

Creating Your *Mikdash M'at* – Your Personal Worship Space

With the Covid pandemic and restrictions on group gatherings, our kitchens have become our classrooms, our basements 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 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 Shul services. What can help us create both that spiritual mindset and sacred refuge?

We will not be able to gather in our Shul building for the High Holy Days. We will all certainly miss being together in person with the majesty of large crowds standing close, singing all our familiar and moving tunes in harmony. But we will be “together” safely 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 Holidays and beyond.

These ten suggestions collected by Rabbi Elyse Goldstein (City Shul, Toronto, CN) 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. Do not 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 given 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 workspace 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 Hashana 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 is 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.
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 your machzor with you, just like on past High Holy Days when we gathered. As you feel its cover and edges and flip its pages, remember the times you’ve used

it before, who you sat near, what moved you in the service, the first time you used it, etc. If you buy a new one, inscribe it with a meaningful phrase for this year. We will use Mishkan HaNefesh as we have for the past several years. The prayers will not be on the screen, so having a machzor means you can participate more fully. We will be holding a drive-through event for congregants to pick up copies of Mishkan HaNefesh. Watch for more information coming out soon.

10. Make it a habit to join the online services we already offer now. Praying as any other activity becomes more comfortable and “natural” when we practice it. Now, that we all need to adjust ourselves to the new form of services, we also need to find a new way to personally feel comfortable with praying at home. The more services you attend before the High Holy Days, the more you will be able to enjoy them and to find the right kavanah, mental and spiritual setting.

We all appreciate the time and effort it takes to make your mikdash m’at a reality. Think of it as a “work in progress!” May it add joy and meaning to your holiday I wish you a very warm and personal Shana Tova.

Verses and blessings to help create your sacred space/mikdash m’at:

1. Numbers 24:5

מה־טובו אהלי־ךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

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

2. Birkat HaBayit (home blessing):

בְּנֵה הַשַּׁעַר לֹא יָבֹא צָעַר
בְּזֹאת הַדִּירָה לֹא תָבֹא צָרָה
בְּזֹאת הַדָּלֶת לֹא תָבֹא בְּהֵלָה
בְּזֹאת הַמַּחֲלָקָה לֹא תָבֹא מַחֲלֹקֶת
בְּנֵה הַמָּקוֹם תְּהִי בְּרָכָה וְשָׁלוֹם

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.

3. Exodus 20:21:

בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲזַכֵּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי אֵבֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבֵרַכְתִּיךָ

In every place where My name is mentioned, I will come to you and bless you.

4. Exodus 3:5

כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמְתִּי־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:

Indeed, the place on which you stand is holy ground.

5. Psalms 121:8

יְהוָה יִשְׁמְרֵ־צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֲךָ מִעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:

Adonai will guard your going and coming, now and forever.

6. Pirke Avot 1:4

יְהי ביתך בית ועד לתכמים, נהגוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם, נהגוי שותה בצמא את דברייהם

Let thy house be a house of meeting for the wise, sit at their feet, and drink in their words.

7. The last line of the blessing said at havdalah separating Shabbat from weekday can be used to “separate” this sacred space:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל

Baruch atah Adonai, hamavdil bayn kodesh lechol.

Blessed are You Adonai, who separates between holy and ordinary.

8. The traditional prayer for healing can be used to “heal” a space too:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', רוֹפֵא כָּל בָּשָׂר, וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת

Baruch atah Adonai, rofeh kol basar, u'maflee la'asot.

Praised are You Adonai, healer of all flesh, doing wonders.

Thank you to Rabbi Elyse Goldstein (Toronto CN) for writing this wonderful guide