



## Creating Sacred Space For Prayer At Home\*

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

The Sages asked this same question right after the destruction of the Temple. 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, on Zoom or live-streaming High Holiday services. What can help us create both that spiritual mindset and that spiritual refuge?

We are not able to gather in the sanctuary for the High Holidays. But we will be “together” safely— in our own homes and perhaps in small outdoor groups. **This year, we have a unique opportunity to create a sacred space in our home— a *mikdash m’at*—for the High Holidays and beyond. These ten suggestions are meant to help you enhance the High Holiday 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. Don’t wait for the last minute!
2. Once you have chosen your space, say a blessing or kavannah (“intention”) over it to mark it as your *mikdash m’at*. Suggestions of verses and blessings are below.
3. What chair will you sit on? Put a cushion or festive pillow on it, or drape it with a tallit, special piece of fabric, or scarf.
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. Find meaningful objects to grace your space. On Rosh Hashanah include holiday objects like candlesticks and kiddush cup, apples and honey. On Yom Kippur you can place cherished mementoes, family heirlooms, and photos of loved ones to surround you. If you own a shofar, put it where it’s visible.
6. If possible, move the computer space back so that you are “watching” the screen more than “manipulating” it. Consider connecting your computer to a TV screen so it feels less like a work device. **Directions to connect to your smart TV will be in an email about the High Holidays.**
7. Try to limit or disconnect auditory distractions. You can turn off your email and text message ping sounds, and/or close your email program and other apps so you can be fully present during the service.
8. Wear clothing that makes you feel as if you are entering a spiritual space. Kippah and tallit are welcome if they help you express a connection to this special worship.
9. Be sure you have a *mahzor* with you, either your own, one you’ve borrowed from Beth El, or the pdf version available here.

<https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/civicrm/event/register?id=1116&reset=1>



10. If you are someone who likes to read non-machzor material during services or on the High Holidays, that's okay (we won't tell!); choose a relevant book, article or poetry to inspire you on these sacred days. If you're looking for resources, check out Jewels of Elul at <https://www.jewelsofelul.com/>.

Here are some verses and blessings to recite to help create your *mikdash m'at* at home.

וַעֲשֵׂה לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם: (Exodus 25:8)

*V'asu lee mikdash v'shachanti b'tocham.* Make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

### Birkat HaBayit (Blessing for the Home)

בְּזֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֹא יָבֹא צָרָה  
בְּזֶה הַדִּירָה לֹא תָבֹא צָרָה  
בְּזֶה הַדְּלֵת לֹא תָבֹא בְּהֵלָה  
בְּזֶה הַמַּחְלָקָה לֹא תָבֹא מַחְלֹקֶת  
בְּזֶה הַמְּקוֹם תִּהְיֶה בְּרָכָה וְשָׁלוֹם

*B'zeh hash'a'ar lo yavo tza'ar, B'zot hadira lo tavo tzarah, B'zot hadelet lo tavo behalah  
B'zot hamachlakah lo tavo machloket, B'zeh hamakom t'hee v'rachah v'shalom*

Let no sorrow come through this gate.  
Let no trouble come in this dwelling.  
Let no fright come through this door.  
Let no conflict come to this section.  
Let there be blessing and peace in this place.

The last line of the blessing said at *Havdalah* separating Shabbat from weekday can be used to "separate" this sacred space:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל

Baruch atah Adonai, hamavdil bayn kodesh lechol.  
Blessed are You Adonai, who separates between holy and ordinary.

Shanah Tovah,  
Rabbi Jesse Olitzky and Rabbi Rachel Marder

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