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L'Shana Tova 5781

Dear Congregation Emeth,

When I learned in March that I would become your new rabbi, I eagerly anticipated celebrating Yamim Noraim—the High Holy Days with you this September in our beautiful Sanctuary. The impact of the pandemic has brought challenges and innovations which will enable us to be together safely via Zoom.

Though our worship will be different than we imagined, it will be meaningful. I invite you to bring your full selves to the experience and offer you suggestions for “Preparing for the High Holy Days.” Services will be shorter on Zoom. The evening services will be approximately 1 ¼ hours and the morning services about 1 ½ hours. Check the holiday service schedule for all options available. I’m excited to be leading services with Cantorial Soloist, Mira Weller, a 4th year HUC-JIR rabbinical student and trained musician.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur mornings we will offer a Family service at 9:00-9:30 am. For Rosh Hashanah morning, please have an apple ready for the Family service.

This is a time for reflection of the past year, teshuva (repentance/return) and hopes for the new year. It is traditional to read Psalm 27 during this month leading up to Rosh Hashanah.

I invite you to read all 14 verses of Psalm 27. For now, I draw your attention to this verse for which we will hear a beautiful melody during High Holy Day services.
Psalm 27:4

אַחַת | שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְהוָה אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שְׂכֵתִי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה כִּלְיָמִי תִּי לְחַזֵּן בְּנַעַם־יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ:

One thing I ask of the LORD, only that do I seek: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD, to frequent His temple.

Shana tov u'metukah-Wishing you a good and sweet new year.

Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz

Faith Joy Dantowitz
Rabbi

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Preparing for the High Holy Days (Yamim Noraim-Days of Awe) at Home-- Mikdash M'at-a miniature sanctuary

With the current health pandemic, and restrictions on group gatherings, our kitchens have become our classroom, our basements are our yoga studios, and the dining room has become our office. Where then, is our synagogue?

The rabbis asked this same question right after the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. Without a localized place of worship, how could we pray together? We are the inheritors of their answer: our home would become our “mikdash m’at,” a miniature sanctuary, a holy place. Our current challenge is to create a sacred space at home while we are in front of our computers, attending services with Congregation Emeth. What can help us create both that spiritual mindset and that spiritual refuge?

We are not able to gather in large groups in our building for the High Holidays. We will all certainly miss being together in person, feeling the intensity of the experience in close proximity, singing together and in harmony. But we can be “together” safely on Zoom— in our own homes. This year, we have a unique opportunity to create a sacred space in our home— a mikdash m’at—for the High Holy Days and beyond. These suggestions are meant to help you enhance the High Holy Day experience at home, while creating a communal atmosphere for us all.

1. Choose your prayer space carefully in advance by spending a few moments of individual contemplation/family discussion.
2. Once you have chosen your space, say a blessing or kavannah (“intention”) over it to mark it as your mikdash m’at. This blessing from the Torah could be recited.

Numbers 24:5

מִה־טֹבוֹ אֱהָיֶה יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

How good are your tents, O Jacob, Your sacred places, O Israel!

3. Where will you sit? Arrange comfortable chairs around your table, or fluff the couch pillows, put a nice pillow there, a pretty scarf or throw blanket to make it feel special.
4. Change where you put your computer from a work space to a contemplative space by covering the desk or table with a white tablecloth, white runner, or white placemat, and a vase of flowers.
5. While we are fortunate to have technology to help us pray together, in order to engage more fully in the worship experience, turn off notifications on your computer, close other applications, turn off text message sounds, email and FaceBook during services, and put your phones on ‘do not disturb.’ Remember to keep your computer on ‘mute’ during our Zoom service while you sing and pray out loud.
6. Children are welcome at all services but we recognize they may not want to attend the entire service.

Here are a couple links to activities for children:

<https://reformjudaism.org/celebrate-rosh-hashanah-shalom-sesame-sounding-shofar>

<https://reformjudaism.org/teaching-children-about-asking-forgiveness-slicha>

7. Find meaningful objects to grace your space. On Rosh Hashanah include holiday objects like candlesticks, kiddush cup, round challah, apples and honey. On Yom Kippur, you can place cherished mementos, family heirlooms, and photos of loved ones to surround you, especially for Yizkor. If you own a shofar, include that too.

8. Wear clothing that makes you feel as if you are entering a spiritual space. Kipa and tallit are welcome if they help you express a connection to this special worship. It is traditional to wear white on Yom Kippur.

9. Set candlesticks and candles for the evening services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Set apples, honey and challah for Rosh Hashanah evening and morning service. For the Rosh Hashanah Family Service, have an apple ready to be cut. Prepare special food for a sweet new year such as a honey cake <https://prettysimplesweet.com/honey-cake/>

We hope you find it meaningful to create a mikdash m'at in your home to enhance the experience of joining together for services in this way.

[Preparing for the High Holy Days, adapted from Rabbi Elyse Goldstein]

L'shana tova -Wishing a good near year; a year of good changes.

Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz