

# Beyond the GATES

*A look at Schaarai Zedek life at home...*



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Beyond the

GATES

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# Thank You

Thanks to our 2019-2020 Torah Circle Challenge Givers, **Francine & Dick Dobkin, Russell LaFuente, Lee & Saul Rachelson, and Rena L. & Joel B. Singer**, and all of our Torah Circle donors, our congregation has continued to thrive during these moments of separation.

We know that for many of our congregants, hope can be hard to find these days. If you are experiencing adversity (whether health, financial, mental, or spiritual), please feel free to reach out to our clergy and staff.

We are never truly apart.

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# 01 HOLY SCREEN TIME

“Screen time” helps keep us  
connected now more than ever.

CLERGY

by Rabbi Joel Simon

“Black Mirror,” a series available on Netflix, is a favorite show of Jacent’s and mine. We started watching because every time we try watching something at night, without fail, one of us falls asleep early. “Black Mirror,” unlike most series, consists of entirely independent episodes. This format was perfect for us, as it meant that whoever fell asleep didn’t have any catching up to do the next time we watched (and if we wanted, we could go back and watch what we missed at any point).

Each episode of the series takes one piece of society today, usually having to do with technology and/or social media. It examines the potential consequences of this trend to the extreme. Most episodes take place in the future, although some do not. (Warning - some can get quite grotesque, and it’s definitely not recommended for all audiences. If you’re going to try watching, I recommend *not* starting with the first episode.)

I didn’t understand the meaning of the title, “Black Mirror,” until I had been watching

for a while. It turns out the name comes from the somewhat eerie reflection one sees when looking at a television, computer, phone, or tablet screen when it is turned off, resulting in a black mirror. Ultimately, Charlie Brooker, the show’s creator, asks us to contemplate what reflection we are emitting through the lens, or the screen, of our technology. Rather than the literal reflection, we focus on how we use our technology to reflect the individual and society that are utilizing it. The picture is rarely a pretty one.

I spoke from our bima in one of my first Yom Kippur services about the social risks when technology, screens, and social media keep us from being present to the reality of our own lives and the society around us. My addiction to my phone has only worsened since that time, as I am now one of those people who is glued to my screen far too often. And yet, without our screens as a source of our social interactions over these past few months for our synagogue and Jewish communities around the world, we would have been completely isolated from our friends and family.

Through our screens, we can create connections. In addition to our livestreamed services, we have opportunities to gather, both to learn and to socialize with fellow congregants. If you are not yet comfortable with Zoom, please try, or try again. It is far from perfect, but this use of our screens allows our connections to strengthen even as we are physically distanced.

We are preparing to worship together, even as we are apart, during our upcoming

“[The] use of screens allows our connections to strengthen even as we are physically distanced”

# “Let us be inspired . . . and think about how we can use our screens to learn, connect, and grow”

High Holy Days. Even with our screens turned on, we too will be looking into a mirror. What will we see? We will ask the same questions we have asked on every Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in which we sat in our sanctuary. We will think about how we have each responded to our current adversity and how our reflection contributes to the world around us.

We yearn for in-person interactions, but we must continue to sacrifice for our own well-being and that of the greater society. We will come back to a time of putting our screens away, but for now, let us be inspired by the stories we find within these pages as we think about how we can use our screens to learn, connect, and grow. May the reflection we see in our black mirrors be one in which we are surrounded by our Schaarai Zedek family, and may we see a picture of ourselves that shows compassion, concern, and love for every life. ♦

Temple members gathered on Zoom to say farewell to Rabbi Farb.



In May, we hosted our first “Drive-Thru Shabbat” and greeted congregants from a safe distance.



# Life, Reimagined

Our new Assistant Rabbi reflects on his Rabbinical Ordination and what he has learned from this strange time.

I always had a clear vision of the moment I would be ordained as a rabbi. I would walk up the steps of the bimah at Plum Street Temple in Cincinnati, only barely taking in its grand design, and I would glide effortlessly to the rabbi who would make me a rabbi. They would lay their hands on my head, say the sacred words that would imbue me with a new title, and then I would sink into the pews, full of emotion, a whole new person. But, as with many of our hopes for 2020, this is not how things worked out.

When it became clear back in March that large events would be unsafe, my class of 5th year rabbinical students at Hebrew Union College worked quickly. We met every week to see what we could do about “saving” HUC’s Ordination, a ritual that, as far as I know, has been enacted every year since the beginning of the 20th century. We came up with plans for every contingency, with a Zoom-only program being our last choice. But then, that choice became the only option.

It was heartbreaking for us, for our teachers, for our families. My dad, who happens to be my rabbi, was working on composing a piece of music for the ceremony, and it was painful to realize that we would never hear it performed at the iconic Plum Street Temple. In our sadder moments, some of us wanted to skip the ceremony, get our certificates in the mail, and move on. But we pushed forward together.

We poured our hearts into creating an online ritual that would do justice to the occasion. We put together a full day of online learning as a class with great Jewish scholars from near and far. We invited family and friends, many of whom

could never have made it to Cincinnati in the first place. We put in time, thought, and *kavanah* (positive Jewish intention). And then it happened! It was not what I imagined, but it was better than I could have hoped for. At the end, I felt like a rabbi. Because I was.

During these past months, life has not been the way any of us imagined. Birthdays, graduations, Purim, Passover, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, school, visiting family (old and young), even getting coffee with a friend -- all of these “normal” events have been turned upside down and inside out. Nothing has been easy, and staying optimistic remains a challenge.

There is a Japanese art form known as kintsugi in which one repairs shards of broken pottery with lacquer and gold dust. The brokenness of the pieces is both made visible and beautified, unlike most repairs in which we try to make it seem like the damage never occurred. Our lives are in pieces, some of us more profoundly than others, and trying to put things back together the way they were doesn’t work anymore. Mending our days and healing our spirits will entail putting the pieces of our lives back together in new ways.

With online services, virtual brunches, Zoom meetings, and lots and lots of emails, texts, and calls, it is clear to me that Congregation Schaa-rai Zedek is building something new. We are adapting. We are connecting. We are living lives that we could never have imagined but which are being beautified by our compassion for one another. I am so excited to be a part of what we are creating together. Thank you for welcoming me so warmly. Thank you for letting me imagine new ways of being Jewish with you. ♦

We are pleased to welcome Rabbi Michael Weiss  
as our new Assistant Rabbi!



# Lockdown Wedding

by Carolyn Adler



Sweat dripped down my neck as I clicked submit at the end of the grueling eight-hour practice MCAT exam. Grabbing my phone from across the room and powering back up, alerts frantically interrupted the silence. Quickly scanning them, I felt my chest tighten as I dialed Matt, who had been patiently awaiting my call.

Disney World was closing, nullifying our postnuptial celebratory kid-focused family trip. Group meetings were banned. In those eight hours, the world had changed, with our wedding one week away.

It was difficult, but we quickly decided to cancel the wedding to keep the people we love safe. In consultation with Rabbi Simon, we decided to move forward with our carefully selected cheeky “blast-off” wedding date of 3.21 in a small, private ceremony with only two witnesses in attendance.

Even with our decision to modify, Matt felt it was important to have as much of our real wedding as possible. I wore my dress; Matt wore his tuxedo. I had my bouquet, and Matt

Carolyn and Matt opted to keep their ceremony at Schaarai Zedek and have friends and family join on Zoom.



Amy and Jared Miller, friends of the bride and groom, were present to witness the couple's *ketubah* signing.

had his boutonniere. We made sure that our photographer could safely capture our day.

On the morning of our wedding, I woke up feeling like I should feel different. I mean, this is a big day, right? Instead, it felt like any other lovely day. Isn't it funny how life is that way? We expect moments to feel different, but when everything is right and good, they don't. My mom always reminds me that the unexpected thing about getting older is that while your bones grow old, you still feel the same on the inside.

With the sun beaming as only a Florida sun can do, we enjoyed a leisurely morning filled with decadent challah French toast, web chatting with the 20s+30s group from Schaarai Zedek, running outside with our oldest pup, and singing “Siman Tov u’Mazel Tov” on repeat as we laughed and danced around the bedroom.

In our merriment, the time slipped away from us, and before we knew it, we were frantically rushing to make it to the temple on time. Matt sent Rabbi Simon a text letting him know we were running behind, and his response, “We won't start without you!” had us laughing and returned us to our former state of joy.

We arrived at the temple sweaty but still laughing with a photographer in tow. Rabbi Simon offered to use the temple's livestream

“In those eight hours, the world had changed, with our wedding one week away”

for the family to tune in remotely. What we wouldn't see until after our service was all of them dressed to the nines, congregating around screens, with wedding-like rows of seating to cheer us on as we stepped into married life. Surrounded by a virtual family and two very dear friends to witness our ketubah signing, we made a covenant.

Before the ceremony, we discussed the details with Rabbi Simon, and he asked if we would walk down the aisle, to which we responded, "Well, that seems silly as we will be getting ready together."

At the temple, Rabbi Simon wisely asked again, and this time we agreed to the formalities. He knew from our premarital meetings the significance of the religious ceremony to us and gently guided us towards the tradi-

tions that are now cherished memories. We both left the auditorium to pretend it was our first time entering, Matt winking at me as he left me in the foyer.

As I walked down the aisle to Rabbi Simon playing "Dodi Li (Song of Songs)" on the guitar, I felt the lump in my throat as tears filled my eyes. At the end of the aisle was the man who had loved me patiently and well and helped put back together the pieces of my broken heart. Walking toward me was my beloved, and the knowledge that I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine overwhelmed us with gratitude.

Sometimes imperfect moments give us the most beautiful memories if we are open to letting go of our expectations. When we look back on our day, we remember the perfection that was not the plans we let go. ♦

Rabbi Simon played "Dodi Li (Song of Songs)" on the guitar as the bride walked down the aisle.



LIFECYCLE

# A Day in the Life of a Zoom Bride

by Susan Miller

04



April 18, 2020 was to be our wedding date. Gary and I chose this date very carefully. April is the fourth month of the year, my favorite number. 18 has the number eight, which is Gary's favorite number. Rabbi Simon was going to perform the wedding ceremony at 8:04 PM at our request.

The date was rapidly approaching when COVID-19 took over. The government was beginning to put restrictions in place, and where there weren't, our family and friends were adding their own rules. We had decided to call Rabbi Simon to tell him that the wedding might not take place. In his optimistic way, Rabbi

Simon said, "Not so fast, let's think how we can make this happen." I actually said that there were more pressing things taking place, and we should postpone the ceremony. Rabbi wouldn't hear of it and said that a wedding is very important, and so began the research as to how this would all come together.

Zoom! That's how we'll do it. We had trial runs to make sure we can connect. Then there was the question of how many can celebrate with us. Thousands, I was told. Gary and I gathered all our family and friends and invited them to this virtual and very special event. We were standing on the lanai with no

one beside us. Rabbi was officiating from his office, and our family and friends from all corners of the country attended.

We didn't know what to expect when we signed on to have this virtual ceremony. Gary and I never felt alone for one moment. We felt the warmth, excitement, and joy from everyone that was a part of our Zoom wedding.

Rabbi Simon made our special evening nothing less than wonderful. April 18, 2020 is a date that will always have such special meaning to us.

When you are dealt lemons, you learn to make lemonade. ♦



Alex Rose & Ally Min Linsky celebrated their B'not Mitzvah from home, while family and loved ones joined the ceremony from Zoom.

## Cooking with Cantor

On June 16, Schaarai Zedek Sisterhood hosted a virtual "Cooking with Cantor" class on Zoom. Participants shopped for ingredients before the session started, and together, with Cantor Cannizzaro's guidance, they cooked a full Shabbat meal!

The recipes included healthy zucchini fries, Cantor's baked chicken, balsamic onion and thyme carrots, and a delicious foolproof brownie recipe.

Full recipes are available on our website at [zedek.org/cookingwithcantor](http://zedek.org/cookingwithcantor).

Cantor Cannizzaro shows participants how to make her delicious recipes.



When we signed up to be the first "Zoom Mitzvah," we didn't know what we were in for. It ended up being a whirlwind of emotions and an amazing day. It exceeded our expectations, and it felt like a religious ceremony at the synagogue. But with one catch - we were able to do it from our very own home. Thanks to the advanced technology and support from Rabbi Simon and Cantor Cannizzaro, we were able to have the b'not mitzvah of our dreams.

On the Saturday of our service, we had a rehearsal before which

allowed everything, including the "virtual" opening and closing of the ark and the *alliyas* to run smoothly. We were both nervous and anxious because we're perfectionists, but our fears were put at ease. It felt real because all of our family and friends were surrounding us both on Zoom and around our dining room table. We were able to keep all aspects of Schaarai Zedek's traditional service. We read from the Torah in our own home which is something that was important and special to us. There's a lot of effort and time that went into our service, but it was all worth it.

With that being said, we are so thankful for everyone who contributed to our service. It was such a joyous event that we will always remember and never forget. Like we said in our speech, we live in an "everyday's a great day" mindset which was integral during our service. Our Torah portion was about the Jubilee year, and our service was definitely a jubilee as it was so important for us to block out the challenges during this time and under these circumstances. If we can just live in the moment, we can all have our own jubilees, even in these challenging times. ♦

# GRIEVING DURING COVID-19

by Judith Mish

It has now been over three months since my beloved husband, Joel passed away. At any other time, I would have been surrounded by family and friends from many places, had a beautiful memorial service in our sanctuary honoring Joel and the life he had, sat shiva with many around, and just had the time to tell stories, share hugs, and most of all had closure. However, due to the virus, all that changed in an instant, and I found myself totally alone.

So how have I managed during this most difficult time, you might ask? Quite simply, my amazing Sisterhood friends have called and called, constantly checking on me and giving me words of encouragement, listening to me cry, FaceTiming me, and much more. Food has been dropped at my door, a challah on Shabbat, and countless other good deeds. Rabbi Simon, Rabbi Birnholz, and Rabbi Farb have checked on me so many times, always giving me words of encouragement, and many times making me laugh.

Our daughter and her family facetime me almost daily, and on Shabbat, when they sit down to dinner, I am part of the ritual of prayers, lighting the candles together, blessing the wine, and watching them bless the challah that our granddaughter makes each week. Our son has done



"I got up one day and realized that life was so very precious, and I need to be there for not only my family but for myself"

my grocery shopping for me each week and also checks on me daily. I am so lucky to have two wonderful children that are so caring.

After weeks of sitting home, feeling depressed and missing Joel more than I can say, I got up one day and realized that life was so very precious, and I need to be there for not only my family but for myself. On went the sneakers and out the door I went for what has now become a ritual of walking five miles a day, five days a week. It has been the best medicine ever, giving me time to

reflect on all that I had for 57 years with Joel, and realize all I have to keep going for.

Zoom has become a great friend, as I get to worship each week with our Schaarai Zedek family, cook with the Cantor and our Sisterhood, listen to lectures and go on tours right from my office. This is not the journey that I once saw for myself, but I have come to terms with it and look forward to the day when I can pray in our sanctuary, be surrounded by friends, and yes, spend a cool summer in Ithaca once again. ♦

## Rabbi Richard J. Birnholz Torah Circle

We express our gratitude to our congregants. Thank you for your commitment to our temple through your Torah Circle pledge.

As I was writing to you all a year ago, we were preparing for our 125th anniversary, celebrating all those who worked so hard to create and continue to build our holy community. As we looked to the future, we affirmed that even as we change as a community, the values that guided our creation and sustained us over these 125 years would remain a part of Schaarai Zedek. We were living a year in which we continued to innovate new ways to create community, connections, and meaningful Jewish moments for all of our members.

And then we had to pivot when physical gatherings, which defined our community in so many ways, became a risk. As we were changing how we gathered, all of us were changing the way we lived our lives, and my sincere hope is that our presence was able to provide strength and comfort to those who needed it. In this magazine, we have seen stories representing how Schaarai Zedek has been there to celebrate and mourn with our members in these most trying of times.

Our innovative program and forward-thinking had us prepared to pivot, and I am incredibly proud of our clergy, staff, and lay leaders. Still, none of our work would have been possible without the support of the Rabbi Richard J. Birnholz Torah Circle. I could not be more grateful to **Francine and Dick Dobkin, Russell LaFuerde, Lee and Saul Rachelson, Rena L. and Joel B. Singer**, and those who responded to their challenge. You put us in a position to thrive this year, and we thank you.

We also recognize that this coming year is going to be a difficult one. The pandemic financially impacts many of our congregants. No one is turned away from our congregation because of a lack of financial means. This, too, is only possible because of our Torah Circle donors. As we thank last year's supporters, I hope those who find themselves in a secure place will consider increasing your gifts this year. Thanks to this coming year's challenge gives **Laura and Richard Eggnatz, Laureen and Scott Jaffe**,

**Meg and Gary Moskovitz, Laura and Steve Salzer, the Gil, Betsy, Dan and Holly Singer family, and Paula and Carl Zielonka**, we are already off to a great start. Now I am asking you to join me as we join them.

Our foundation is strong, and we will grow stronger as a community in the coming year, emerging on the other side with strengthened relationships, identities, and faith.

Thank you for supporting our mission, and thank you for being a part of our beloved family. ♦

- Rabbi Joel Simon

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\*Donation is new or increased from last year and will be matched by the Dobkin, LaFuente, Rachelson, and Singer Torah Circle Challenge.

If you would like to make a donation to the 2020-2021 Torah Circle, please call the temple office at (813) 876-2377.

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Congregation Schaarai Zedek  
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Tampa, FL 33609-4643

# CSZ AT HOME

While information about programming is not currently being mailed to your homes, please make sure to read our weekly CSZ at Home emails and visit [zedek.org](http://zedek.org) often for information about services, classes, and other gatherings.

Feel free to call the temple office with questions any time!

**Website:** [zedek.org](http://zedek.org)

**Email:** [office@zedek.org](mailto:office@zedek.org)

**Phone:** (813) 876-2377

**Facebook:** @csztampa

**Instagram:** @schaaraizedek

**YouTube:** Congregation Schaarai Zedek

## High Holy Days

We would love for you to be a part of this year's High Holy Day service!

If you would like to be included, record a video of yourself or your family answering the following question in one or two sentences:

**“What do the High Holy Days mean to you?”**

We may not be able to use every video in its entirety, but everyone who submits an answer will be included in our video montage.

Also, if you have a shofar, please send a video of your best *Tekiah Gedolah*.

Send all videos to Rabbi Simon at [jsimon@zedek.org](mailto:jsimon@zedek.org).