

WESTMINSTER SYNAGOGUE

Kent House, Rutland Gardens,
Knightsbridge, London SW7 1BX

T: 020 7584 3953

E : admin@westminstersynagogue.org

W : www.westminstersynagogue.org

16th July 2020

Dear members,

Avinu Malkeinu, our Father our King, withhold the plague.

For years we have read these words, and sung them with deep feeling in our High Holy Days. This year they have such profound meaning, previously unanticipated.

For our High Holy Day services this year we will be coming together through technology, rather than in person. This is a decision that we have considered carefully and collaboratively, with professionals and lay leaders, with the Executive and the Council, and with the Reform and Liberal movements. We do not want to single out a tiny sub-group of the community, on no sound basis, to gather in person - and then, of course, that small group would need to be told not to sing, before being rushed out of the building. We are making the same decision as the vast majority on non-Orthodox synagogues (all of the Reform and Liberal, to our knowledge) in forgoing a traditional requirement for a physical prayer quorum for the sake of the quality of our collective spiritual experience, inclusivity, and health. This is a difficult decision because we are facing a difficult reality at the moment. If you would like to speak to me about how you are feeling please do not hesitate to get in touch. This year will be different, and we are committed to making these Days of Awe special for our community.

Rabbi Thomas, myself, our Senior Warden, David Connick, our singers and organist, and one or two prayer leaders, are planning - circumstances allowing - to lead services from the warm grandeur of Kent House, straight to your home. We will have more focused services, so as not to push one's concentration, packed full of the moments you treasure: there will be live singing and beautiful music; there will be the challenging binding of Isaac and the story of Jonah; there will be thoughtful sincere sermons and time for personal reflection. We will, of course, still hold tailored services for all ages, and we are also considering ways that we can connect to each other and chat in between services.

We will ensure that you are all able to fully experience in your home these special services. If you have any concern about navigating the technology please let us know so we can help, and if, due to lack of internet, you would like to be one of a very limited number of people watching the service on a screen in a room in Kent House, then please do be in touch. Exact timings and details of the services and other High Holy Day initiatives will be shared in the coming month - and we will make sure that every member has access to prayer books for these services, either through online versions or physical copies.

Since lockdown I have been moved by the creativity, versatility and togetherness of our community, with more members calling and helping each other than ever before, and so many of us, of all ages, participating - truly participating - in learning and services. For the last two years I have read at the beginning of Kol Nidrei, on the evening of Yom Kippur, these ancient lines, asking that I be worthy to lead such a congregation at such a time. As I have gotten to know you better, and felt increasingly at one with you, they have moved me more: "O gracious God, let me find favour in thine eyes; hear the supplications and prayers which I pour out before thee for myself, for my household and for my congregation, who are now assembled as one, and who with one heart and one mind implore the compassion of their heavenly Father".

We will for years to come remember how well we as a community have come together, with the absence of physical proximity, but "with one heart and one mind".

B'Shalom,



Rabbi Benji