



## Rabbi Charles S Sherman

June 23, 2020

Dear Friends,

Typically, the conversations begin as summer winds down – “The Holydays are early this year,” or “The Holydays are late this year,” or... “Where will you be for the Holydays?”

This year, in this unprecedented time, musing about the Holydays begins much earlier. And so, I write to provide some perspective, information, and reassurance about Melrose B’nai Israel Emanu-El, our plans and commitment as we prepare for the holiest days of the year.

Yes, we will have a physical presence in our synagogue for the Holydays. And, yes, we will have virtual services.

We have invested in new technology, and we will provide our community technical support so that you can fully participate in the service experience. Your living room, your study, anywhere in your home, will be an extension of our sanctuary, with its specialness, its familiarity, its sacredness. You will be able to participate in services on your computer or your television, whatever device you prefer. We recognize that for some of us, our technical skills are limited, and sometimes there is frustration.

Therefore, we will provide resources and instruction to walk you through the technology weeks beforehand to make sure you are comfortable and that when the Holydays arrive, the emphasis is on the service and not on the technology. Some of the things that add to the Holydays’ elegant spirit are small things. If you are part of our virtual congregation, I suggest you try to make the days “kadosh,” by having a festive holyday meal and wearing your “yomtovdic” clothes.

In anticipation of a physical presence in our sanctuary, it does require flexibility and education. We are not sure what the next few months will bring, but again, we will have a physical presence in our synagogue for the Holydays. We will follow the most stringent guidelines established by medical authorities.

The services will be conducted in real time. There will be spontaneity, the familiar liturgy that we have come to recognize and appreciate, the sounds of the Shofar, beautiful music, the celebration of the newborns, the recognition of simchas, and as always, a compassionate and caring community.

This is not “one size fits all.” Some may want to take advantage of the physical presence; some may wish to be part of the virtual community. Some may choose the physical for some services, and virtual for others. You will have the opportunity to choose from your own comfort level. **Most important, we transcend boundaries; we will be together in sacred time and sacred space.**

It will be different. And that’s all right. I am excited, because it requires us to infuse the old with creativity and a new sense of energy. Even though there is a sameness to the liturgy, this requires a different kind of mindset. If ever there was a time for gratitude, it’s this year. If ever there was a time for hope and optimism, it’s this year. If ever there was a time for relationships and community, faith and God, it’s this year.

A friend who has enjoyed the opportunity to surf the internet and to join virtual services throughout North America, told me about a service he frequently “attends” in the New York area. Describing the service, he told me it was “a great performance.” At first, I was envious. I too would appreciate a great performance. But like most things, after several days of reflection, I recognized that’s not a fair description of a Jewish service. Performance is okay about a Broadway show, a movie, a concert. I much prefer being part of a High Holyday service that is uplifting, touches my heart and my soul, challenges me, makes me see things differently about myself and others, comforts me, nurtures me, provides me

motivation to get up the next day with renewed energy, purpose and goodness.

As Leonard Fein reminds us, as a community, we are called to create systems that encourage and reward good. For in the end, we are, we Jews, *assirei tikvah*, prisoners of hope. We know there is not only a Promised Land, but also a Promised Time. We know that “they who plant in sorrow, will surely one day, reap in joy.”

In Friendship,

Rabbi Charles S. Sherman

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