

Ma Tovv: Gila Efrati and David Diamond

HONORING OUR LEADERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Interviewed by Marcy Spiro, Director of Membership Engagement

The two of you are staples in the Estelle & Melvin Religious School. How did you begin teaching in a religious school setting, what brought you to Adas, and how long have you been teaching here?

Gila: I visited my family in the Washington area in November 2000, when I was between jobs in Israel. While I was visiting I was offered a job at Adas after another teacher had left to return to Israel. I went back to Israel for three and a half weeks, packed up my apartment, and came back to the U.S. I started teaching on December 3, 2000.

David: I've been teaching Hebrew school since my senior year of college. I came to Adas 20 years ago to teach in the high school program and later began teaching in the lower grades also.

During the past few years, you and Rabbi Rosenbaum have completely re-created our Hebrew curriculum. What inspired you to make these changes? What does the curriculum look like now? Do you have any tips or tricks that you can share to help people learn Hebrew?

Gila and David: We had been teaching sixth grade at Adas for quite a few years and were looking for a new challenge. When we were teaching, we often found it difficult to meet the needs of all Hebrew levels within our classrooms. We discussed this with Kerrith, and she proposed that we pull students into small groups to give them more individualized instruction in Hebrew reading. We created goals and objectives for each grade level from kindergarten through sixth grade and, after assessment and meeting with all of the students, we created Hebrew groups with the help of Kerrith and Pam. The overall goal for Adas students is to read Hebrew prayers and other texts with accuracy and fluency. We support the teachers in grades 3–6 in their Hebrew instruction by sharing goals and objectives, preparing materials, and restructuring Hebrew groups to best meet the needs of the students.

Hebrew is like any language; in order to learn it, you must practice every day. This includes listening to Hebrew spoken by others and repeating the words. To master Hebrew reading you must first learn the letter and vowel sounds, decode, and move toward fluency. Practice, practice, practice... and practice...

When you're not teaching at Adas, what do you love to do?

Gila: I like to listen to music, go to live concerts, practice my photography, and visit my family in Israel.

David: My favorite thing to do is to spend time with my kids and grandkids, particularly on Jewish holidays and *Shabbes*.



What are some of your favorite teaching moments over your years at Adas?

Gila: I remember how we worked with the sixth graders to sell hot chocolate and bagels to raise money six or seven years ago to send to Beit Oren in northern Israel, which had suffered damage from forest fires. The best moment at the end of our first year of pulling small Hebrew groups was when students shared with us how much they loved learning in a small-group environment. Hearing students make connections between the Hebrew curriculum and the Judaics curriculum was very satisfying.

David: Some of my favorite memories of teaching at Adas are of the Sixth Grade Model *Seder*, the students' sharing their sixth-grade family research projects, and getting to know the parents and families of the students I was teaching.

We get to celebrate Purim in February! What is your favorite Purim song that you sing on Sunday mornings, and what is your ultimate *hamentashen* filling?

Gila: I love *hamentashen* filled with the traditional poppy seed filling. No need for any change in *hamentashen* fillings!

David: My favorite *hamentashen* fillings are prune and apricot. I really used to enjoy singing all of the *Purim* songs with the *Vav* students.

What are two of your favorite Hebrew words, and what do they mean?

Gila: My favorite Hebrew words are *shalom* and Israel. *Shalom*, as you know, means hi, bye, and peace. Israel, of course, means Israel!

David: My two favorite words or phrases in Hebrew are *l'hizdangef* and *tearti l'atzmi*. *L'hizdangef* comes from the name of Tel Aviv's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff. A well-known street in Tel Aviv is named after him. *L'hizdangef* means to stroll on Dizengoff Street. *Tearti l'atzmi* is for me a typical Hebrew idiom. It literally means "I described to myself," but the meaning is "I figured it out." 🌟