

A message from Dr. Schatz

It is the end of December. We have completed four months of hybrid school this year, in a religious school that looks quite different from the past. We have also completed ten months of battling the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am awed by the ability of our pharmaceutical companies to have been able to release the first of the vaccines. Personally, I am in the last few weeks of the eleven-month period of *aveilut*, of reciting mourner's kaddish in memory of my mom. I attend morning minyan daily. When the weather permitted, I attended an outdoor minyan in my neighborhood. On days that were cold or wet, as well as prior to the opening of even the outdoor services, I attend a zoom minyan. Not only do I attend and recite kaddish with the other mourners, on most days I am asked to be the *shaliach tzibbur*, the prayer leader, using the skills I began to develop when I went to my synagogue's Hebrew school. Our children at Har Zion are building these very same skills – how to function as a literate Jew in the synagogue, at home, and in the larger Jewish community. I am so proud of our Kitah Zayin students, who are learning to lead the weekday *Ma'ariv*, evening service. At a time when they are finalizing their Torah readings and other Bar and Bat Mitzvah responsibilities, they are building a skill that will serve them and the Jewish People into the future. I am proud of our younger children, those first learning their Hebrew letters, those working on building their reading skills, and those who are practicing siddur reading. They are not just preparing for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah service, though that is a considerable accomplishment. They are preparing to function in the Jewish community for the rest of their lives.

I am proud of the many students who have nearly 100% attendance in their classes and tutorials so far this year. Our teachers have noted the advancement of so many children in their reading, and we attribute it in part to regular attendance. I am proud of the way students are able to join in when I visit classes for Sunday tefillot. I was particularly touched by the note from one parent who was so thrilled that their child was singing prayers in the shower! Of course, we want the children to experience the power of praying in community, of exploring their own spiritual growth and concept of G-d, but we'll take the win of children singing our age-old prayers like songs – this is worth everything!

When we return to school in January, we will take some time during Hebrew tutorials to do a mid-year assessment of reading progress. I anticipate that we will see quite a lot of improvement. We will then be better informed as to how best to proceed into the winter and spring. One of the best things you can do to support your child's Hebrew skills is to remind them to do some practicing during winter break. Students who use the Shalom Hebrew app (in Hebrew groups 3, 4, 5, and 6) can win a prize for completing various activities on their own. We can already commend **TJ Miller** who has finished lessons 1-4! A prize is coming your way! Those in other groups will find free apps at [www.behrmanhouse.com/playlearn](http://www.behrmanhouse.com/playlearn) to review letters and vowels (Alef-Bet Practice) and can read prayers and have the computer read back to you to check yourself (Prayer Practice). This is a fun and easy way to stay on top of Hebrew reading.

I was so pleased to greet so many families during the Hanukkah Drive-Thru! The classes I visited around Hanukkah time made creative crafts, edible Hanukkiot, and played fun games to review their Hanukkah learning. As we move into January, please note the many opportunities available for doing *Chesed*, acts of kindness, around Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Please be sure to let your child's teacher know if your family participates in something, whether through Har Zion or otherwise in the community. Also please note the "save the date" elsewhere in this email message about the "Zoom Nation Shabbat" on January 23. More information to follow.

The faculty and staff join Rabbi Shawn and me in wishing all of our families a safe and relaxing winter break, and we will see you in 2021!

*B'shalom,*

Dr. Michael Schatz  
Director of Curriculum and Instruction