

High Holy Day Plans Update

As part of a broader conversation about Jewish Law, the use of technology, and Shabbat/Holidays, this past Tuesday I introduced our plans for the High Holy Days this year. If you wish to watch the totality of that conversation (the last 30ish minutes are specifically about the High Holy Days), you can find it here ([Click Here](#)). As it remains highly improbable that this year's High Holy Days will resemble any that we have done at Kehillat Beth Israel or either of its legacy congregations, we have been hard at work, not only finding ways to re-actualize the traditional components of the service, but also explore what unique opportunities may exist for this year to create a different yet still equally meaningful experience. While we don't know exactly how many people (if any) will be allowed to gather in place this September, and therefore some of the details of execution are still to be determined, I did want to share with you, in broad strokes, our plans for this year. As you will see, the solution will not be a one for one replacement, but rather a multifaceted approach to the High Holy Days that will allow for each individual to find the most meaningful way to approach the season.

So, without further ado, here are the many components that we have in mind for this fall:

1- Livestreaming

While I am not halakhically comfortable with Zoom or any two-way livestreaming technology on Shabbat or the High Holy Days, we are in process of implementing a one-way livestreaming service. Much like using a microphone that is already on, the camera will be set up in advance of Yom Tov and will be pre-set to "go live" at a specific hour (likely 9:30). That way, the overwhelming amount of our community who are comfortable with livestreaming will be able to access a live High Holy Day Service without requiring anyone not halakhically comfortable with its use to do anything to make that happen. This livestreamed service will be an abbreviated one, likely about 2 hours. The number of people able to be physically present for these services will depend on Public Health recommendations. If you aren't halakhically comfortable with the use of the technology please reach out to me so we can discuss our options (including, but not exclusively, all of the possibilities below).

2- Pre-Recorded Offerings

While a livestreamed service allows for a shared experience, it is unlikely to be the exact service that many will be seeking. That is why we will also be creating a collection of pre-recorded services and parts of services that people can access individually. If a person wants the full 5 hour liturgy, you will be able to find it there (broken into more manageable pieces). If a person is missing a favourite tune or part of the service, it will be available. If a person requires unique timing, they will be able to find whatever they need regardless of their specific availability.

Additionally, we will be providing even more abbreviated (30 minutes or so) family services geared to families with children of different ages. That way, if a family is on a nap schedule or just need to pause the service, they can always return to it in a way that

is appropriate for them. We are also exploring utilizing pre-recording to create some exciting, innovative, and high-quality video experiences that simply aren't possible live or created on Yuntif itself.

3- Seasonal Small Group Opportunities

While the High Holy Days are the “peak” of the season, we are called upon to be reflective on our lives and engage in Cheshbon Hanefesh throughout the month of Elul leading up to the holidays as well as during the Aseret Yemay Teshuva, the period of time between Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur.

This year, we will put a renewed focus on creating small group opportunities for reflection and discussion on the relevant themes of the season. By assuring that everyone has more personalized time with their community and their clergy, it will provide a meaningful opportunity to create greater meaning out of our High Holy Day experiences.

Additionally, while there will be videos available for families of all ages, we know that greater meaning will be created through group engagement as well as through the utilization of technology and supplies not available to us on the holiday itself. That is why we will be offering virtual gatherings specifically for children and their families, creating meaningful experiences and memories on many days, not just the High Holy Days.

4- Personal Experiences/A “Refocusing”

In previous High Holy Days, our focus has been primarily on communal prayer experiences. We come together with our community to pray as one. Since this year this will not be possible, we will be encouraging our community to create a greater and more intentional prayer life/relationship with God. Additionally, while our focus has been on prayer, the Unetaneh Tokef prayer reminds us that it is repentance, prayer, and tzedakah that have the power to avert the severity of the decree. What would it mean to put a greater focus on creating our best selves and actualizing a better world than simply on prayer?

We have a number of ideas on how to actualize this idea. We may provide opportunities for people to reserve time by themselves or with their families at the Ark at the synagogue before and after the holidays. We will create modules and materials to be utilized by individuals and families on the High Holy Days to encourage deeper, valuable conversations and action plans around social justice and personal betterment. We will provide guidance on how to create meaningful personal prayer experiences through meditation, reflection, nature, and other modalities. Rather than only having opportunities to engage on High Holy Days with groups of people large and small, we would like to utilize this year as an opportunity to think about the themes of the season differently and, hopefully, meaningfully.

5- “HH Pods” If small groups are permitted, we will try to create opportunities for people to engage in High Holy Day activities together in healthy and safe ways. This may involve being able to sing together with a small group of people along with the livestream. It may involve creating a “viewing party” specifically for people who do not have access to or a comfort with the technology necessary to access our services.

All that being said, we do not yet know what Public Health will recommend in terms of gathering for this September. As such, we do not yet know what will be possible in terms of gathering. In a best case scenario, everyone who wished would be able to attend one High Holy Day Service live. Under a worst case, only those participating in the service would be present in the sanctuary. In the end, we will make a decision on this topic by the end of July.

6- Shofar Blowing

The only part of the service that must be heard in person is the blowing of the shofar. Therefore, under normal circumstances, hearing a pre-recording or even live-streaming would not suffice. While, obviously, this year includes

extenuating circumstances, we still intend to provide the opportunity to hear a shofar in person for those who wish. Hopefully in conjunction with other religious communities, we intend to have shofar blowings taking place in large parks and other gathering areas that will allow people to be physically distant, yet still hear the 100 blasts. As the first day of Rosh Hashannah falls on Shabbat, this would only take place on Sunday afternoon.

Again, while the specifics of the execution of many of these projects are still to be determined, the core components discussed above will remain in a way that is both as safe and as meaningful as possible. Through personal prayer, familial and communal conversations, inspiring recorded services, shared live-streaming experiences, and public Shofar blowing, we believe that everyone will be able to find meaning this year and in new and exciting ways.

If you have any questions about what was presented or have other suggestions, please reach out, we'd all love to speak with you about them. While unlike any previous High Holy Day season, I truly believe that this may yet be the most meaningful one yet for me, and I hope for many others as well.