

Preparing for the High Holy Days

Making your Home a Sanctuary

With the current health pandemic, and restrictions on group gatherings, our kitchens have become our classroom, our basements are our yoga studios, and the dining room has become our office. Where then, is our synagogue? The rabbis asked this same question right after the destruction of the Temple. Without a localized place of worship, how could they pray together? We are the inheritors of their answer: our home would become our “mikdash m’at,” a miniature sanctuary, a holy place. Our current challenge is to create a sacred space at home while we are in front of our computers, on Zoom or live-streaming services. What can help us create both that spiritual mindset and that spiritual refuge?

These suggestions are meant to help you enhance the High Holy Day experience at home, while creating a communal atmosphere for us all.

- Choose your prayer space carefully in advance. Spend a few minutes to think about it or discuss as a family. Can your prayer space be different from your work space?
- Face towards Jerusalem, East where we face as we pray communally.
- Say a blessing or kavannah (“intention”) to mark your space as your mikdash m’at. Suggestions of verses and blessings are below.
- Put a cushion or festive pillow on your chair. Drape it with a tallit.
- Beautify the space. Perform the mitzvah of hiddur mitzvah. Cover the desk or table with a white tablecloth, add flowers or artwork.
- Add ritual objects. On Rosh Hashanah - candlesticks and kiddish cup, apples and honey. On Yom Kippur - family heirlooms, photos of loved ones, a shofar.
- Move the screen away from you so you are “watching” it more than “manipulating” it. View on your TV if possible.
- Try to limit distractions. Turn off your email, apps, and text messages.
- Wear white clothing on Yom Kippur or something that centers you. Kippur and tallit are welcome.
- Have your machzor ready: the digital flipbook, a purchased copy, or a borrowed one from TBE. TBewellesley.org/HHD5781/#PrayerBooks

Verses and blessings to help create your sacred space/mikdash m'at:

1. Numbers 24:5

מֵה־טֹבוֹ אֱהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

How good are your tents, O Jacob, Your sacred places, O Israel!

2. Birkat Habayit (home blessing):

בְּזֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֹא יָבוֹא צָעַר
בְּזֹאת הַדִּירָה לֹא תָבוֹא צָרָה
בְּזֹאת הַדָּלֶת לֹא תָבוֹא בְּהִלָּה
בְּזֹאת הַמַּחְלָקָה לֹא תָבוֹא מַחְלוּקָת
בְּזֶה הַמָּקוֹם תִּהְיֶה בְּרָכָה וְשָׁלוֹם

Let no sorrow come through this gate.
Let no trouble come in this dwelling.
Let no fright come through this door.
Let no conflict come to this section.
Let there be blessing and peace in this place.

3. Exodus 20:21:

בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶזְכֹּר אֶת־שְׁמִי אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבֵרַכְתִּיךָ

In every place where My name is mentioned, I will come to you and bless you.

4. Exodus 3:5

כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמְתִּי קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:

Indeed, the place on which you stand is holy ground.

5. Psalms 121:8

יְהוָה יִשְׁמַר־צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֲךָ מִעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:

Adonai will guard your going and coming, now and forever.

6. Pirke Avot 1:4

יְהִי בֵיתְךָ בֵּית וְעַד לַחֲכָמִים, וְהוּי מִתְאַבֵּק בַּעֲפֹר רַגְלֵיהֶם, וְהוּי שׁוֹתֵה בְּצִמָּא אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם:

Let thy house be a house of meeting for the wise, sit at their feet, and drink in their words.

7. Genesis 28:17, Temple Beth Elohim's namesake text. When Jacob awakes from a dream:

מֵה־נֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם־בֵּית אֱלֹהִים

How awe-inspiring is this place? This is none other than a beit Elohim.