

Creating Your Mikdash Me'at – Your Personal Worship Space

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 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 Temple Israel services. What can help us create both that spiritual mindset and that spiritual refuge?

We are not able to gather our building for the High Holidays. We will all certainly miss being in person together, with the majesty of large crowds standing close, singing in harmony all our familiar and moving tunes. But we will be “together” safely. 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 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's visible.
6. If possible, move the computer space back so that you are “watching” the screen more than “manipulating” it. Consider connecting or casting 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 programme 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 Holidays 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 do every year. The prayers will not be on the screen, so having a machzor means you can participate more fully. If you do not own a copy, you can buy one now in time to be delivered by mail to your home or you can borrow one from the Temple. Click here for the Prayer book Request Form. Contact Lisa Slaton at admin@templeisraelth.org with any questions.
10. Historically, many synagogues and even homes had a decorative work on the wall called a Shiviti, taken from the first Hebrew word of the verse, “I always set Adonai before me” (Ps. 16:8). We have taken inspiration from this Shiviti tradition and discovered this small home sanctuary poster. We will be sending it digitally or in snail mail before the holiday and hope you will hang it behind you, so it becomes the common background for all of us, to help create an inspirational and communal frame of mind. You can see it here: <http://www.alephtechnology.com/shiviti.html>

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, meaning and to your holiday, and wishing 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־טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתריך ישראל:

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

2. Birkat Habayit (home blessing):

בְּזֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֹא יָבֹוא צָרָה
בְּזֹאת הַדִּירָה לֹא תִבֹוא אָרָה
בְּזֹאת הַדֶּלֶת לֹא תִבֹוא בְּהִלָּה
בְּזֹאת הַמַּחְלָקָה לֹא תִבֹוא מַחְלֹקֶת
בְּזֶה 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 אֶזְכֵּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי אָבֹא 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 יִשְׁמַר־צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֲךָ מִעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:

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

6. Pirke Avot 1:4

יְהִי בֵיתְךָ בֵּית וְעַד לְחַכְמִים, וְהוֹי מִתַּאֲבָק בְּעַפְרֵי רַגְלֵיהֶם, וְהוֹי שׁוֹתֵה בְּצַמָּא אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם

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 havdala 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:

רופא כל בשר, ומפליא לעשות, ברוך אתה ה'

Baruch atah Adonai, rofeh kol basar, u'maflee la'asot.
Praised are You Adonai, healer of all flesh, doing wonders.

(Adapted from Rabbi Elyse Goldstein)