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1001 Central Avenue
Wilmette, Illinois 60091
tel: 847/ 251-2675

www.sukkatshalom.org

CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

The High Holy Day services this year were not the first time that Jews have used new technology to meet the needs of our people. In the era of the Babylonian Exile in 586 B.C.E., the parchment scroll allowed the Jewish people to survive by having a portable narrative that could unify a dispersed nation. By the year 70 C.E., the codex, or book, was the new "technology" of the time and, once again, enabled the Jewish people to survive the destruction of the Second Temple.

Over the years, other technologies have influenced religious life, as well. Today, however, the internet may be as important an innovation as the scroll, codex, and printing press. For this High Holy Day season, we chose to fully embrace this new technology. Worship needed to change, and this new medium demanded an innovative response.

If the Covid-19 crisis had occurred ten years ago, there would have been no Zoom or Facebook Live or Internet streaming

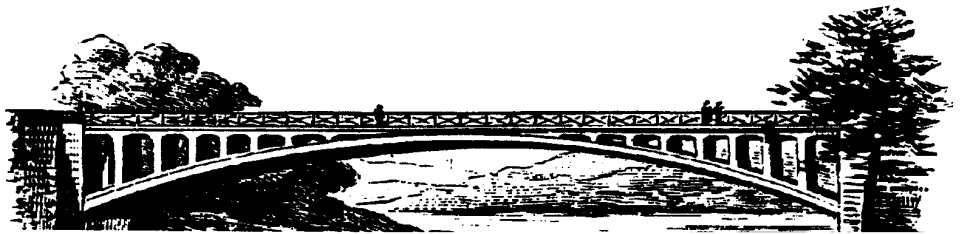
services, so we were somewhat fortunate. New technology allowed us to respond in creative ways. We knew that the latest technology of other ages also transformed religion, study, and worship. We began imagining how we could create meaningful worship if we could not meet in person.

We decided to not merely replicate our usual service. We chose not to follow and read from the High Holy Day prayer

"Worship needed to change, and this new medium demanded an innovative response."

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Our Journey to a "Virtual" High Holy Days by John Rüpper



It wasn't long after the coronavirus struck with full force last March that the clergy and staff of Sukkat Shalom realized that High Holy Day services would be very different this year. It was clear that hundreds

of congregants wouldn't be able to gather as usual at the Church of Latter-Day Saints

in Wilmette. Neither would members of the congregational choir be able to sing together.

What to do?

Fortunately, the son of a member of the congregation serves as music coordinator for Stephen Colbert in New York City. A quick call and consultation helped cantorial soloist Kenny Lyonswright and musical director Michael Querio start planning a new direction for the September services.

Similarly, Rabbi Sam Gordon and Rabbi Carlie Daniels conferred on how to adapt services for the Days of Awe to the new conditions of the pandemic, whose services would be rendered online instead of in-person. They quickly determined that simply streaming the regular services wouldn't suffice as their length,

alone, would discourage participants from spending hours before a computer screen. Instead, they decided to embrace a "narrative liturgy" that could be delivered digitally.

"They quickly determined that simply streaming the regular services wouldn't suffice..."

One model for the service was an online Seder hosted by Mandy Patinkin and Jason

Alexander, which received over a million views. Brevity seemed to be an important component, so the different High Holy Day services ranged between 35 and 45 minutes. While it included the Torah reading on Rosh Hashanah, it did not for Yom Kippur – although congregants were invited to participate in a separate online Torah reading and discussion covering that portion.

This idea extended to other aspect of the Days of Awe, such as the Book of Jonah and the Yizkor (memorial) service with the reading of names of those of blessed memory. The goal was to spread the various services over the course of the Days of Awe, so congregants could choose which of them to observe.

The Rosh Hashanah service opened with scenes (shot beforehand) of various families in the congregation lighting
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Rabbi's Message, cont'd

book—the *Machzor*. Two-hour services or 20-minute sermons seemed inappropriate

“This year was indeed a challenge, but we remained flexible, creative, and innovative.”

for the medium of coming into your home through your computer, TV, or personal device screen. We opted for a different path.

In 45-minute segments, we tried to offer a complete High Holy Day experience. We cut out repetitions of prayers, certain set liturgy, and unnecessary choreography. We looked at the full Ten Days of Awe as an opportunity to include parts of the services we chose not to observe during the main services. Torah and Haftarah readings, the healing service, *Yizkor* names, and other pieces of our traditional worship were offered at alternative times during the Ten Days.

There were a number of positive outcomes to emerge from our need to turn to the internet for our services. In addition to our own neighborhoods, we reached people in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and throughout the United States. Grown children who lived in other cities could be online with their parents at home. Recordings allowed for creative uses of images such as were integrated during the Yom Kippur confession. Music has always been a vital aspect of our worship services and this format permitted us to offer the best possible musical experience.

Obviously, we missed the extremely important aspect of personal contact. We couldn't physically greet each and every congregant. We couldn't touch the Torah scroll as it was carried through the sanctuary. We couldn't smile at friends we hadn't seen in a long time. Instead, we tried to reach out in other ways. Each family received a “goody bag” of apples and honey, a *yahrzeit* candle, and a prayer booklet. The deliveries were made in person by clergy, staff, or leadership.

This year was indeed a challenge, but we remained flexible, creative, and innovative. As generations of Jews have done before, we will continue to work together to build this sacred community.

Lending My Voice to Our Virtual Choir

by Lorraine Kaplan



The Sukkat Shalom virtual choir. (Lorraine Kaplan is in the bottom row, second from right.)

Our lives have been changed in so many ways by the pandemic. The loss of theater and live music performances has been heartbreaking to many of us. Like many others, we have been relying on home viewing of movies and TV series. The few live performances – like “Hamilton” on Disney+ -- have been highlights for my family.

As the pandemic worsened in the late-spring and summer, I wondered if High Holy Day services would happen and how they would be conducted. When I heard from Kenny Lyonswright that the choir was going to participate virtually, I was excited but nervous. Like many in my age-bracket, technology is not my strong suit. My stress was not over my ability to sing the songs or appear on video, but about the process. I pondered where to sit, look, stand, place my music and the phone to record it.

I must admit that the virtual choir was a good excuse to get dressed, put on some makeup and get those pipes working again! I set up my devices in my office and, after a few takes, sang my first few songs for the virtual choir. I accomplished the task of recording my submissions, but I really had no idea how it would come together with the other choir members.

Little did I know how beautiful the final product would be, and how much we would truly sound like a choir singing in person. The few weeks leading up to the High Holy Days have always been meaningful to me through our rehearsals and the camaraderie among Kenny, Michael Querio and the choir members. While it was not nearly as satisfying as seeing my choir buddies and harmonizing together, we were still able to experience that feeling of community despite the circumstances.

When I watched the online services, I was incredibly moved by so much: Kenny's songs, the other musicians and, of course, Sam and Carlie's thoughtful liturgy. The choir members singing from their homes and blending so beautifully despite not being together truly moved me. Reading the positive comments from the congregation was comforting and meaningful in a way I never expected.

I certainly pray that next fall we will be back to singing together and attending services in person. For now, I am grateful that we had the opportunity to bring a bit of tradition and normality to the virtual services this year with our music. Through the hard work of our fantastic leadership team at Sukkat Shalom, we were able to share a meaningful New Year together.

Virtual Learning Succeeds at Family School Thanks to Students & Parents

by Stacia Goldstein and Alyce Lang

For the past 15 years, we have been co-teaching the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten class at Sukkat Shalom's Family School. The two of us connected immediately and became a team from Day One, sharing similar values and teaching philosophies.

This history has made it easier for us to collaborate in creating interesting and fun lessons for our students during the challenging times of this pandemic. "Virtual" teaching has not hindered our ability to teach Jewish ideas and traditions.

We share a passion for food and enjoy incorporating edible projects into our teaching. The children love these projects and teaching virtually has not stopped them! We try each project at home first to make sure it is fun and easy. Then we email the families prior to class with a list of necessary ingredients. It's wonderful to see through our computer screens how students create their own masterpieces with their parents. For example, interesting discoveries in everyone's pan-



Family School teachers Alyce Lang (left) and Stacia Goldstein together on a Zoom call.

tries resulted in fabulous Torah scrolls for Simchat Torah!

By structuring the virtual classes similarly to in-person classes, we have successfully connected with our students. Weekly routines help children stay focused. Each class begins with a welcome song, sharing time, lesson and activity and ends with a story and Shabbat blessings. Songs with Music Specialist Alan Goodis are enjoyed by all. The only difference this year is that we are learning from afar instead of together.

We could not succeed each Sunday if it

wasn't for the amazing support of the parents. They are well organized, provide the necessary supplies and always lend a helping hand during classes.

The coronavirus certainly has made life challenging for everyone this year. But we have found virtual teaching at Family School to be interesting and rewarding. The students are engaged, curious and eager to learn about Jewish holidays and traditions. Although they are not sitting together on a rug during "circle time," they are happy and motivated while connecting through their home computers every other Sunday.

Zooming to Family School During the Pandemic

by Olivia Chiss

Almost every other Sunday from September to May we dash out the door trying to make it to Family School by 10 a.m. -- grabbing our name tags, parents getting their coffee, and seeing all the smiling faces. Because of Covid, however, this Family School year looks a lot different.

Now we sit in the Zoom waiting room instead of outside the auditorium, wear our PJs instead of putting on regular clothes, and sit on our couch instead of the theater seats. I also miss one of my favorite parts -- getting snacks in class. YUM!

While being on Zoom is a lot different, I feel like all the Family School teachers have been very engaged during our time together and have worked to make it more fun -- because it can be so hard to sit in front of your Zoom screen for 90 minutes.

One of the best parts of Family School is being live in the classroom, playing

games while we learn. And even though that part is harder to do on Zoom, the teachers have come up with creative ideas -- like building our own sukkahs out of supplies we find in our house. (Mine was made of graham crackers and peanut butter, which my dog tried to eat!)

I also really miss hearing the whole community singing along with Kenny and sometimes Alan. So I thought it was really awesome when Nefesh Mountain came to Family School a few weeks ago. It's amazing when Sukkat Shalom can get speakers and bands to join us and come perform, even on Zoom, because it makes it way more interesting and fun.



Family School 7th grader Olivia Chiss.

While there have been some highs and lows of this quarantine and how it's changed our lives, I look forward to getting back to in-person Family School -- and even Hebrew school -- at Sukkat Shalom!

Journey, cont'd

candles in their homes, linking our beloved traditions to the new technology being utilized this year. Rabbi Daniels undertook an updating of the traditional prayer or *Vidui* – the alphabetical confession of sins that is central to the Kol Nidre service. (Her revised version, and how she came to compose it, can be found on page 5.)

Family Services for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur incorporated special features to appeal to children. The congregation enlisted longtime friend of Sukkat Shalom and noted puppeteer Marilyn Price to entertain and educate younger viewers on Rosh Hashanah morning. And the shofar service featured a video of cantorial soloist Kenny Lyonswright popping up with the traditional ram's horn at various local landmarks – from the Baha'i Temple to Wrigley Field.

Other notable aspects of the reengineered services included the participation of musician Don Cagen, who had previously appeared at a pre-pandemic Shabbat service. The Kol Nidre service featured the cello and piano artistry of two young members of the congregation, Jan and Natalie Nedvedsky, who had shared their talents with us in person before "social distancing" began.

For those who participated through Sukkat Shalom's YouTube or Facebook platforms, real-time comments and conversations occurred throughout the services – lending an air of connection and community during the previously recorded services.

The tragic death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the day before Rosh Hashanah Eve required a late change

High Holy Day Services: By the Numbers

This table shows the unique electronic devices that connected to our various High Holy Day services, pre-views and events. For example, 2,096 unique devices connected to Yom Kippur Morning services. That number could be multiplied many times by people sharing those screens.

This large number of viewers of our virtual services isn't limited to the High Holy Days. While Shabbat services previously attracted 20-to-30 people in person, we now average more than 150 unique views for each virtual Shabbat service.

Service or Event	Unique computer views
Sukkat Shalom: High Holidays 5781 Preview	2,734
Yom Kippur Morning	2,096
Kol Nidre	1,817
Rosh Hashanah Morning	1,572
Oseh Shalom Teaser - Site and FB	1,500
Family Rosh Hashanah Services	1,301
Erev Rosh Hashanah	1,022
In Memory of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg	737
Yom Kippur Family Service	491
Reading of the Yizkor Names	362
Yizkor and Neilah	347
Service of Healing	252
Shabbat Shuvah, FB and Zoom	218
A moment of reflection for the Days of Awe with Rabbi Daniels	199
Creating your Sanctuary for the High Holy Days	118



Rabbi Carlie Daniels and Rabbi Sam Gordon offer closing prayers.

in plans to acknowledge her immense influence as a Jewish-American. Rabbi Gordon composed and recorded a tribute to the late Justice, which was posted the next morning before Rosh Hashanah services commenced. And he revised and re-recorded his Yom Kippur sermon to include references to Justice Ginsburg's meaning and work.

Ultimately, the success of the virtual services was due primarily to the hard work of Sukkat Shalom's young clergy and staff – Kenny Lyonswright, Carlie Daniels and Seth Zimmerman – with assistance from Andy Schultz and the professionals at Daily Planet Productions. We thank them and all who participated for High Holy Day services that were meaningful, spiritual, accessible and beautiful. They proved that our "shelter of peace" still stands strong even when transported into cyberspace.

Virtual participation isn't limited to Sukkat Shalom congregants alone. Our High Holy Day services received substantial viewership in Canada, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Israel, and the United Kingdom. There was one viewer in Lithuania, one in Roodepoort, South Africa, and a few each in India and Switzerland. We had viewers in New York, Arizona and California.

While we would certainly prefer to worship together, our virtual services have extended the Sukkat Shalom community worldwide.

A New Twist on an Old Prayer: A *Vidui* for Our Current World

by Rabbi Carlie Daniels

Our clergy team began preparing for the High Holy Days back in May. Because this year was unlike any other, our preparation required a fresh vision. We focused on two goals: First, maintaining a sense of connection among the Sukkat Shalom community and to our rich traditions. Second, creatively constructing services that felt meaningful, relevant and enhanced by the new online medium.

We recognized that such services could not be a cover-to-cover reading of the machzor, our High Holy Day prayer book. Instead, we chose to highlight specific liturgical selections from each service, weaving together our own words and interpretations, traditional liturgy and beloved High Holy Day music.

In our early planning meetings, we reviewed each service to decide on the themes and particular prayers on which we would focus. For example, Yom Kippur is the day that we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. We offer numerous confessions during which we stand and recite aloud our communal wrongdoing.

As part of this year's Yom Kippur morning service, we made the decision to focus on the long, communal *vidui* (confession). Inspired by the 'Vidui for the 21st Century' reading in our machzor, I was asked to create a new *vidui* that focused specifically on the sins dating back to the last Yom Kippur.

As our worship team discussed what we felt should be included in our modern *vidui*, we also imagined how to make it a visual experience suitable for our online service. We used headlines and photos to make a connection between the sins we recited and specific events of the past year. The hope was to make this ancient, communal prayer more relevant to our current world and its many challenges:

We abused our power and privilege.
We betrayed the trust of those closest to us.
We cared only for ourselves
 and not for the health and wellness of all people.
We damaged our planet and destroyed God's creations.
We edited our history and omitted the stories of black and brown people.
We failed to protect our children from violence.
We glorified status and power over higher ideals.
We harmed our national health,
 ignoring guidelines from scientists and professionals.
We ignored racist policies and people,
 busying ourselves with platitudes instead of action.
We judged other people more harshly than we do ourselves.
We kept silent when we should have spoken out.
We lost faith in ourselves and God
 under the overwhelming pressures of daily living.
We manipulated the system to work in our favor
 and leave behind those in need.
We neglected the needs of human beings in favor of economic growth.
We obsessed over being right, justifying falsehoods over facts.
We preoccupied ourselves with meaningless gestures,
 and facile answers.
We quarreled with friends and relatives over unimportant matters.
We remained silent in the face of racism and oppression.
We refused to engage with others who do not share our views.
We stockpiled essential items and ignored the needs of our neighbor.
We turned away from the plight of the stranger and poor among us.
We undermined the knowledge and advice of experts
 and knowingly put others in danger.
We violated the bodies of women in workplaces and homes.
We wasted precious resources of the Earth.
We exploited the weakest and most vulnerable among us.
We yielded to negative thoughts and forfeited opportunities for growth.
We zealously guarded the fruits of privilege.
For all of these wrongdoings, eternal Source of forgiveness,
Help open our eyes to the needs of others and ourselves,
Help open our eyes to injustice everywhere.
Forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.



The dynamic shofar duo of (from left) Dan Lipson and Jeff Miller.

Musical Notes: Producing Our Virtual High Holy Day Services

by Kenny Lyonswright, Cantorial Soloist

At the beginning of the global pandemic, our Christian friends celebrated Easter. I remember tuning into the virtual Easter services held by my wife's home church in Minneapolis. I thought to myself, "Thank goodness this will all be over soon and I won't have to worry about producing a virtual service!" Famous last words.

About a month later, the Sukkat Shalom team sat down to begin conceiving a Virtual High Holy Days.

After many hours of careful deliberation, we decided that much of our traditional content should be pre-recorded.

The momentousness of this decision cannot be overstated. This would be the first

time in history that most Jews around the world would NOT attend an in-person service on the High Holy Days. This realization prompted us to think carefully about how we wanted to present the holiday liturgy. Would we simply point a camera at the *bimah* and offer the usual services?

We quickly decided that it would be wise to embrace the medium we had been forced into using. Liturgy that would

normally be repeated across multiple services was now delegated to a specific service. Translation and explication of Hebrew would be offered between musical stanzas, with instrumental music underscoring the speakers.

We engaged the services of Daily Planet Productions, a professional audio/visual production company, to film and edit much of our High Holy Days footage. We also worked with Don Cagen, who recorded and edited all of the music and also played the EWI—Electronic Wind Instrument.

During two days in July, we filmed most of what eventually appeared in our virtual services. For the staff, it was a surreal experience. Finishing the *Kol Nidrei* at 11 a.m. on a Thursday morning in July was rather discombobulating! Strange, too, was watching Rabbi Gordon deliver moving *Yizkor* thoughts and Rabbi Daniels offer a stirring Confession for 2020—all in an empty sanctuary.

While we left those two days of filming feeling quite proud of our work, we knew that some final touches were necessary to make it feel true to Sukkat Shalom.

In post-production, we were able to add a montage of congregants lighting candles and dipping apples in honey in their homes. We interspersed shots of our past presidents with the performance of *Kol Nidre* and added shofar-blowers and candle-lighters to our Rosh Hashanah services. Michael Querio, our fabulous choir director and pianist, assisted me in rounding up the choir, and I was able to produce "virtual choir" videos for all five High Holy Days services. As each congregant was added to the recordings, they began to feel like home.

For, of course, that was the hardest part of this past season—not seeing each and every one of you nor being able to greet you and your family at the door. We missed you, as we have all missed friends and loved ones over these past months. In watching the services as they aired, and commenting back and forth in the chat room, I felt a sense of connection to this wonderful community despite our physical distance. No matter how we are worshipping in the weeks and months to come, this community will remain deeply and meaningfully connected.

"No matter how we are worshipping in the weeks and months to come, this community will remain deeply and meaningfully connected."



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1001 CENTRAL AVENUE
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS 60091
847/ 251-2675
www.sukkatshalom.org

Staff

Rabbi Sam Gordon
Rabbi Carlie Daniels
Cantorial Soloist Ken Lyonswright
Andrew Schultz, Executive Director

Lisa Fingerhut-Carlton, President
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Cantorial soloist Kenny Lyonswright with shofar outside a Chicago landmark as part of the Rosh Hashanah Family Service.