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THE SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES



Sparks of memory light the way home

Award-winning songwriter Larry Lesser in early February 2020 released *SPARKS*, an ambitious album of 24 original songs deeply grounded in Jewish text and values. The album includes “Lights Lead Home,” his heartfelt composite of experiences of *b’nai anusim* he has known from his time in El Paso, home of the Anusim Center of El Paso. Lesser has usually played this song to open most of the 15 years’ worth of annual Sephardic Anusim Conferences that won Congregation B’nai Zion a 2009 Solomon Schechter Gold Award for Synagogue Excellence in Celebrations and Dedications, and yielded the passage of a 2009 USCJ resolution welcoming *b’nai anusim* and memorializing the Spanish Inquisition as part of *Tisha B’Av* observances. The song also appeals to those who do not have Sephardic ancestry, as it poignantly reveals more generally how ritual can awaken and reveal heritage or soul that is within all of us.

A slightly earlier version of the lyric (with less Spanish) was featured in a 2010 national resource guide compiled by Rabbis Stephen Leon and Juan Mejía and a video of Lesser performing that version at a Sephardic Anusim Conference is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=psn3mGNMR-g.

Information on Lesser’s new album is at www.larrylesser.com/sparks and the new lyric for “Lights Lead Home” is reprinted here with Larry’s permission. 



Larry Lesser

Larry Lesser is a Houston-raised El Paso-based, award-winning educator, songwriter, author, and speaker blessed to have integrated several realms of experience, including: education, math/statistics, and poetry/song.

His passion for combining music and math/statistics has made its way into his research, grant-writing, teaching, outreach, and service; and over 120 of his published poems/songs are discipline-related. He has even found ways to connect math/statistics education with his Jewish background, yielding some of the first national journal articles in this niche. He also recorded an album of original Jewish songs.

Larry is a lifelong learner with a gift for helping diverse audiences make connections among diverse realms of content.

LIGHTS LEAD HOME

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**Rosa Mendez wonders why
her *abuela* drew the blinds,
lit two candles and closed her eyes
on Friday nights.**

**Lights lead home, lights lead home
over ocean of soul.**

**Here in this New World land,
Rosa starts to understand
Traditions hidden, lost or banned,
since Ferdinand.**

**Lights lead home, lights lead home
over ocean of soul.**

**It’s like she found an ancient key
that opened doors of memory:
fin’ly safe now to see
sparks redeem.**

**Lights lead home, lights lead home
over ocean of soul.**

**Lights lead home, welcome home
over ocean of soul,
*sobre el alma del mar.***

Speaking of El Paso...

The Anusim Center in El Paso had been quite active until COVID-19 put things on hold. I had been visiting a group of about 50 people including children every month in the city of Juarez, Mexico, enjoying classes, services, observing holidays and other activities. Genie Milgrom visited and spoke to the group, and also at University of Texas El Paso. My last visit was in February for *Tu Bishvat*; we planted a tree and held a service. Film producer Isaac Arstenstein and crew also visited and filmed one of our Juarez programs for his new film. Thanks to board members Blanca Carrasco and Emanuel Velez, connection to Juarez has been successful. As we plan for the future, we wish everyone a safe, healthy and meaningful summer, surviving this difficult time. — *Rabbi Stephen Leon, Director Anusim Center*

