This time of year passes by swiftly. While we look forward to late-year holidays that celebrate light we cannot help thinking back to the High Holidays and the recitation of Unetaneh Tokef.

This prayer, essential within Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur liturgy, is frightening in its poetic recitation of what may transpire for humankind within the space of a year. Continual tribulations seem to be our recent state of affairs. But fear and horror are leavened by hope.

In the days after the tragedy at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, flocks around the world came together to mourn and to be inspired by the lives lost. Our relationship to those precious souls was familial even if we had no direct connection to the individuals.

For one of our JCLP Legacy communities, Beth Israel in Washington, PA, the relationship was a direct one. Bernice and Sylvan Simon (z"l) were the parents of Marc Simon, Beth Israel's vice president, and often accompanied him to events there. Daniel Stein (z"l) was the husband of synagogue president Marilyn Posner's childhood friend. Extended "Jewish geography" identified more bonds within the congregation.

Shabbat services after the murders drew more than 200 people—including many non-Jews—to Beth Israel, which on a typical Friday evening has difficulty assembling a minyan. Friends and neighbors offered comfort and warmth during a meaningful service.

Even without primary relationships with the Squirrel Hill community, we all came together after the devastating event to offer consolation.

The experience of another of our JCLP communities reinforced that Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la zeh—we are all responsible for each other.

Beth Israel Center, a Legacy community in Whiteville, North Carolina, felt the direct impact of that saying in September. Whiteville was just recovering from Hurricane Matthew when it was hit by this year's Hurricane Florence. A relief effort for the stricken community was masterminded by sisters Jennifer Kamin Kulbersh and Heidi Kamin Enzor, who grew up in Whiteville. Through JCLP connections, Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta facilitated collection sites at various synagogues in the city. A truck already en route from Birmingham stopped off in Atlanta to load the results, adding to the generous gifts of the Birmingham Jewish community.

Only one of the Kamin sisters still lives in Whiteville, but their entire family is still rooted there. They share a sense of place with those in the Jewish communities in small towns featured in a series of Atlanta Jewish Times articles sponsored by JCLP. Read them and perhaps you will identify your own story here and here and here.

For those who do identify with and care about the special qualities of Jewish life in small-town America, please consider a donation to the only organization working exclusively with historic communities to help them navigate the singular challenges they face.

Sincerely,

Noah Levine
Senior Vice President, JCLP
And, always, please be in touch if we can help you or your community.

Of Blessed Memory: Roger Ackerman (1932-2018)

At the moment in 2010 when Roger Ackerman was interviewed and photographed by The New York Times, he was helping his cherished Temple Sinai in Sumter, South Carolina, acknowledge the reality of its predicament as an aging and diminishing congregation. The interview was for an article about the work of the Jewish Community Legacy Project.

His charm and persuasiveness and stalwart leadership had convinced his fellow congregants to engage with JCLP to plan for a future that might include little Jewish observance in Sumter but would include the continuation of a significant Jewish presence for a community with roots in the early 19th century. They all worked together to craft a Legacy Plan and Sumter became one of the first to have a full blueprint to address all of the elements that similar communities worry about, including the ongoing spiritual life of members, financial stewardship, and cemetery maintenance.

Business brought Roger Ackerman to Sumter from the North Carolina of his birth. In addition to his devotion to Temple Sinai, he was active in the civic life of the city and over the years received numerous honors including The Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina's highest award given to an individual for excellence in service.

Roger lived to see his civic and Jewish lives come together with the realization of the most visible component of Temple Sinai's Legacy Plan when the Temple Sinai Jewish History Center--part of the nearby Sumter County Museum—opened in June of this year. Housed in the synagogue's former social hall, exhibits give an introduction to Judaism and tell the story of Jews in South Carolina and elsewhere in the South, with a particular emphasis on the civic and military involvement of Sumter's Jews. One section summarizes Temple Sinai past and present. The Temple Sinai Jewish History Center also stands as the only Holocaust museum between Richmond and Atlanta.

After visiting the exhibits, guests are led into the sanctuary of the 1912 Moorish Revival-style building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The holy space is decorated with stunning stained glass windows depicting Torah stories that were produced in a drapery style often used by the Tiffany Studio to add three-dimensional effects.

Sunlight streamed through those windows when JCLP President and Treasurer David Sarnat opened his address to the Jewish Society of South Carolina during their bi-annual meeting held in the sanctuary in October, not long after Roger's passing. The conference theme of "Endangered Congregations—Strategies for Survival" matched the surroundings. David's tribute to the skillfulness and determination of his partner in the legacy plan process inspired conference attendees.

Roger Ackerman was a stellar example of someone who recognized a situation and did everything within his ability to reach the best outcome. He also encouraged other congregations to follow the example of Sumter's Temple Sinai by engaging with JCLP.

Rabbi David Lyon: Member of the Board

Why did Rabbi David Lyon help craft a "Memo of Understanding" between his Congregation Beth Israel in Houston and B'nai Israel in Victoria, a two-hour drive from Houston, and then join the JCLP Board of Trustees?

Rabbi Lyon is a busy, busy man with myriad commitments. He is husband to Lisa, father to three grown children, and a proud new grandfather.

He leads a congregation established in 1854 and now a vigorous community of 1,650 families that emphasizes inclusion and participation. He is an author "God of Me: Imagining God Throughout Your Lifetime" and local radio personality. He serves on the board of United Way of Greater Houston and the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, where he is an Executive Committee member of the Multi-Faith Council. He is a member of the Advisory Board of Holocaust Museum Houston and also a member of the Houston ADL's Coalition of Respect. He is a board member and committee chair of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform Rabbinic Leadership organization.

"Pikuach nefesh," he said in response to the question of why encourage his congregation to get involved with a much smaller and somewhat distant proud Jewish community that also had 19th-century roots but was now struggling.

He continued, "We were approached by JCLP because we are so large and many of our members have emotional and familial connections to small towns in Texas where Jewish life is more fragile. Jewish values obligate us to care for each other and we at Beth Israel have enough to share with others in need."
The relationship between the congregations assures responsible oversight for Victoria's historic cemetery, where a number of relatives of Beth Israel congregants are buried. Members of the Victoria synagogue may also take part in Houston's relevant, modern and joyful practice of Judaism.

Jewish communities in other small towns in Texas, he noted, can look to this example and could benefit by taking on their own legacy planning process with the assistance of JCLP.

Rabbi Lyon says he is in the "business of sustaining Jewish life" and advocates for JCLP's work by emphasizing that its role is not to hasten the demise of diminishing congregations but to prolong their lives as long as possible in tandem with a plan to protect assets and secure broad continuity of Jewish life there or elsewhere.

For additional information,
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