

*A Message from Rabbi Shields and the Entire Leadership Team*

Temple Israel is a shul and a center for Jewish community. Our strength is in our People. Like the majestic live oaks of Tallahassee, we are strong, and our roots are deep. Every single soul has a place in our beautiful forest. Whether you have been devoting your heart and soul to this congregation for generations or you have just become a member this past week. We honor you. We celebrate you. We are grateful for you.

During this pandemic, our doors may be closed, but the heart of Temple Israel has been open in every other way. We have gathered for weekly services, education, and meaningful programs. People are integrating Temple life into their homes like never before, and we are witnessing how far our reach can extend online. We have extended our hand in partnership to other congregations and are looked at as a leader in our region.

Our sacred community is made up of so many different people: various ages, identities, and health realities. Many of us are experiencing elevated levels of anxiety, fear, and stress. Our tradition calls on us to put the health and safety of our people first. And so, more than ever before, the choices we make now must be with the collective in mind: *Pikuach nefesh*, the preservation of life above all else. It is more important than any mitzvah or any holy day. Consequently, the best way to protect our people during this unique time is to keep us separated in body. That means virtual, Internet-based services during this season's High Holy Days. This is regretful. It is something we are not accustomed to at any time, especially during High Holy Days. But we remain tightly bound together in every other way.

It is difficult to imagine the High Holy Days during which we cannot return physically to our sacred spaces to pray and sing together. There is a sense of loss in that, but there is also a sense of pride in doing God's good work, which comes spiritually standing side by side to overcome this crisis together. We can still find meaningful and sacred renewal together during these *Yamim Noraim*, these High Holy Days.

Home and the synagogue have always been essential anchors of Jewish life. In the second half of 5780, those two spheres have converged in new ways. You are bringing your synagogue into your home as never before and we are so grateful for it. The High Holy Days always have been about homecoming. Every year, the entire community gathers in its congregational home, a space where it has been a high honor for your rabbis to welcome you home.

But this year, out of necessity, the roles are reversed, and it is you who will welcome us into your home, your very personal space, where you feel a sense of peace and comfort. It can be a personal sanctuary, a *mikdash me'at*, a place to concentrate on your prayer and meditation and personal reflection.

Thank you for opening your door. It is no less a privilege to facilitate these moments of spiritual connection. Together, we will create a meaningful and, yes, a most memorable High Holy Day season. In coming weeks, we will share more details regarding this season's unique plan.

Until then, we wish you a safe and healthy rest of the summer and we look forward to being with you to greet this New Year. May it be a year of blessing for you and those you love. For the Temple Israel community, for Israel and all the world.

-Rabbi Shields