



Temple Beth El – President's Letter Re: High Holy Days Updates

I hope you have all been enjoying the beautiful summer weather and staying safe. This year continues to be so very different than I envisioned...than we all envisioned, but I'm thankful for the pace of life (work and TBE work included), and the opportunity to spend time with my family.

With six weeks to go before the High Holy Days (HHD), I want to provide you an update about our plans for the 5781 HHD season. This letter contains a lot of information and I ask that you read it all the way through.

First, my thanks to those of you who took the time to respond to our HHD survey. We received 220 responses – your feedback reaffirmed much of our original thinking and provided additional insights shared with our clergy, staff, and committees. As expected, the majority of responses indicated a preference for virtual services v. in-person. Many of you also expressed interest in helping – rest assured we'll be in-touch.

So, what are the most important things you need to know right now and what could the HHD season look like? This list is not exhaustive or final and reflects ideas/initiatives we are working towards.

Technology

We have been working with audio/visual consultants to upgrade and enhance the online/virtual experience. We are trialing three channels – Facebook Live, Zoom, and streaming, added additional cameras to provide multiple views of the congregation/clergy, and a screen for those attending in-person to see friends participating from home. You may have also noticed that congregants have begun to accept honors and participate by way of pre-recorded, spliced-in segments of the service from home.

The next several weeks will afford us opportunity to continue fine-tuning things in preparation for HHD services. Please continue checking the TBE [website](#) for updates and information.

Selichot

Hazzan is putting the finishing touches on a virtual only Selichot service to be streamed for you to enjoy at home and to start the HHD season. More details to come.

Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur

This HHD season will stretch us to think differently about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – to take in these Days of Awe through prayer, study, and reflection.

Both the HHD and Reopening Committees are working together on recommendations and guidelines for in-person participation. That said, much can change between now and mid-September, and our focus is therefore virtual first. This is by no means an easy decision as it is a conflict of the heart and the mind. My commitment to you is prioritizing health and safety.

With an emphasis on virtual, Rabbi and Hazzan are collaborating to reimagine soulful HHD services, inclusive of guest clergy and alternate programming/engagement opportunities. In addition, to traditional davening, some of the ideas include the potential for outdoor worship (weather permitting), small group Tashlich, family learning, streaming yoga,

mindfulness/meditation, tot programs, teen conversations, and niggunim only services.

A full program is in the works – please stay tuned!

Shofar Blowing

The shofar will only be sounded on the second day of Rosh Hashanah (first day falls on Shabbat). Two ideas – a parking lot shofar service at TBE, and/or with your help, we work on a plan to dispatch shofar blowers around town for small group gathering and all to hear.

Mahzorim (Prayer Books)

Having your own prayer book will make every aspect of the HHD season more accessible and meaningful. We intend to loan mahzorim to every family. Details for how and when to pick-up your mahzor will be forthcoming. We can also help point you in the right direction if interested in purchasing a mahzor, or provide access to a digital version if preferred.

Sacred Space

Leading up to the HHD, and the seven days in-between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we invite you to schedule time to come into the Main Sanctuary for a few moments of contemplation and reflection. We are working on a process that will allow you to sign-up for a timeslot online. Please call the Main Office with questions.

Resources

We are collecting a list of resources for families to reference throughout the chagim. To start, I have asked Debbie Zeger to explore a partnership with the Institute for Jewish Spirituality's "Shofar Project." The Shofar Project is a free, four-week program featuring videos, Torah learning, yoga, and more. Please check it out for yourself by clicking [here!](#)

I know that many may be lamenting the idea of not coming together in-person as a community for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is admittedly a personal challenge for me, but I am choosing to find bright spots in this upcoming HHD season, and to accept a mix of traditional and new, a chance to find alternate ways to connect spiritually, and capitalize upon the opportunity to free myself of distraction such that I can be fully in the moment. Whether we are at TBE or at home, Lina, Chaya, Ari, and I look forward to celebrating the New Year with you.

Please be in-touch with any questions (chances are other people might be wondering the same thing you are), or if you are in need of support during these challenging times.

L'shalom,

Martin A. Spokony
TBE Board President