

From the Cantor

Two months ago I was writing to you with the excitement of my upcoming Installation Shabbat service and Havdalah concert. It was phenomenal to see so many members of all ages filling the sanctuary to share in the joyous occasion together. I am so grateful to all the musicians who helped to create this joyous evening, to Rabbi Amy and Bob Small and the many donors who helped to make this special Shabbat happen, as well as Sarah Glassman and all the staff who gave countless hours on the logistics of this weekend. It was a thrill to be able to see so many of our own talented musicians as well as the children of the community sharing their musical passion and immense gifts. I know you were all *kvelling* with me as we heard the “OZ Glee” children, in one of the concert’s many highlights, sing *L’dor Vador* (From Generation to Generation) to a well-deserved standing ovation.

It was only one week after the installation that we were no longer able to gather together in person. With the health and safety of our congregants and staff top priority, and abiding with the state’s “stay at home” orders, we soon decided to transition to “congregating” online using Zoom for all of our prayer services, classes and programs. This transition has gone smoothly, though I know I truly miss the beauty and power of congregational singing, of hearing all of your voices, and the power of harmony that we can only experience while singing and praying in the same room.

During these past several weeks, we have adapted our musical offerings to able to continue to reach all the constituents of the OZ community.

Some highlights of our adapted musical programming:

- I have enjoyed connecting with our preschool children every Friday morning through our Zoom “Shabbat party,” sharing our favorite Shabbat songs, saying the Shabbat blessings together, and allowing each child and family to share a Shabbat wish for the rest of the preschool family.
- With Hebrew School, we have adapted our Junior Congregation prayers and used our first 30 minutes every Sunday morning for an important **check-in/sharing** session, combined with many of the core morning prayers. It has been particularly meaningful to hear the children sharing their own personal expressions of gratitude, prayers of healing, as well as their own acts of *chesed* (loving-kindness) that they have performed or witnessed during this period.
- During our Singing Community session every Sunday at 5:00 pm, we have focused on songs of healing, hope and comfort. Though we haven’t been able to sing together in the same way, to experience our voices joining together in communal sound and harmony in Yurt or small sanctuary, we have been blessed to listen to one another’s voices as many of you have shared songs that have been close to your hearts during this time.
- Beginning in May, I will be sharing one video per week of song that brings comfort and healing during this time. And as I share, I will be asking you to share a piece of music as well (either a video of yourself singing or performing a song of your choosing, or to simply email me the name of a piece of music that is touching your soul in this moment). I’ll be collecting our music of hope and healing as a resource to call on during these challenging times, as well as part of our collective archives for this challenging period we are in together.
- I’m also excited to share with you another exciting Jewish musical opportunity. Beginning on Tuesday, May 12 and running for 8 classes (6:00 – 7:00 pm-May 12+June 9 will be 7:30-8:30 pm), I will be offering a class on Torah Cantillation (Trop). Whether you are a complete beginner at chanting Torah or you would like a “refresher,” this class will give you all the tools (including audio clips and resources to

practice at home). Chanting Torah and teaching others how to chant (leyn) have been one of the constant threads in my Jewish journey and I would be honored and thrilled to help you learn (or re-learn) this skill and spiritual practice.

Beyond the musical offerings, I want to assure you that Rabbi Amy and I are here for you during these challenging times. Though we have spoken to many of you already, please do not hesitate to let us know how we can best meet your needs at this moment. I pray for the health of you and your loved ones. Through shared song and spirit, we will get through these challenging times together.

~ *B'shira*/In Song,
Cantor Steve
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