

To: TAA Membership
From: Rabbi Steven Lewis
Re: Your Input Needed on Challenges and Opportunities of High Holidays
5780/2020
Date: 6/1/20

This year we have an unprecedented challenge and opportunity preparing for *Yamim Noraim* ("Awesome Days" aka: High Holidays). I am grateful for the wonderful TAA staff and lay leadership that has helped our community transition to virtual gathering. I am confident we will continue to meet the challenges ahead together.

We don't know what social distancing protocols will be on Erev Rosh Hashanah, Sept 18, but I know that this year will look like no other in Jewish history. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the times when we join together in the synagogue - the whole tribe. But this year it will not be safe for all to gather. This understanding was difficult for me at first. However, I am encouraged by the example of Passover this year. Our inability to "do it in the normal way," while disappointing, also resulted in people reading the Haggadah carefully for the first time, making Seders or family recipes for the first time. Some families welcomed relatives and friends to their Seders they had not seen in years, and will now do so again every year. Our disruptions are also opportunities to strengthen our connection to one another and to the practice of the *Yamim Noraim*.

Every year when we gather for the High Holidays, I have the same question for the faces I am delighted to see: Why are you here? What do you hope to get out of this? What does showing up on Rosh Hashanah and/or Yom Kippur mean to you? Is there anything you'd like to know about these rituals and practices that might make it more meaningful? This year, I have the opportunity to actually hear the answers to these questions! This year we have a new freedom, opportunity, (and I think obligation) to use this disruption to learn together and find new ways to connect to each other and these amazing rituals and practices.

At the Annual Meeting we will have an opportunity to begin the conversation. After that, the Ritual Committee is preparing a questionnaire that will reach more members and collect more information. Decisions about how to conduct the services for the Holidays and what learning opportunities to offer beforehand will be greatly improved by hearing from you!

We are a creative and resilient community. I am excited to have us innovate spiritually engaging Yamim Noraim experiences that embrace the entire community and deepen our connection to these holidays, this year and into the future.