



# Tefilla Notebook

15 Tishrei • Sukkot

October 2-4, 2020

Steven Dorfman, President

Rabbi Pini Dunner, Senior Rabbi

Nati Bar-Am, Chazan

## SUKKOT SCHEDULE

**Friday, October 2nd - Erev Sukkot/Shabbat**  
 Candle Lighting **6:17pm**  
 Kabbalat Shabbat/Yom Tov on zoom only **5:45pm**

**Saturday, October 3rd - First Day of Sukkot**  
 Sukkot Services **9am**  
 No evening services  
 Light Yom Tov candle after **7:19pm**

**Sunday, October 4th - Second Day of Sukkot**  
 Sukkot Morning Services **9am**  
 No evening services  
 Yom Tov Concludes **7:18pm**

**Chol Hamoed Monday October 5th - Thursday, October 8th**  
 Shacharit **7am**  
 Mincha **6:20pm**

Thank you to **Raphy & Rivka Nissel** for sponsoring our Yom Kippur break the fast to-go bags

**Yizkor Service**  
 Friday October 9th, 2020  
 Via zoom  
<https://zoom.us/j/3102767650>  
 Password: yinbh



Dearest Members and Friends,

Imagine. It is John Lennon's most iconic song. The music video begins evocatively with John and Yoko walking through the mist in their large garden. Birds chirp in the background as their feet crunch on the gravel with every step. It is a scene of soft tranquility with an added air of mystery. And then, suddenly, the soft piano chords begin to play.

We all know the lyrics, and if the opening piano riff starts up on the radio we can all immediately sing along with the words.



Imagine there's no heaven  
 It's easy if you try  
 No hell below us  
 Above us only sky  
 Imagine all the people  
 Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries  
 It isn't hard to do  
 Nothing to kill or die for  
 And no religion too  
 Imagine all the people  
 Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer  
 But I'm not the only one  
 I hope someday you'll join us  
 And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions  
 I wonder if you can  
 No need for greed or hunger  
 A brotherhood of man  
 Imagine all the people  
 Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer  
 But I'm not the only one  
 I hope someday you'll join us  
 And the world will live as one

You may think it's odd for a rabbi to quote an iconic pop song. I'm not bothered. First of all – this is not just any song, it's Imagine by John Lennon. And secondly, it is without doubt the best-known "peace" song of the 60s and 70s, preaching universal love, equality for all, non-violence and of course world peace.

Whatever we may think of John Lennon and some of the more radical aspects of the peacenik movement, there is a part of us that wants to buy into the core message of this song. Surely, it represents a perfect world – no war, no arguments, no discord, not even petty disputes about possessions. And although we live in an imperfect world, Lennon gave us a glimpse of what a perfect world could look like.

Well actually – and forgive me for being a party-pooping iconoclast! – I'm quite sure he didn't. To begin with, let me contrast the lyrics of Imagine with a prayer we say numerous times over the festival period, beginning on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and then again over Sukkot: "You chose us from all the nations; you loved us, you desired us above all other people, you sanctified us with your commandments, you drew us near to your service." The prayer is a celebration of the fact that God turned the Jewish nation into His Chosen People.

This theme reappears on numerous occasions in Hebrew scripture. I can quote you countless verses throughout Tanach that reflect this idea – telling us that the Jews are special, the Jews are chosen, the Jews are unique – "am segulah", "am ha-nivchar", "am kadosh".

Troublingly, this idea seems to fly in the face of a universal God. How is it that the God of all humanity has chosen to reveal Himself uniquely to one nation? What about equality for all? And I hardly need to remind you that our enemies and detractors have often used this foundational aspect of our national identity to criticize and vilify us.

And especially for those who love Lennon's 'Imagine' there is an uncomfortable truth here – we cannot possibly reconcile our Jewishness with the worldview painted in the idealistic lyrics of that song. How can we be good Jews and subscribe to the utopia Lennon describes?

The answer is simple – we can't. But actually, that's not a bad thing, it's a good thing – and please let me explain what I mean. Being the Chosen People does not mean we are racist, or arrogant, or special – at least in the sense that a white supremacist might describe himself as such. Moreover, the ideal painted by Lennon in his cherished song would be a world that is the very antithesis of what God wants; rather than being a utopia, it would be a nightmare.

Search through the entire Torah, Talmud, and Midrashim, or indeed in any Jewish literary source – and you will be struck by an incredible fact. It appears we Jews do not believe that we were chosen for any special privilege. Nowhere are we exclusively promised the Kingdom of Heaven to the exclusion of gentiles. Nor are we promised special treatment by God to the detriment of others. If anything, the contrary is true. We are told that we need to serve, or else we will fare badly. And in return for a life of unending commitment we are told that our lives will be ok. It seems that being chosen means we were chosen to serve, and potentially to suffer the ordeals true service might entail.

In the movie 'Fiddler on the Roof', Tevye comments: "I know, I know. We are Your chosen people. But, once in a while, couldn't You just choose someone else?"

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The point is this. Our ancestors took something on at Mount Sinai – they declared Naaseh Venishma: “we shall do, we shall obey.” They meant that they would do everything and anything that Judaism demanded of them. They undertook an exacting code of morality, law and discipline – more than any of their contemporary nations, then as now. Drawing on the sentiment behind Tevye’s cue, many Jews have indeed opted not to be so special after all, and have rejected observing mitzvot and ultimately their Jewish identity. To do so hardly makes sense if being chosen is such a privilege.

In which case, what does it mean to be chosen? It means that God chose us to do everything that made creating the world worthwhile. And like all relationships, the closer you are, the more intense it is. If someone hears about a random kid who has misbehaved, they won’t be too concerned. But when it’s their own kid it is very different. And when a person hears that their kid has done well, they celebrate. Your child’s success intensifies your feelings of love. So, too, is our special relationship with God. It is subject to highs and lows, because we are His children: when we do well we bask in His love, and when we do badly, we elicit a negative reaction.

Chosen-ness means responsibility. It means something is expected of us. And it requires a consciousness that is reflective and on the ball. This is the chosen-ness that explains what it means when we say that the Jews are God’s ‘Chosen People’.

The pretty chords and softly sung words of Lennon’s anthem blind us to the fact that if the world was ever the way he describes it, it would be an utterly dreadful place. Universal love is not love at all. Imagine I would say to my wife (and by the way, I don’t recommend that you try this): “Darling, do you know how much I love you? I love you just as much as I love every other woman on the planet.” How long do you think it would take her to sling me out? By choosing my wife I expressly and without equivocation rejected every other woman on the planet. That is not regressive, nor backward. It is beautiful.

But such exclusive commitment comes with responsibilities. We know very well what this means, and we also know that the alternative is ridiculous and unworkable. It explains why God is referred to as a jealous God in the Ten Commandments. Rather than describing some petty human emotion, the verse is using a human emotion to help us understand our chosen-ness. If a husband is not jealous with regard to their wife, or a wife jealous with reference to their husband, then their relationship is not a relationship of chosen-ness. God could never allow us to have any other ‘gods’ in our lives, because we are His chosen. Jealousy is the perfect human emotion to understand that.

Lennon suggests a world where there is “nothing to live or die for”. I can’t imagine a world more boring than that. The most invigorating thing of all is the fact that there is good and evil, right and wrong, and that there are things in our lives worth dying for. It is worth dying to protect my children, or my value system, or my loyalties. The utopia of universal equality as described by Lennon in Imagine is not a utopia at all. It is a nightmare. In fact, it has been tried and it failed – in an experiment called the Soviet Union – and it was a colossal failure. Indeed, such a dream is the antithesis of God’s plan for humanity.

Which is why being the Chosen People is nothing to be ashamed of. We must celebrate it, and every time we say or hear “ata bechartanu mikol ha’amim” we should remind ourselves that we need to live up to our chosen role, and not fool ourselves to think that we are special or better than everyone else. Rather than being a privilege, it is a challenge. Our task, as those who have been chosen, is to live up to that challenge.

*Praying for your safety and health, Shabbat Shalom & Chag Sameach.*

*Rabbi Pini Dunner*



Check out our facebook page for all upcoming events, photos, livestreams, and more!

<https://www.facebook.com/YoungIsraelOfNorthBeverlyHills>

## Sisterhood Corner

October

As we emerge from the High Holy days we welcome the joys of Sukkot!

Many thanks to Rabbi Pinni Dunner, Cantor Nati Baram, President Steve Dorfman, Carly Einfeld, Madeline Kramer, Darryl, Gae & Sarrah Kam and the Nissel family & all others who helped us to stay inspired and connected from our temporary Minyon locations and our homes.

Make sure to tune into The World’s biggest Succah Hop

**Wednesday, October 7th, 2020 From 10:00-11:00am**

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**October 7th 2020**  
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