

# High Holy Days



## Erev Rosh Hashanah Services Because the Sky is Blue



**Rabbi Daniel A. Schwartz**

For years, I've been playing a game that I'm guessing many of us play. We put the address of our destination in our phones to get an estimate of how long it will take to get there and then we try to beat it.

Like me, some probably also use it for planning purposes, determining the latest time you can depart so that you don't have to sit, waiting for an appointment.

When I first got my phone, I was victorious, always arriving with time to spare. But in recent years, there seemed to be more pressure as I drove.

As I watched the clock, I started worrying that I was

cutting it too close. The only way to beat the system, to beat the phone, was to cheat, was to go a few miles over the limit.

And that's when I realized, my smart phone outsmarted me. I couldn't cheat its algorithm because core to its operating system was accommodating for my driving patterns. It recalculated driving estimates knowing that going a few miles an hour over the limit was my M.O.

So, of course, not to be outsmarted, I came up with my own plan. I intentionally drove with the directions on while following all the posted speed limits.

I was on to something. I was going to beat my phone. I was going to retrain it so that I could start winning again. I did it for short drives, long drives and for everything in between.

But in trying to retrain my phone, I learned something. Driving slower and leaving more time taught me, I was rushing through life, trying to pack as much as I could into it without ever processing it.

Slowing down changed not just my outlook, but how I interacted with those around me. It put me in a better mood; decreased my stress. It allowed me to be aware of the things I was overlooking. It sounds strange, but slowing down made me a

the mark. It's our chance to reflect on what's effective and what has escaped us. It is our annual reminder that every one of us is imperfect and has something to improve upon.

And then we are supposed to commit to addressing those things in the upcoming year. We are to recognize our mistakes and retrain ourselves not to make them again. Some people are great at that, they make a New Year's resolution and they

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better husband, father and rabbi. It made me a better person.

These 10 Days of Awe, these 10 days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, are to be the same for us. It is our one period each year when we slow down, do a chesbon hanefesh, an accounting of our souls when we think about what we've mastered and where we've missed

stick to it.

But there's a reason I have a hard time finding a parking spot at the gym in January, but seem to see a lot more open spaces as I drive by that same parking lot in February.

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**So, on the first day of each Hebrew month this year, I'm going to send you a short video. Something that you can watch as you're waking up the morning, when you find yourself scrolling through your social media, or maybe even the next time you beat your phone and arrive early at your destination.**

about those possibilities regularly.

The great rabbi Maimonides recognized that almost a thousand years ago. In his writings on how to teach someone to become philanthropic, he wrote that giving multiple smaller donations was better than giving an equivalent donation in one lump sum. Why? Because it's the repetition that helps create a habit. Just like Maimonides teachings, Judaism has a path on how to make ourselves better too.

One that I want to share tonight, because for me, that's one of the goals of a high holy day sermon, to give something that will help us make a change and make our world better in the next year. It's called Musar. It's an ancient study that recently gained popularity. One of its founders described it as "the science of the inner life."

We rabbis like to give technical definitions with high falutin language, so let me put it in pedestrian terms – Musar is about finding your core values, developing and strengthening them. It's our exercise of the soul, giving us stretches that aren't too difficult, but that allow us to expand.

Usually it's practiced in three parts. First, a morning mantra which identifies the value. Next, an assignment – something to do that will bring out and strengthen that virtue within you. And finally – reflection. An activity that forces you to think about the value and your actions or inactions.

Tonight, on this first day of our Days of Awe, I want to challenge each and every one of us here in person or here with us online to adopt this practice. Make a commitment during these 10 days to give it a try.

And my commitment to you, for those who want it, is to make it go beyond these 10 days, to make it a habit, to give you something at the beginning of every month to focus on.

So, on the first day of each Hebrew month this year, I'm going to send you a short video. Something that you can watch as you're waking up the morning, when you find yourself scrolling through your social media, or maybe even the next time you beat your phone and arrive early at your

destination.

I'll share a virtue– with a story or a mantra. It'll be something memorable, something that provides a model for each of us as we reflect on that value. Then, I'll give you an action item, I'll give you your daily assignment and end with a way to reflect.

Tonight we don't just celebrate the New Year, today is the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. And so, for this month, you're already here, you're all going to get it.

But if you want it for future months, then you'll need to sign up for it. Online in the chat, we'll drop in the link for you. Or if you're here at Temple, we've got the sign up link in your High Holy Day pamphlet under Monthly Musar Mantra. If you want to get it next month, go to that link and enter your email address.

As I shared, Musar is about developing your core values. Yours may be different, but for me, those core values are goodness, integrity, love and joy.

Tonight, we'll start with the first – goodness. How do we find the goodness in every situation, even a bad one? How can we improve at finding it? How can we make it better?

One of the gifts of Musar is that we learn from the lessons of our lives. We see that the lessons are in other people. And tonight's illustration is from an 11-year-old who is living with his father's memory.

A story. A true story. Yeah, I know - it's a Schwartz thing. A young man from Indiana named Jeremy, along with his National Guard unit, was deployed to Israel to help with searches and extractions.

One of his first assignments came when a 5-story building in Jerusalem collapsed. Jeremy and his team jackhammered and dug their way through the rubble to try to find and rescue victims.

After 6 hours, they came across an 11-year-old boy. His parents had died shielding him and he was between them, barely alive. Jeremy and his unit, they saved the boy's life.

A few days later, Jeremy spotted that same boy at an orphanage. And he noticed something interesting, something that surprised him. The boy seemed happy.

**The boy understood he had a choice. Happiness wasn't something that happens to you, it comes because you make a choice to be happy.**



He was smiling, laughing and playing with others.

Curious how it could be that this boy who was just orphaned, who had lost everything was now playing and joking with others, Jeremy asked him. And the boy's response? 'Because the sky is blue.'

**And then, your homework is to find the good in situations. Even when you're faced with adversity, do it with a positive attitude. Look for, find and recognize the good.**

It was something the boy's father had taught him: "'Because the sky is blue,' can be a reason for anyone to do anything, at any time."

Jeremy realized the statement was irrelevant. The answer was really "just because." He didn't need a reason.

The boy understood he had a choice. Happiness wasn't something that happens to you, it comes because you make a choice to be happy.

We would expect the boy to be sad, but instead, it's a wonderful illustration for us of the value to focus on this month, Gisha chiyuvit:

Having a positive outlook.

How different our world would be if we were each able to have that boy's positive mental attitude.

And so, my parting gift tonight is our mantra, that boy's and his father's 5 words: "Because the sky is blue."

"Because the sky is blue." Every morning during these next 10 days, when you wake up, say it to yourself, "Because the sky is blue."

And then, your homework is to find the good in situations. Even when you're faced with adversity, do it with a positive attitude. Look for, find and recognize the good.

And your way to reflect?

Keep a count of the days you say that mantra to yourself. And keep track of how many times each day you think of that phrase when you respond to a situation. If you do it once, good. If you do it these 10 Days of Awe, great. If you challenge yourself to do it every day this month, that's fantastic.

Because as long as you do it, I know you'll notice a difference, that mantra will begin to change you and you'll have started the training to make this a better year.

Shanah Tovah.

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# Rosh Hashanah Morning Services

## Believing is Seeing – Finding our Prayer



**Rabbi Michael L. Moskowitz**

It's a fascinating reality. The fact that we place such a high priority on being here on this day of Rosh Hashanah. We show up. But Why? Why have we shown up generation after generation for over 2000 years. And in 2022, whether we are here in person or even virtually, we still show up.

From the most believing of believers to the most agnostic atheists, we show up. Now, it could be tradition, because our ancestors did this year in and year out. It could be the opportunity to reassess our lives. It could be something social, a chance to reconnect with those we haven't seen for quite some time. It could be the occasion to model that new outfit we've had hanging in the closet for months. (loving my white robe) Or it could even be just what we Jews do. We show up.

But according to our faith,

that's not enough. For more than just showing up, when we are here on this day, we pray.

Interesting – for how many when asked about what they'd be doing today even mentioned that reality? Rather we say we're going to services. Or we're going to temple. But praying? For a good many of us, dare I say, not something we're so comfortable doing. However, more than merely being present on this holiday, it's the prayers our law dictates with which we engage. That's what we are commanded to say.

Why is that? Does it make a difference? Are they effective? Because if they're not, then what's our Judaism offering us if merely to be able to say, it's Rosh Hashanah and I showed up.

Sounds cynical, I know. But with my elder colleague fully enjoying retirement and not delivering a sermon from the bima this year, maybe its time you call me a cynic. Surprised? You shouldn't be. For my friend and mentor Rabbi Dannel was and continues to be my cynic-in-chief – and he taught me one of the best lessons learned. That it isn't about cynicism – rather it's about holding my feet to the fire.

And now I get to be doing the same with all of you. A

cynic isn't a cynic because he doesn't believe. He's making sure you know why you do what you do. In other words, that behind anything we teach, there needs to be reason, rationale and meaning. Or else it will sound, more than that, it will be hollow. And Rabbi Schwartz, of course, would make sure my answers would not just be another form of, as he loves to say, fortune cookie wisdom. For me, this is what it's all about. Reasons that give us meaning. Not rote. Can't just be going through the motions.

Yes, we have tradition – and there's value in that. But we need more. The people of our faith who do just because it has always been done, well, that doesn't work for this rabbi. I need to know the purpose. Why does one wear a kippah, a yarmulke? Can't just be because we always have – or even, for that matter, that we always have not, as some choose. You tell me you wear a kippah because it reminds you of your dad? That's purpose. That's a good reason in my book. Or maybe it's because it connects you with your people wherever you are? That works too. For me, it's spiritual – a way to separate time, between the regular and the holy. That when this is on my head, I'm engaged in something special

– learning, teaching, praying.

Ah, so we're back to prayer. Already two hours this morning. We offer, intone, read, sing, articulate prayers. For the rational, it's not that this doesn't work nor am I suggesting we don't believe. We actually do. Because what we have realized is that some things have to be believed to be seen. And that is what prayer gives us. You see our Judaism is a tool kit for our lives – and prayer is the most utilitarian tool, the best of the swiss army knives that has everything for every possibility within it. A reminder of our values, our priorities, our humanness. Because prayer engages not just our emotions, but our mind. And our mind is a powerful machine.

Take for example the realities of the placebo effect. Countless instances in which placebos have actually made a difference, even though they were nothing but sugar. Personally I've always appreciated what happened before the release of rogaïne, in helping those concerned with their hair loss caused by male pattern baldness. Initially minoxidil was just a high blood pressure medicine, which had this fascinating and what some realized useful side effect. So in testing the medicine's effectiveness and safety, they set up the





## In a world filled with criticism and pain, prayer makes us positive.

tests, the control groups. As they hoped would be the results, 96% of those given the new rogaine topical treatment experienced hair growth. Remarkably though, so did 45% of the control group, even though their applications were completely benign placebos. Believing it to be real, believing they would grow hair, they did. Clearly I was in the 4%.

The strength in our minds is not only powerful, often we find it's the untapped potential we need. The placebo effect, in a sense, is a prayer. Think about it. In this age of modern medicine, in a high tech world with giant leaps of science, we have learned the damage stress can cause. That literally it can be a killer. But the cutting edge means of calming stress is . . . meditation. In other words, it is a kind of prayer; this gift the ancients gave us.

No wonder there are over 2500 meditation apps available to us all. Setting aside a moment to focus on what matters most – that when you quiet your mind, when you don't let the world get in the way, even though it so often does, what we need comes to light.

And maybe that's why we're here – and why our prayers do make a difference. You see, what we are articulating isn't about wanting things or asking for stuff, no.

They're about noticing our world, seeing one another, connecting.

Why certain prayers, such as the mourners Kaddish, is to be said when in a community of at least ten people. Yes the most traditional Jew just demands it – but the reason behind this is equal in importance to what the prayer itself teaches – why minyan matters most when we're mourning. For the one who has experienced loss isn't to be left alone. They are to be supported and protected and comforted. And by making the Kaddish as something to be said with others, we appreciate our prayers are here for us in the best of times and in the worst.

So important was this belief in Jewish law, that the rabbis added it to our morning ritual, a prayer we say every day. Eilu dvarim she'ayn l'hem shiur – these are the obligations in life that have no bounds – and we find this profound and exhaustive list of how to live, very specific actions items – honoring our parents, acting with kindness, pursuing learning, welcoming guests, visiting the sick, rejoicing with couples under the chuppah, caring and comforting the mourners. It's that simple and that important.

In a world filled with criticism and pain, prayer makes us positive.

Ve'ahavta – tells us you shall love. I love with all my heart, all my soul, all my might. Right here we find and are reminded of the definition of love.

Shema Yisrael – Hear people of Israel, Listen. Listen to the things that are being said, the things that are not being said. You want to find God, keep finding ways to listen.

These ideas, embedded in our tradition, they make our time here today worthwhile. I'm not suggesting that by reading these words we're to think all is rosy and perfect and there are no problems in our world, let alone our lives. Rather, that is the very reason we need this. It's why we come together, especially when so much of what we see can be disconcerting and depressing. Saying these words is a reminder that yes, difficulties and evil have always existed but somehow as a people, we persevere. We survive. The world we live in has been falling apart from the start, but there is beauty in trying to put it back together. There's a responsibility we are reminded of, that we feel, that we are called to do.

Prayer helps us find the positive in what others might find as negative. And I want to see beauty in my world, in this life, because it is really easy to go down the rabbit hole and only notice the bad. But God made you and me and each one of us – and we are not junk. I believe that. I believe because I can

see within the possibilities and the potential. Sometimes we have to believe in order to see.

So to my friend the cynic, whether he be watching from Maine or Los Angeles, or sitting here in the sanctuary or watching from a screen in West Bloomfield, allow me to share this. I believe that prayer is meaningful because it reminds me of all I haven't reached, all I haven't done, all I haven't been. But also all the potential that exists and is waiting to be tapped into.

Why do I pray?

I pray to connect with myself, to focus, to hold true to my values.

And I pray to connect myself to my people, my family – to know we're connected, in contrast and in comfort, when we agree and when we disagree. So I know I can always be a part of them and I remember upon whose shoulders I stand.

And I pray to connect with my God, to keep myself humble but simultaneously to lift me up and remind me there's always hope.

So...do you have to be here? Do you have to pray? Can it make a difference? Well, that's up to you.

Amen v'Amen



# President's Address



**Allison Parr**  
President

Thank you Rabbis and hello to everyone. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Allison Parr, Temple's President. I can't believe it has already been a year since I was standing here giving my first High Holiday address. Last year at this time, I told you how honored I was to serve this role. I explained how thrilled I am to give back to the community that enhances the lives of myself, my husband Harry and our 3 daughters. Now I want to add that this exciting past year makes me even more proud to be a part of our forward thinking, growing congregation.

On many fronts, this year has been a milestone year in the life of our Temple. At a time when the congregations around us are shrinking, we have welcomed 34 new families this year alone. This September, our booming SHORESH program began with 221 kids and that number continues to climb. Our Fruman Youth Program for Highschoolers on Sunday

night welcomes more than 50 teenagers each week. And we have expanded our traditional membership to include a virtual option for those who live out of state.

As far as our rabbis go, we have also accomplished something genuinely exceptional. It is well documented that congregations around the country are struggling to fill rabbi positions; pulpits are remaining empty. Yet here in our Shir Shalom family, we have extended Rabbi Daniel's contract for the 5 years permitted by our by-laws. And of really special significance, we as a congregation have voted overwhelmingly to offer our senior Rabbi, Michael Moskowitz, a life tenure

**For Shir Shalom, it does always come back to relationships. That is our super power. It's why I feel so connected to our Temple. Even as we continue to grow in membership, we remain a close-knit community with real relationships with our rabbis, with our beloved Cantor Penny and with our tireless Executive Director, Brian Fishman and with each other.**

contract. I'm sure Michael will share some sort of joke about us being stuck with him, but given all of the touching feedback you sent to me regarding his life tenure contract, all jokes aside, I feel certain we are the ones comforted knowing that HE is stuck with us.

In addition to solidifying our rabbinic future, there

is another really important way that we are securing our CONGREGATION'S future: Last year at this time, I introduced Project All Together: It's the effort to pay off our current mortgage, end paying rent elsewhere for our educational programs, welcome more celebrations into an updated social hall, and yes, complete our building as it was originally envisioned by our founding Rabbi, Dannel Schwartz. Many of you may know that from an aerial view of our Temple it was designed to be a torah scroll. To date, we are missing one of our scrolls. Adding on this missing part will mean having room in the future to bring our SHORESH kids and preschoolers home to our building. It will also have

a small chapel, more space for adult lectures and classes and a beautiful, updated social hall with windows, natural light and a connected garden entertainment space.

The most exciting part is that June Gurwin of blessed memory and Fran Bell Grossman, gifted Temple with a tremendous lead gift to begin this endeavor.

Because of their remarkable generosity, they have created the momentum and the ability to make this dream a reality. I'm excited to tell you that of our audacious \$8 million goal, to date, we have collected over \$4 million – I want to stress that this will build on to our sacred space to accommodate our numbers, it will bring our kids home under our roof, it will honor the intentions of June Gurwin of blessed memory, and also, it is the essential path to materially reducing our annual overhead. For these important reasons, I hope you will consider making a gift for our legacy. A gift to Project All Together. Look for a brochure in your mail with naming options and a variety of giving levels.

But I digress because this is the high holidays, a time of reflection, Jewish community and togetherness. Here at Shir Shalom, I have found these concepts come up often. This past year, a founding member reached out to remind me that we are a community built on relationships. She wanted this founding principle at the forefront as we embark



on expanding our building. I completely agree and nothing underscores this more than the fact that both of our rabbis have spent their careers here with us alone. For Shir Shalom, it does always come back to relationships. That is our super power. It's why I feel so connected to our Temple. Even as we continue to grow in membership, we remain a close-knit community with real relationships with our rabbis, with our beloved Cantor Penny and with our tireless Executive Director, Brian Fishman and with each other. It struck me that this priority is the real reason I feel good about standing here today and again asking you all to give at this special time of year.

Because this is the time of year when we, as a congregation, make sure that everyone who wants to be a part of our Temple and everyone who wants to give their child the gift of our Jewish education can do so despite their ability to pay. While careful fiscal conservatism and member generosity has made temple operations run smoothly and has enabled our endowment to grow to over \$1,000,000, we still live in challenging times. As a result approximately 40% of our members look to us for some form of dues relief. This makes up of our kids in SHORESH who could not attend our program without our financial help. So we are counting on your support

so that nobody is turned away. For those of you who are wondering what is the amount needed to make up our dues shortfall: well, it is \$280.58 per household. A gift of this amount (or any amount) to the High holiday appeal will be a mitzvah and will help us to bridge this gap. Best of all, your gift will be doubled again this year by a generous group of donors who have pledged to match all of the dollars raised from our High Holiday Appeal.

If like my family, you are able to help out your neighbor: please do so. You can simply click the donation button on this email or go to [shirshalom.org](http://shirshalom.org) and click on

the High Holiday tab and on the left side of your screen you will find the HHD donor appeal form. You can fill this form out on line and easily hit "submit." No need to print out or mail anything.

Finally, please know that I welcome all ideas, questions, and feedback from you. Feel free to email or call me. You can always find my email address and cell phone number in my Scribe articles. Thanks so much for listening. Shana Tova to you and your family.

**We invite you to make a pledge to support Temple's families and future for this new year. Visit [www.shirshalom.org/form/2022-hhd-appeal](http://www.shirshalom.org/form/2022-hhd-appeal) to make your donation or cut, complete and mail to Temple the appeal card below:**

I pledge to the **5783 High Holy Day Appeal**:   ☐ \$180   ☐ \$280.58   ☐ \$360   ☐ \$720   ☐ Other

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*We appreciate your generosity.*



# Rosh Hashanah Family Services



**Ella Blank**  
SSTY Religious  
& Cultural Vice  
President

Raise your hand if you have eaten string cheese. Did you open the plastic packaging and peel strips down the side, eating them one at a time? Or maybe you were in a rush so you bit straight into it. While eating string cheese is simple, it's a bit more complicated to eat an elephant.

How do you eat an elephant? Well, everyone has a different "elephant" they are trying to face. It could be running a marathon, learning to read, or a driveway you have to shovel out from under 6 inches of snow. Most elephants seem like they are impossible from far away. Eating them is no small task.

When I was two years old, my grandfather was sick with kidney disease. That was his elephant. Pa tried to eat it with medication but was unsuccessful. He became critically ill. A miracle in the form of my grandmother happened when she donated her kidney to him. She was

a perfect match, not only for his jokester personality and loving smile, but also for his medical needs. He felt better immediately after surgery, and his elephant was gone.

On January 28, 2021, Pa unexpectedly passed away. He was the first family member I'd lost, and I was stuck 500 miles away with unfamiliar emotions. I couldn't be surrounded by much of my support system because we were still in the midst of the isolating COVID-19 pandemic. This was a gigantic elephant.

Some days my loss hurt more than others. Swapping stories and photos with my family took the sting away. We still celebrated his birthday with his favorite ice cream pie. While my elephant is not gone, I now have comfort in my memories. His life is meant to be celebrated. Thanks to kidney donation, I got to love him for 13 extra years, which is why this elephant was so difficult to stomach.

As you heard earlier in the service, Rosh Hashanah means "head of the year." It helps us to celebrate the birthday of the world, and the beginning of a new year. It also gives us time to reflect on this past year, 5782. When was a time you were

present to help others? When were others present to help you? As we move forward this week, we get a chance to start over and better ourselves.

For these past two years, Pa could not be physically present with me and my family. We miss his hugs and classic "Dad" jokes shared through Facetime. However, our memories of him live on in his advice that continues to be present for us during our toughest challenges. For it was he who always knew just when to ask, "How do

present for us. In February, I shared this elephant story for the first time at school. My friends and family were very supportive, but the unexpected messages from acquaintances and strangers are what really made my day. I got a text from a girl I hadn't talked to since elementary school. She told me that my message helped her because she was also going through a tough time. I didn't know her story, but I was able to be present for her by sharing Pa's advice that had always been present for me.

**When was a time you were present to help others? When were others present to help you? As we move forward this week, we get a chance to start over and better ourselves.**

you eat an elephant? One spoonful at a time."

As a society, we face many different elephants. There are people without homes, others facing illnesses, and those who don't have food in their cupboards. Fortunately, we are a part of a community that knows how to take our spoonfuls one at a time. A spoonful can be collecting food to donate to Temple's food drive, which you can bring back with you this Sunday in the bags we gave you. Or, you can continue to help us repair our world and join Temple in January for the Tikkun Olam-athon.

We don't always know the people who end up being

In this upcoming year, challenge yourself to be present for others, even if you don't know them. When your friend needs a shoulder to cry on, give them your full attention and listen. When your community has an elephant, bring your spoon to help them eat it.

I hope that everyone has a happy and healthy 5783.

Shana tovah!









# Kol Nidre Services

## Our Call and Response



**Rabbi Michael L. Moskowitz**

I have always loved the experience of going to a gospel church. The energy and the joy, the music and the passion – it's all contagious. But probably most powerful is the tradition of the call and response. The pastor makes a statement and the congregation responds. Do I hear an amen? (And you all know what the response is!) It is the greatest affirmation for any preacher. He knows through his entire teaching how he's doing, how well it's going. He knows the congregation is with him.

But they don't reserve that only for their own. I will never forget the time when Pastor Robert Bailey, of blessed memory, invited me to preach at Trinity Missionary Baptist Church. For those newer to temple, we used to have a home in home with the ministers and their congregation. They would come here, along with their 75 person choir filling that entire section over

there. They would add to our service and Pastor Bailey would give the sermon. As great of an orator as he was, his choir was even better.

Shortly thereafter Temple Shir Shalom would visit them and experience church. Cantor Penny and our choir would join with theirs, members of our community would share in the Sunday service, I would get to offer a prayer and Rabbi Dannel Schwartz would give the sermon. But then one year, Pastor Bailey asked me to give a sermon as well, at the 8:30 service. Only after I said yes, did I learn it was 8:30 in the morning. That said, they still had over 1000 people for their early worship.

In my memory, that morning I gave one of my greatest sermons of all time. Truth be told, I actually don't remember what it was about. But I felt the energy of the call and response. They were with me the entire way. Made me feel inspired and like I could go on forever.

And after, I thought long and hard how we could bring that tradition here.

But, I wonder if we have become too formal as a faith. We don't respond with the amens. We don't yell back any affirmation. We don't even talk emphatically during our prayers. In the gospel church, not only do they get it, their tradition

demands it. Call and response is a cornerstone to their culture – because they literally are saying that they don't take for granted that you are being heard. They don't take for granted that you are listening.

I know it's not our culture. But by not doing this, we pass by an opportunity, the reason why we actually gather. We miss out quite possibly on... what God wants of us. What God demands of us.

In preparing for Yom Kippur this year, I realized we actually have a call and response built into our tradition. It's just that we haven't necessarily tapped into it. God shows us phenomenal things, not just today, but all year long. Spectacular sunsets. Majestic trees. Cascading waterfalls. Snow peaked mountains. And those are just the most grandiose. Right in front of us we see the birth of new lives, the laughter of children, the wisdom of generations, the depth in our relationships. And God is asking us, so to speak, how am I doing? When we notice, we say thanks. God calls, we respond. And if by chance we don't, we very well may not see the surprises. We won't recognize the miracles. We will miss out. The ancients focused on this holy time to make us pause in the midst

of life's busyness, all so that we won't miss out.

God calls. We respond. We say thanks. We say our blessings. Baruch ata Adonai – Blessed are You, God. It's our formula. Yet, in thinking about this, we might question why does God need all this response, this praise? Is God that vain or weak or insecure that their ego needs to be stroked? Or is it that God is keeping marks on us all and tallying up how often we say a blessing.

Doubtful I think. Rather, this is all about us; the response helps us see more clearly. We notice. We appreciate. We sense the difference a thank you makes, reminding ourselves of the positives in our world.

Of course, seeing the good and appreciating, responding with a blessing makes sense, especially when all is going well. But what about when it does not, when the problems and difficulties pile up. We do everything we can to avoid such challenges, yet sometimes, no matter what, the random blows in like a tornado, or a hurricane. It's the precarious nature and uncertainty of living. As much as we take care and plan, the devastation can still land at the doorstep. Ten days ago my daughter, who lives in New Orleans, was preparing to evacuate because of this brewing



storm. But then Ian took a turn and poured out its wrath on Florida instead. It's that random – the fires, floods, violence, pain, loss.

It's the reminder we find packed into the prayer Unetaneh tokef. "On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. How many will pass away from this world, how many will be born into it; who will reach the ripeness of age; who will be taken before their time; who by fire and who by water..."

Yet if this is now God's call, we're supposed to respond with a blessing? Of course it is life's reality. As much as we'd like, we cannot avoid it. How many times have we rabbis sat with families in the midst of their grief and sorrow, listened to their unanswerable questions. Why did this happen? How could this occur? 27 years of doing this and the pain others have shared is etched deeply on my soul. And then hearing the sadness of those words pronounced, "why me?"

Learned the story this year of Frank Bruni, the New York Times journalist, who found his life turned upside down. Waking one morning to blurry vision, only to discover days later that he had a stroke, a stroke which destroyed the nerve endings attached to his retina, making him functionally blind in his eye – and changed his world forever. But after a few moments of

self-pity, he realized that saying "why me" makes no sense. Thinking of his friends, his community, it dawned on him that every one has pain - one was battling a lifelong illness, another was widowed young, a third divorced, who knew what else was out there and not known. Instead of "why me," he realized, the question we all should be focused on is "why not me." That shift in perspective opened him up to not only being ok and tackling his challenge head on, but to feeling more alive, more attuned, more appreciative of the good that very much was there all along.

Why not me? Yes, the mystic teaches that when God closes a door, God opens a window. Of course the blessing is not in the curse experienced, God forbid. It's in the realization, that even within difficulty, we can still notice blessings. We can respond. That is the beauty of life. And in so realizing, our response needs to be that we appreciate.

That is the thank you. Yom Kippur's prayers provide us with the ability to reorient our focus, to recognize the changes we need to make – to see the beauty more in the most basic of realities. The great medieval philosopher Maimonides taught that people often complain to God about what they don't have. They chase after riches thinking it will help them enjoy more, failing to see the wealth they already

have. But he counsels, we need to look at the world with different eyes. Initially we focus on what is most elusive and take for granted that which is most plentiful. We long for precious jewels but take for granted the air we breathe and the water we drink. So he taught, our perspective should remind us to give thanks, especially for the most simple.

Responses like this are the thank you's that come from our appreciation. They inspire us to make life more meaningful. It's why we say on these days, kotveinu b'safer hachaim, that we hope to be inscribed in the Book of Life. Literally it sounds as if we're saying we want to live. We pray for another year in the Book of Life. And yes, that makes sense. But I love the interpretation, from Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins, that the real translation of sefer hachaim is not the Book of Life, but the Book of the Living. In other words, that everything we do is inscribed on those that are living around us, with us, in our world. And each day we make entries into the biographies of our loved ones and our friends. By appreciating life, we're transmitting our values on those around us. We're recognizing the potential we each have – and how much is waiting for us in this world.

And maybe that's what implores us to say our blessings, to say thank you.

I needed that. To say Amen. Amen. It means "I believe." I believe in the goodness inherent in our world. I believe in the love, the caring we're able to share with one another – and our ability to find more. And I believe this is what is needed from us all.

I can't stop the pain in our world; the challenges that arise and that exist. Something is broken, that we can see. But our blessing is that we've each been created B'tselem Elohim, in God's image. Image isn't literally a likeness, it's emulating what we see God doing in Torah – creating and healing, protecting and sustaining, reflecting and loving. Therefore all of these qualities, all of these abilities are in each and every one of us. We are that powerful. We are that deep. We have that much strength.

We are here tonight and tomorrow to have our attention grabbed, to be shaken by our shoulders, all to make sure we notice; to make sure that we appreciate.

And our response will be known.

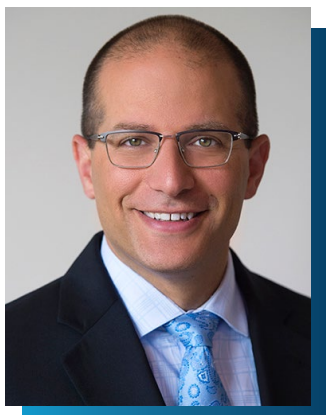
I hear the call. I hear you, God. Loud and Clear.

Thank you. Amen.



# Yom Kippur Morning Services

## Yom HaKaPurim



**Rabbi Daniel A. Schwartz**

When I was in elementary school, I remember going shopping with my parents for a new pair of shoes. It wasn't something we did often. So, of course, we had to search for the perfect pair.

After exploring the shelves and turning down lots of options, out came a box that was different. We opened it and there in front of us were the shoes that I knew would make me the coolest and fastest kid in my class – they were a pair of royal blue sneakers, with white laces on top and decals of Mighty Mouse, flying through the air, printed on the side.

I'm sure it didn't take any convincing, but my parents agreed to buy them and the next morning, as I was putting them on, I was beaming with excitement, ready to show them off to classmates and friends.

But things changed quickly that morning. Upon arriving at the playground, a

classmate asked, "Why are you wearing baby shoes?" and then went on to call them ugly. My excitement immediately disappeared, any pride I had in wearing those shoes, it vanished.

"These things? They are ugly. My parents made me wear them because I got in trouble. Wearing these is my punishment." I disguised the excitement, pride and appreciation of my new shoes with a mask of lies.

I wish I could say that this was just an issue on elementary school playgrounds – that as people grew, they became more secure in their own identities, that they didn't have to put down others in order to feel better about themselves.

**But, like Purim, if we don't take off our masks, if we don't find the value in our religion, then in times like this, times when we are pressured to be nothing, times when we don't stand up for our identity, then we will give Haman what he wanted all along – a posthumous victory.**

Or that, as we moved to high school, we recognized that those around us might have different interests and instead of calling each other names or picking on one another, we celebrated the pursuit of their passions.

Or that as we grew older and had differing understandings and opinions of events in our world, that we didn't have to hide that

perspective or membership in certain communities or organizations.

But truth is, that's not the case. And sadly, we've done the same with our Jewish identity. Members of our community have felt forced into hiding it, not practicing, and forgoing the beauty found within our traditions.

Parents of our college students and campus professionals shared the struggles that on some campuses students hide their Jewish identity to avoid becoming a target of anti-Israel sentiment. And for some who have attended Hillel events, to avoid a connection, they asked that their photos not be posted to social media.

On the other side of the spectrum there are adults who felt forced to go to work today because they didn't want co-workers to know they are Jewish.

And there's the parents who felt pressured and concerned that today is Michigan public school's "count day." They sent their children to school because they didn't want them to feel or be treated

differently or for their child to miss out on one of the incentives for being present today.

These contemporary challenges are maybe just a few more reasons that a famous 18th century Polish rabbi who was known as the Vilna Gaon, linked this special day of Yom Kippur to another Jewish holiday.

You see, Yom Kippur, our day of atonement, is also referred to as Yom HaKippurim, the day of atonements. The Vilna Gaon recognized that by changing one vowel, the name could be translated as, "The Day that is like Purim." A list of similarities between the holidays was then composed. But today, it is really one of the underlying messages of Purim that I

want to highlight.

On Purim, our tradition is that we wear masks, we wear costumes that are to be removed by the end of the day. These costumes are a physical reminder of how Esther masked her identity to become Queen and that, when she removed her mask, when she revealed her Jewish identity, she was





able to save our people from Haman's plan and the King's decree.

Linking these two holidays is a reminder that as we go through life, we too put on masks. Our lives become make believe. We are what we want people to believe we are.

## **As Jews, we're unique. And my mission is to help remind us of that. Because I believe our uniqueness means something, our presence makes our world better.**

But, like Purim, if we don't take off our masks, if we don't find the value in our religion, then in times like this, times when we are pressured to be nothing, times when we don't stand up for our identity, then we will give Haman what he wanted all along – a posthumous victory.

In thinking of this, I'm reminded of the tale of Reb Yitzhak of blessed memory, who was known for his fervent faith. He was kind, loving and compassionate. But when it came to his sermons – Oy!

Well, one of his students, Eliezer died and upon meeting God was excited to hear he could see his old teacher. "3rd building on the left. Walk right in and you'll see him." Eliezer entered and found the rabbi lecturing to hundreds more than he had ever taught before. Upon seeing Eliezer, Reb Yitzhak dismissed the auditorium so

that he could talk to his old student.

After catching up for a bit, Eliezer asked, "Is this your reward for being so faithful?" To which Reb Yitzhak responded, "Is this my reward? Is this my reward? No, this is their punishment."

People often look at me and wonder if being here at Shir Shalom is my reward for being such a good student, for being a hard worker. And I like to joke, I'm your punishment. Because, today, I get to stand here and share whatever I want with you. And today, I'm going to share that I've removed my mask, I figured out who I am.

I'm a rabbi, I invested my life in this. This means something to me. I know it would be easy to drop your Jewishness because of this plague that has attacked our country. It would be easy to go about our daily lives and not connect with the Jewish community

It was easy for me to put on my mask about my sneakers. Because I wanted to fit in. We all want to fit in. It's our nature. If we want something, we'll find a reason. If we don't want something, we'll find an excuse.

And that's what I want for all of us. I want us to find a reason. I want us to be proud of who we are.

It's why I like taking people to Israel – I'm proud of what they've accomplished. It's not perfect, but it's ours. We understand that we are there for one another. We have customs that support each other.

When Soviet Jews were in trouble, we came out and saved them. The same was true for the Ethiopian Jewish community and the dozens and dozens of countries around the world who have faced disasters and needed search and rescue teams or other relief. It's what we do. Unlike any other country, it's what we do. And I am proud of that.

As Jews, we're unique. And my mission is to help remind us of that. Because I believe our uniqueness means something, our presence makes our world better.

I believe that b'emunah shleimah –I believe that with perfect faith.

I believe with perfect faith that we are the recipients of beautiful rituals, traditions and customs that help us both sweeten the bitterness in life as well as increase our joy. That in moments of sorrow, we recognize a loss and then have a roadmap that acknowledges our feelings while slowly returning us to life. And that we have prayers and holidays which compel us

to pause and allow us to see the good in our world.

I believe with perfect faith that our tradition has a realistic view of our world and teaches us to have one too. That we are focused on the here and now, and that, while we can see the beauty in our lives, we can also recognize the imperfections and challenges while understanding our obligation to be a part of the charge for change.

I believe with perfect faith that we come from a tradition that celebrates debate and questioning. That we don't have to be uniform in our understanding. That we say in jest that in a room of two Jews, there are three opinions. And that in reality, it is often the case.

I believe with perfect faith we have a belief that allows for doubt. That there are those here this morning who have complete faith in God and others who question God's existence daily. And that no matter if you take one of those sides or fall somewhere in between, we still recognize each other as members of the community.

I believe with perfect faith the words of Torah that teach that every human being is created in the image of God and the lesson that we derive from all being descendants of the same person, that we are all equal.

I believe with perfect faith that we are called upon to act with a certain set of



**I believe with perfect faith the words of Torah that teach that every human being is created in the image of God and the lesson that we derive from all being descendants of the same person, that we are all equal.**

values and ethics, that while we are responsible for taking care of one another, we are also free to make our own choices and are accountable for our actions.

Ani Ma'amin B'emunah  
Shleimah – that is what I believe with perfect faith.

And I am proud of it.

It makes me feel good about being me, about being Jewish.

On this Yom HaKapurim, on this day that is like Purim, as you peel away the masks you put on, I beg of you, try doing one blessed thing

for the next year. It could be anything that makes you remember who you are, what you are, what you stand for and what you won't stand for.

It could be anything that is Jewishly inspired, to give you a whack on the side of your head every time you do it. All I'm asking is for you to do is one blessed thing.

A Yahrzeit candle – light one. Shabbat candles – light them. The Motzi – say it before you eat

One blessed little thing, because doing it will remind you who you are. It will help you take off your mask and it will make you proud. And I hope that's something you carry with you and share with others in this upcoming year.

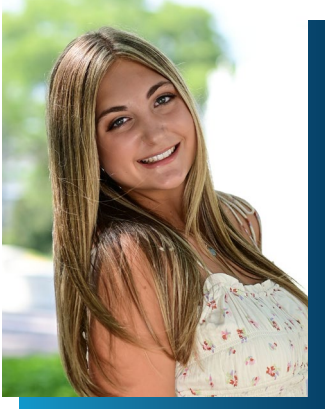
G'mar Chatimah tov! Finish well.







# Yom Kippur Family Services



**Izzy Cimmino**  
SSTY President

Does anyone recognize this book? It's called *The Hardest Word*, a PJ Library favorite for Yom Kippur. In this story, a large colorful bird named The Ziz flaps around the world, searching for the hardest word to say. Not to spoil the book, but he discovers that the hardest word to say is sorry. When I was young, my family read this story before every Yom Kippur to enforce the importance of the word sorry and make the act of apologizing a standard practice in our home even when it is hard. We learn that it is important to repair bonds with those we care about and to reflect on mistakes so we don't repeat them. Nobody lives a perfect life, but saying sorry is a way to show one's effort towards becoming their best self. At any age or with any mistake, it takes bravery and humility to own up and apologize, which is an important part of this holiday.

During this time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we get a

fresh start, it is important to start with the intention to work towards being our best selves. This Yom Kippur, however, I'd like you and your family to go one step further than just using the hardest word. Instead of only focusing on the times we have had to say sorry this past year, we should dedicate ourselves as a community to putting kindness out into the world. Repenting is important for our own self growth, but committing acts of kindness effectuates positive change for our community as a whole. As easy as it is to stand here and ask you all this, I know that radiating positivity and love into the world can be a difficult task, so I want to talk about

**... you don't need to find world peace in order to share goodness with our world. You just need to find a person or a group and use your passion and positivity to make improvements.**

how the smallest of actions have life changing effects on others.

Everyone felt the effects of COVID in their homes, whether it was sickness, prevention from activities and spending time with loved ones, or even just feeling isolated. At the time, I couldn't think of a person who could be feeling more in need of love than my great grandmother, Nina. At 98 years old, she was alone in her apartment amongst a global pandemic with

no visiting hours or way of seeing the outside world past her window. My family missed her and felt like phone calls weren't enough to show how much we cared about her in a scary time. So my brother and I decided it was time to bring some goodness into her life. With my cello and his drums, we created a setup in the parking lot of her retirement home and called a friendly nurse to open her window. As she looked down at the parking lot and saw her great grandchildren for the first time in months, I could already tell what a difference we made in her day. Her smile was visible from four stories up. And when we began to perform, the act of kindness only grew.

Others had heard the noise from their apartments and opened windows and doors to hear us play. It was the first time since March that any of them had live entertainment, let alone been able to see others even from a distance. When we finished performing, Nina called us on the phone and told us we had made her month with how beautifully we played and for giving her the chance to see us. We waved goodbye to her and our audience, and drove

home feeling like we had made a difference.

Our intention had only been to have a safe socially distanced visit with our great grandmother, but it resulted in so much more, as we were able to brighten the lives of her neighbors and friends, for that day as well. Knowing the positive change we made in not only her life but in the lives of others made going inside and back to quarantining so much easier for everyone.

As you can see, you don't need to find world peace in order to share goodness with our world. You just need to find a person or a group and use your passion and positivity to make improvements. We are lucky

as Jewish people to be given a chance to reflect, repent, and find ways to change for the better every year. On this day, we will say the hardest word and ask for forgiveness. But I am hoping that you will spend the year finding small ways to contribute your acts of kindness and enacting positive change in our community.

