it all might be hackneyed and corny but it still rings true.

For as long as I've been watching sports, I still get an actual thrill the first few times I see baseball players on television in spring training, the first few times I hear a game on the radio in March or April, the first few times I spot that green outfield and manicured field. It's the cycle of life, swinging in the right direction again.

So how do we cope in a world with no live sports, with no green ballparks, with no baseball? I have friends who've been watching last year's Nats playoff games on repeat, and maybe that helps.

I've had friends attempting to get interested in Korean baseball by placing ridiculous bets on teams like the Hanwha Eagles and Doosan Bears. (Ok, um, guilty.) Others have turned to sports movies, sports books, sports video games. Or you could always have a baby.

The biggest consolation, though, is that while this Season of Silence might be longer than any other, the silence will end at some point. It always does. We don't know when (at least as of this writing), and we don't even know for sure if it will happen this year.

But there will come a day when you jump into your car to run an errand on some breezy spring evening, and that inimitable hum of a ball game will be meandering out of your car speakers, the announcers killing time between pitches as the crowd murmurs and the batter steps out and the pitcher finally comes set. It's going to sound amazing.

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*Editor's note: Micah member Dan Steinberg is a digital sports editor at the Washington Post.*

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**Berman** FROM PREVIOUS PAGE ▶

Depression Center.

And, oh, by the way, Berman has competed in many triathlons and finished a full "Ironman". An Ironman competition consists of a 2.4 mile-swim, a 112-mile bicycle ride and a marathon 26.22-mile run.

He also plays what he calls a "decent amount" of tennis and rides a bike. Plus, the Bermans have a 4-year-old labradoodle named Cody Han Solo.

Berman said he and his family "always have loved being part of the Machon Micah community from day one and have so many fond memories of Sunday mornings at temple, field trips to the MLK memorial, Teddy and the youth choir and great energy from Rabbi Beraha, Sharon Tash and the team.

"We are blessed to have three wonderful rabbis who care so deeply about our community, not just now in COVID, but always.

"We don't know what the new normal will be, but we know our community will always come together whether it's in the sanctuary on Zoom or in some other way." ◆

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Gerald Liebenau, by Barbara and David Diskin, Mark Gruenberg, Stephen Rockower and Ann Sablosky, Mary Beth Schiffman and David Tochen, Cecelia and Mark Weinheimer

Debbie Rosen McKerrow, by Mark and Myra Kovey

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Gerald Liebenau, by Betsi and Harold Closter

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Shirley Levy Cherney, by Rielle Miller Gabriel

Robert Friedman, by Roberta Aronson and Paul Goldberg, Elka and Sid Booth, Lynne and Marshall Cohen, Helen Epps

Ruth Goldberg, by Nancy Raskin

Jerry and Vivian Liebenau, by Arlene and Pete Reiniger

Debbie McKerrow, by Myra Wendel Roney, Harry and Jessica Silver

Pearl Obrand, by Lorri Manasse and Russ Misheloff

Freddie Traum, by Beverly and Harlan Sherwat

Kenneth Wentworth, by the Federal Trade Commision Office of International Affairs, Debbie and Jim Roumell

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IN MEMORY OF
Debbie McKerrow, by Beverly and Harlan Sherwat

Kenneth Wentworth, by Susan Goda, Mary Beth Schiffman and David Tochen

## THE RABBI DANIEL GOLDMAN ZEMEL FUND FOR ISRAEL

IN MEMORY OF
Gerald Liebenau, by Mark and Myra Kovey

Wendy McLaughlin, by Jennifer Kaplan

*This list reflects donations received February 13–May 6, 2020. Every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, but if there are any errors or omissions please accept our apologies. For corrections or clarifications, please contact Rhiannon Walsh in the temple office. Thank you.*

THE LIFE OF TEMPLE MICAH

# SEARCHING FOR WISDOM: FINDING IT RIGHT HERE

By Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

On the second day of Passover, we start counting 49 days to mark the Omer. On our biblical calendar, this connects the grain harvest of Passover to the fruit harvest of Shavuot. On our spiritual calendar, this counting of time marks the distance away from slavery, toward the imminent inspiration of Torah. Although I've always counted the Omer, I've never developed a strong emotional connection with the practice. This year, however, has been different. This Omer season, in keeping with a practice traditionally associated with the Omer, every day at 6:30 pm, a group of Micah folks have gathered on Zoom to study Pirkei Avot and mark each day.

As someone who frequently prefers spontaneity to structure I've been surprised at the power of the ritual of counting each day. After removing an empty calendar from our fridge because it made me too sad, the Omer has been one of the only things keeping each day from slipping into the next. I've loved the devoted time to daily study. I've rejoiced in seeing the same faces day after day and the feeling of us all trying to accomplish something together.

And I'm sad to know that as I write this it will be over in just a few days. I am especially sad because the moment we've been counting toward is meant to conclude with us all standing together at Sinai, a moment of meeting and encounter and experiencing inspiration together. Yes, we will meet to study together; we will hopefully share in delicious dairy. But it will be so different this year.

I need a new ritual for post-Omer days. While discussing what this ritual might be, my husband sent me a section of Talmud, which asks the question: if the Torah hadn't been given at Sinai, could we still have learned all we need to know? The answer? "We would have learned it nonetheless. We would have learned the Torah of modesty from the cat, through watching their behavior. And we would have learned that stealing is wrong from the ant, because they do not take grain from each other."

Thus my new ritual: a search for the Torah right in front of me. And as rituals often require a liturgy, here is mine:

***Where can wisdom be found now?***

If Torah is not in the classroom or in the sanctuary,
Let me find it in the way my balcony plants bend towards the light.
Let me find space in the way the record needle drops giving me a chance to ready myself for its start.
Let me discover the lesson in my husband's nightly ritual of pushing together papers to create a sense of order
Let me see the Torah of change in the way the onions I placed in vinegar have transformed
Let me feel the Torah of comfort for soft rugs and warm virtual smiles
Let me learn the Torah of patience in the mute button and the impossibilities of interruption
Let me witness it in the way my neighbors let the person with heavy bags enter the elevator first—
Unable to help them with the load—they find whatever way they can
Let me grasp the Torah of oneness in the way the spilt water runs to find its likeness,
and the wisdom of difference in the way the dandelions spread in the sidewalk cracks.
*Where can wisdom be found?*
If I can't get to the wisdom of the mountain, let me find the wisdom of my home, the Torah of *right here*.

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**Pathogens FROM PAGE 4 ▶**

**Q. Talk about teaching epidemiology at GWU at a time of a pandemic.**

A. It is truly a privilege to be teaching MPH and PhD students in epidemiology during this time. Never before has it been so palpable that there is an urgent need for public health scientists! Our students at GW are already working in great force to support local public health efforts to mitigate COVID-19, and I am so proud of them.

Our epidemiologic methods are central to understanding the disease, studying new ways to treat and prevent it, and implementing our public health approaches in everything from contact tracing, modeling, conduct of clinical trials, analysis of lab studies and more. This generation of epidemiologists will be affected by COVID-19 the way my generation was affected by HIV. I am confident that these passionate young people will improve the health of the world and eliminate SARS-CoV-2 through epidemiology.

**Q. On a more personal note, how did you get interested in epidemiology?**

A. I was drawn into the field when I was working in pediatric HIV clinical trials (preventing HIV transmission from pregnant mother to child and treatments for children with HIV) in New Orleans. My wonderful mentor at that time suggested I take an epidemiology course and I never turned back.

The epidemiologic toolkit allows us to answer questions about health in populations. We can use these methods, not only to understand viruses like HIV or the one that causes COVID-19, but also how to test new interventions or vaccines, public health communication strategies, or the impact of any interventions to improve the health of populations.

One further silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic is that people know what epidemiology is now, and everyone (not just scientists!) is looking at data. Hopefully the impact of our methods will entice future generations to join us to improve the world. ◆

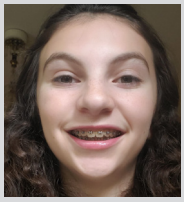
# B'NAI MITZVAH

## SOPHIA TRENDL
**MAY 2 / 8 IYYAR**

**PARENTS:** Jennifer Kaplan and Tom Trendl
**TORAH PORTION:** Achrei Mot-Kedoshim

## PHOEBE ELLEN SABAR
**MAY 9 / 15 IYYAR**

**PARENTS:** Ariel Sabar and Margriet Van Achterberg
**TORAH PORTION:** Emor



## CHARLOTTE MENDELSON
**MAY 16 / 22 IYYAR**

**PARENTS:** Lyndsey Layton and Dan Mendelson
**TORAH PORTION:** Behar-bechukotai

## ABBY SALKIND-FORAKER
**MAY 23 / 29 IYYAR**

**PARENT:** Susanne Salkind
**TORAH PORTION:** Bamidbar

## ARI WISOTSKY TOWNEND
**MAY 30 / 7 SIVAN**

**PARENTS:** Richard Townend and Alexandra Wisotsky
**TORAH PORTION:** Nasso

Photo Unavailable

## ALICE TAPPER
**JUNE 6 / 14 SIVAN**

**PARENTS:** Jake and Jennifer Tapper
**TORAH PORTION:** Beha'alotekha

## JOCELYN VIOLET STRAUSS
**JUNE 13 / 21 SIVAN**

**PARENTS:** Leanne MacDougall and Jeremy Strauss
**TORAH PORTION:** Sh'lach

**MAZAL TOV**

**Susannah Nadler, Zachary Weingarten, and Allen Weingarten, on the birth of their son and brother, Leo Chester Weingarten**

**Doug Meyer and Jacque Simon, on the marriage of their daughter, Hannah Simon to Bryan Klapes**

**Gwen and Marc Pearl, on the birth of their grandson, Jacob Dylan Pearl**

**Larry Bachorik and Gail Povar, on the birth of their grandson, Elliott Ashley Bearbach**

**Mary Beth Schiffman and David Tochen, on the birth of their grandaughter, Judith Ariella**

**Clerman Daniel, Mimi, Ida, and Jane Steinberg, on the birth of their son and brother, Leo Minh Steinberg**

**George and Meryl Weiner, on the birth of their grandson, Noah Ethan Wood**

**Adrian Alvarez and Richard Just, on the birth of their daughter, Juliet Cecilia Alvarez-Just**

# CONDOLENCES

The Temple Micah community extends its deepest condolences to:

**Martha Adler,** on the passing of her aunt, Sue Ransohoff

**Dan Behar,** on the passing of his grandmother, Shirley Katz

**David Braverman and Stacy Braverman Cloyd,** on the passing of their father and grandfather, Philip Braverman

**Wendy Erlanger and Ethan Porter,** on the passing of their father and grandfather, David J. Erlanger

**Lora Ferguson,** on the passing of her nephew, Jake McDonald

**Jamie Gardner,** on the passing of her father, Donald Gardner

**Sarah Gordon,** on the passing of her mother , Barbara Gordon

**Matthew Hoffman,** on the passing of his aunt, Donna Walker

**Lyn Ingersoll,** on the passing of her mother, Shirley Ingersoll

**Lorna Melendy,** on the passing of her husband, David Melendy

**Ben Rubenstein,** on the passing of his mother, Vicki Rubenstein

**Michael and Sarah Schooler,** on the passing of their brother and uncle, David Schooler

**Stan Shulman,** on the passing of his aunt, May Shulman Savage

**David Wentworth,** on the passing of his father, Kenneth Wentworth

May their memories be for a blessing.

# WE ARE WHO WE ARE BECAUSE OF EACH OTHER

By Rabbi Josh Beraha

It is said of Moses that he spoke to God face to face, and when he did, his face was radiant with glorious, bright rays. Though the text later contradicts itself and says that no one can see God's face and live, the main point is that Moses and God had an intimate relationship.

It wasn't always this way.

At the start of their relationship, Moses rejects God because he doubts himself. He asks God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" This Moses is unlike the mighty Moses of history about whom we read, "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses," because in the end, we come to know Moses *not* through his inner-monologue, but rather, through his outward responses to being, namely, through his relationships with his siblings, his father-in-law and with the Children of Israel. Through all of his interactions with others, Moses becomes Moses.

(This is true of most all of the characters in the Bible, actually, as the reader has no access to the inner-mind of the characters, and so experiences them through their interactions with others.)

## Gerald and Piggy Know

That Moses and other biblical characters' identities are ultimately forged through their interaction with others reminds me of a book my kids love called, "The Thank You Book." The climax of the story comes when the main characters, Gerald and Piggy, thank the reader for reading their book. The deep ontological lesson (that even kids understand!) is that without their readers, Gerald and Piggy wouldn't and couldn't really exist. The elephant and pig become Gerald and Piggy and are given life only when children open a book and speak them into existence.

The same idea is true of Torah. As our sources say, *shivim panim la'torah*, the Torah has 70 faces, which means its interpretive possibilities are infinite. To each person, Torah shows a different face. But as I see it, Torah is a mirror, and so the face of Torah is really *our face*, and so we can say that Torah's existence, its core identity, is derived from and bound to our own.

In addition to Torah, the same idea applies to you and me, and this is what I've been thinking about most often since this worldwide pandemic began. *We are who we are because of each other*. We are who we are — and we *become* who we are — when we are seen. To paraphrase the English philosopher Roger Scruton, our individuality resides in how others see us, and has little to do with our own being in the world.

## An Innate Desire

To be seen is an innate human desire, and one of the reasons we gather as a congregation week after week, year after year. Seeing each other is how we gain our own humanity. This is why, despite the pandemic, we're still finding ways to gather. To be seen.

When in mid-March it became clear that the only way for us to gather was virtually, I was worried about how we could possibly translate the experience of praying together in our sanctuary. What would it mean to find a substitute for real presence, for true face-to-face encounter?

The face and especially the eyes, wrote Scruton, are no mere biological objects,

but rather appear "as though lit from behind." "It is the place... from which I address you."

Through our faces, we meet eye to eye and, said Scruton, I to I.

Moses knew God's face, and God knew Moses's face, and in this seeing, they became. Torah emerges because we read it, teach it, live it. We are who we are because we see each other.

Is seeing each other online a true way to become?

## Each Little Box

At the commencement of the first Zoom Shabbat (March 20), I was overcome with emotion. All of the faces I'd been missing were right there in front of me, and each little box was like a treasure, a window into everyone's miniature sanctuaries.

And yet, there exists an intimacy to the face, a presence, that can't truly be captured on a screen. We all know this. When we connect virtually, we're not *really* together. Aren't we all left wanting even after we connect with others via Zoom? I am. Because Zoom is a mere substitute. And so I wonder — without meeting face to face, you seeing me and me seeing you, who are we?

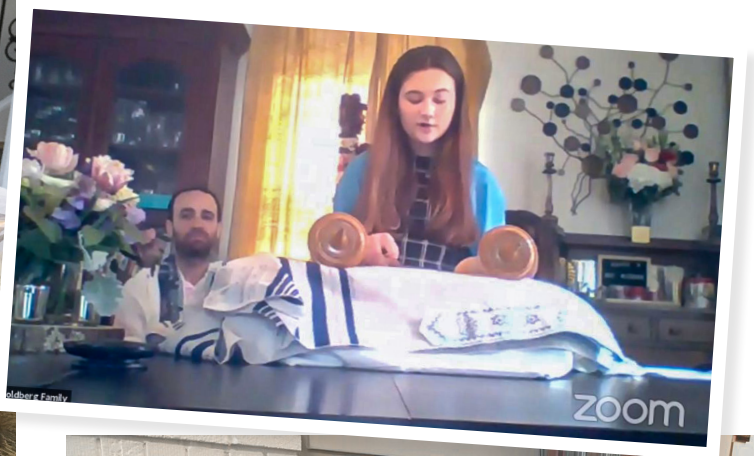
I know one day we'll be back in our collective home and we will greet each other again, face to face, eye to eye, and, yes, I to I. When that time comes — and it will— each glance will be that much more meaningful. We will once again be able to see, and mature, together.

For now, we can marvel at technology, and fill our cups each week as we connect online. But let us never forget that true meeting, true meaning, happens when we are close enough to look at each other and see, in each other's faces, the glorious, bright rays of light that make us who we are.

## YOU CAN ATTEND MICAH'S ANNUAL MEETING ONLINE

Temple Micah's annual membership meeting, on June 7 at 10 a.m., will be on Zoom this year. The agenda includes selection of five members of the board of directors, a preview of the FY2021 budget, and comments from Rabbi Zemel and outgoing President Marcia Silcox. A Zoom link will be available before the meeting.

# B'NAI MITZVAH IN A TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING





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