Questions & Answers about At-Home High Holidays 5781

I am excited about the possibilities and would like to help the High Holiday Planning Committee with executing the details. Who should I contact?

- Co-Chairs: Mark Krasnow & Neal Yudkoff
- Members: Freya Bernstein, Jacquie Cohn, Jamie Gossels, Jillian Gruentzig, Rabbi Polisson, Ian Rubin, Robin Wolk, Howard Wolke

Isn’t it too early to make this decision? Things seem to be improving…

- The High Holidays require a great deal of planning. By being proactive, we have more time to plan and prepare comprehensively.
- Making a choice now allows us to use all of our staff and volunteer resources to make our experience the best it can possibly be. We can devote our efforts toward creating an innovative and meaningful holiday experience.
- Most, if not all, synagogues in our area (and nationally) are preparing for this outcome, but may not have announced yet. We want to be transparent and give everyone time to adjust to this new way of observing the holidays and join in our enthusiasm about what this situation makes possible.
- The re-opening is not a linear process necessarily. Just because things seem to be improving now does not mean that will continue. We have also been advised that the fall may present even higher risk.
- Large groups singing, which is an essential component of our services, unfortunately appears to present an especially high risk of transmission. For this reason, large religious services may only resume long after many other institutions re-open.

So, what are we doing?

- A design team of congregants are already hard at work in partnership with Rabbi Polisson to plan our offerings. Tools at our disposal for an at-home experience include streamed live components of the service, recorded videos, supplies for home observance, and more.
- We are considering a series of small outdoor gatherings for rituals like tashlich and shofar, including on the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah, which is on Sunday this year.
- We know that our members look forward to seeing one another during the holidays. We will find creative ways to accomplish this, even if we cannot all be physically together.
- Ideas are encouraged! Please contact any member of the High Holiday Planning Committee if you have any suggestions and would like to be involved.

What about people who don’t have access to technology or those will not use it on Yom Tov?

- This advance notice gives members of our community, and our staff and volunteers, adequate time to make this experience as accessible as possible, including providing technical assistance to those who need it.
- As with all the programming and services we have been doing on Zoom, there is always an option to dial-in by phone and listen.
- We will be providing at-home resources that do not require a screen or use of technology.
Couldn’t we do a very small service in person, or do two consecutive services, and then live-stream those?

- While that may allow us to have a more familiar service, it likely would not be an engaging experience to participate in for the vast majority of congregants watching from home. Nor do we imagine that being one of a small group of people present in our sanctuary and wearing masks would be a satisfying experience.
- Doing everything at-home puts our members on equal footing and enables people to be together with their families. It also allows us to develop something tailor-made for that format, rather than a bare-bones version of what we would do in-person.
- While we intend to have live-streaming capabilities in the sanctuary in the future when our large in-person gatherings resume, right now we’re better served using our resources to create something that we think will be a more satisfying experience.

Why can’t we just cap services at 25% or 50% or whatever capacity the state allows in September?

- Even half the capacity of our usual holiday attendees is a large group.
- Such a scenario would inevitably leave someone out and there is no fair way to decide who that should be. In addition, this scenario would likely exclude our seniors and people with underlying medical issues, which is a significant part of our community. Based on our values of inclusivity, we do not want to gather in large numbers until it is clearly safe for the vast majority of our community to be present.
- Holding in-person services will require strict adherence to many changing protocols and requirements by everyone attending services. In our judgment, the effort and anxiety surrounding this would outweigh the benefit of having some portion of our community in the same room.
- Even with precautions, there is still risk. We want to keep our congregants healthy and safe and an at-home experience guarantees this.
- Governmental guidelines set the ceiling for what is possible. We still have to assess the situation and decide based on the resources, values, and priorities of our specific community.

Why should I pay synagogue dues if there is not a service to attend?

- We are committed to offering a high quality, meaningful holiday experience for our members this year, under extraordinary circumstances.
- Dues and donations support the synagogue’s activities year-round and will ensure we will still be here for High Holidays 5782 and well beyond. Your continued support is the key to Congregation Or Atid being here for you, now and in the future.
- We still have to maintain and secure our building even if we cannot congregate inside it right now. And of course, we must support our incredible rabbi and staff.
- We encourage you to understand your dues and donations as an investment in an essential community, rather than a transactional, fee-for-service payment.