

To tell my personal Jewish journey, I feel I should start with my parents. My parents were born in Baghdad, Iraq. My mom immigrated to Israel and my father to the US and they eventually met and moved to Los Angeles. Both were raised orthodox to some degree, but raised us more with knowledge about the holidays, Bar Mitzvahs, trips to Israel and of course, marry someone Jewish. Different than my older siblings, I started going to a Jewish school in 3rd grade and back in the late 70s, the larger Jewish schools were all orthodox. I attended a yeshiva from 3rd grade through the end of 10th grade which was a unique experience as I lived in a non-religious home but was learning about orthodoxy all day long, wearing a kippa, Tzitzit, davening – very quickly I was given the title of “Rabbi of the house” and among other things, the guy that made the Passover Seder much longer than it used to be... After transitioning back to public school, I was very confused about my Jewish identity – just when I started asking Why about Judaism, I was no longer in a Jewish school and my Jewish identify was significantly subdued.

This all changed during the first gulf war in my third year at college. Watching scuds landing in Israel awoke something inside me that caused a rebirth of my Jewish identify and told my mom I wanted to move to Israel. Her less emotional reasoning brought me back to Earth and I ended up studying abroad in Israel for a year. I never ended up moving to Israel but that year created a foundation of my Jewish identity and connection to Israel.

Fast forward 15 years I was fortunate enough to meet my wife Tam from Vietnam. This brought another milestone in my Jewish journey as in theory I always thought I would marry someone Jewish, however as I thought through what was important to me about Judaism, it was not to absolutely believe in G-d (which I struggle with continuously), but rather the culture, identify and connection with Israel. And this is exactly how we have chosen to raise our kids – not with two religions, but rather two identities – Jewish and Vietnamese.

When we had children, we were fortunate enough to live near to the Tiburon JCC and both our kids attended the JCC. That is when we started to connect with Kol Shofar as Rabbi Leider would be there for most family Shabbats singing with the kids and parents. Joining the temple and Beit Binah was a natural progression for us and in the process, we have had further connections with Rabbi Leider and the Temple beyond just Beit Binah including running a service at our house when my father passed away and running the Mikvah ceremony for our two kids. Our kids are now in 2nd and 4th grade and get to see both Rabbi Leider and Rabbi Paul most Sundays. And I look forward to continue my Jewish journey with my family and the Kol Shofar community.