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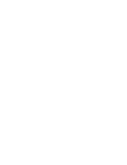
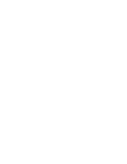


Homes & Lifestyle

A New Year, A New Look For Jewish High Holiday Celebrations

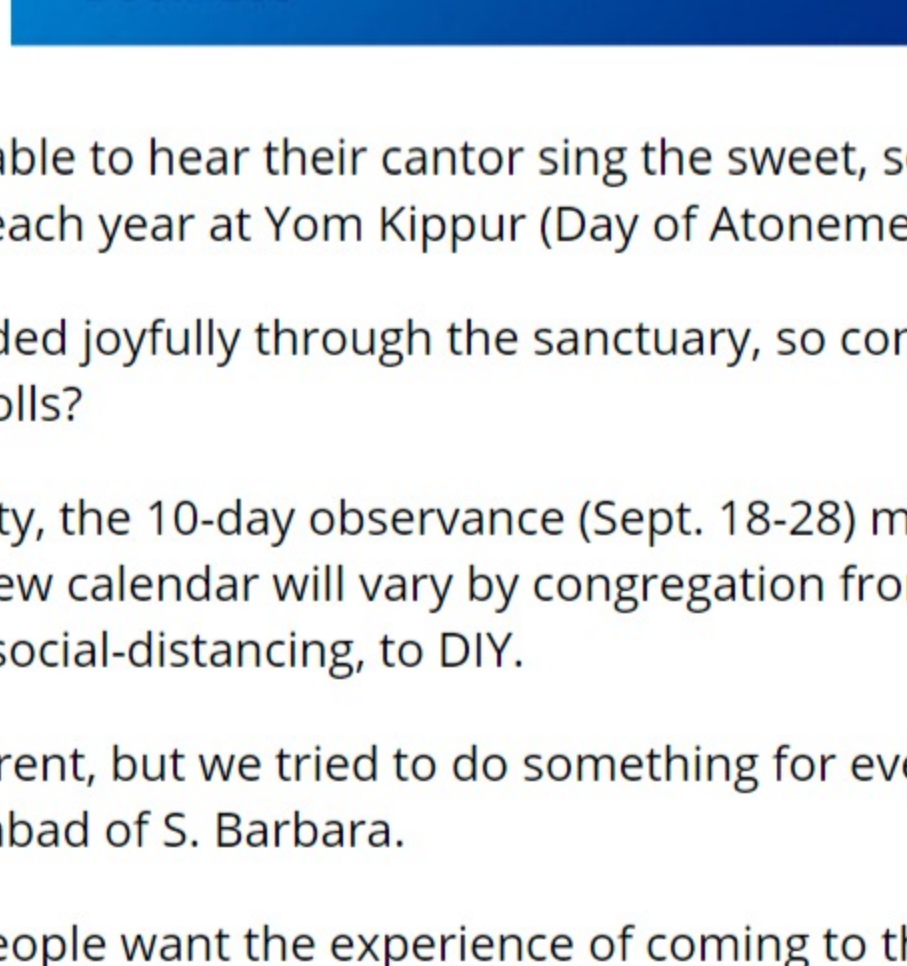
By Marcia Heller

September 16, 2020
4:36 p.m.



As the Jewish High Holidays begin this weekend, members of Santa Barbara County's Jewish community might be wondering how **Rosh Hashanah** and **Yom Kippur** will be celebrated this year, considering the limits on gatherings due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Will the ancient tones of the **shofar** (ram's horn) be sounded to announce the New Year?



Will congregations be able to hear their cantor sing the sweet, soulful notes of "Kol Nidre" as it is intoned each year at Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) services?

Will the **Torah** be paraded joyfully through the sanctuary, so congregants can reach out and touch the holy scrolls?

In Santa Barbara County, the 10-day observance (Sept. 18-28) marking the start of the year 5781 on the Hebrew calendar will vary by congregation from totally online, to in-person outdoors with social-distancing, to DIY.

"It will look a little different, but we tried to do something for everyone," said Rabbi Mendel Loschak at Chabad of S. Barbara.

"We recognize some people want the experience of coming to the synagogue, hearing the shofar. At Chabad House, we have a large outdoor space, and we will have the in-person outdoor experience with social distancing. We will put up a tent covering outdoors.

"For those who don't want to come, there will be a short shofar-blowing service on Sunday [Sept. 20] at 4 p.m. at **Lake Los Caneros Park**, so they can get that **mitzvah** in. People can come with their families. Or, people can get a High Holiday handbook to get the best experience they can do at home," he said.

That handbook includes an at-home service, plus recipes for traditional holiday fare such as **challah** (a twisted-top bread) and **kugel** (a sweet noodle casserole).

"In general, everything is so different; this is just the next thing," Loschak said. "It's forced everyone — myself and family and people in the community — to think: how am I going to react in the face of this challenge? We have been blessed for so long — we can say now, how can I bring out our inner strength? And people have risen to the challenge."

High holiday services at Congregation B'nai Brith will be fully online. As the spiritual leader of Santa Barbara's largest synagogue, Rabbi Stephen Cohen is dismayed with this year's circumstances, but also heartened by how people have stepped up in the face of crisis.

"Where I have to begin is with my sadness," he said. "It [High Holidays] is one of the great highlights of the year to have the community come together and see hundreds and hundreds of people — some of them I don't see any other time of the year; many are old friends, but altogether, this is the time where the community comes together. To not have that opportunity this year is deeply disappointing.

"I also understand completely that this is the reality, and of course that there are many people in our country and even in our community and around the world who are suffering terribly. So, in comparison with that suffering, our not being able to be together is less significant.

"At the same time, I have been really inspired by the response of our community," Cohen said. "It's been wonderful to see the outpouring of offers of help and support for our members of the community who are isolated."

Cohen has witnessed people of all ages stepping forward, people who say the community is important to them and they want to help to make things better.

"In the middle of the sadness, there is also that inspiration of watching people rise to the occasion," he said.

Volunteer efforts run the gamut from regular phone calls to elderly members of the congregation, some of whom live in retirement homes and can't leave; to home food deliveries; to teaching people how to use Zoom, so they can join the temple's virtual programming.

With regards to the reimagined holiday services, like other temples, B'nai Brith faced multiple challenges. Technology is one — being both a blessing and a curse.

While it is suddenly possible for congregants to have services brought right into their homes over the internet, Cohen said, "It's all new technology, so all of us are having to learn — it's that old image of building the airplane while flying it."

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But the deeper issue, he said, is connecting people to their religion when they can't worship side-by-side among family and friends in a sacred space.

"This is the holiest time of the year, of intense introspection, and of connecting to our past; and even for many people who do not see themselves as religious ordinarily, this is a time for them to explore their relationship with religion and with God," Cohen said. "How to do that when we're not physically together is the biggest challenge of all.

"We need to find ways to help people open up to each other and open up in prayer without the support of being together physically."

Two ways in which the seasonal services — even virtual ones — can help are through the spiritual musical experience, led by the temple's **cantor** Mark Childs and choir; and through the words of the rabbi.

As for the sermons, "That responsibility is on me and my colleague Rabbi [Daniel] Brenner," Cohen said. "We're going to be doing our very best to speak words that are moving and uplifting, but also very honest about the challenges facing us all."

Use of the term "challenge" is a thread that runs through the comments of all the rabbis who offered their thoughts on the 2020 High Holidays.

"In a challenging year like this, we have had to make some tremendous changes," said Rabbi Edgar Goodman at Santa Barbara Hillel in Isla Vista.

At Santa Barbara Hillel, which caters to UCSB students, as well as the wider community, services will be offered virtually via links to **Hillel International**.

"All the service options are going to be linked to what Hillel International is creating. It will be part of a national effort. There was no reason for each of us to create a broadcast service," Goodman said.

Locally, Santa Barbara Hillel will participate in person, along with the Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara, in the **Tashlich** ritual — the casting away of sins, noon-4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 20 at Leadbetter Beach.

During the Tashlich ceremony, normally held on the shore of a lake or other body of water, Jews symbolically toss their trespasses of the previous year into the water, making way for a fresh start in the new year.

Following Yom Kippur services, which take place a week after Rosh Hashanah, Santa Barbara Hillel will offer a four-tract program called **ZOOMing Into Yom Kippur**, which is designed to get students thinking and talking about how the messages of the High Holidays resonate with them.

"It's a creative, break-the-mold kind of experience, taking the themes of the High Holidays and enabling people to experience those themes at their own level," Goodman said.

The four tracts are Recharge, Reflect, Redefine; The Arts; Let's Get Spiritual; and Repairing Ourselves, Repairing the World.

"We all watch the service together, and then look at it through the lens of the tract," explained Ashley Marx, Hillel's assistant director and director of development. For example, she said, Yom Kippur is all about apologies, so people participating in The Arts tract might look at how apologies are portrayed through song in the service.

"What are modern interpretations of how we say 'sorry'?" Marx suggested.

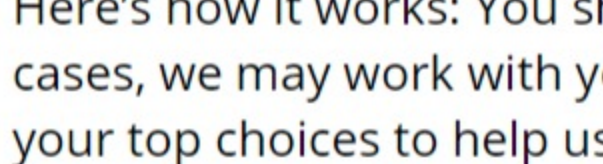
On the theme of wellness (Repairing Ourselves, Repairing the World), particularly in stressful times, students might discuss: "How do we forgive ourselves and be gentle on ourselves," Marx said.

"One of the most important traits to cultivate in these difficult times is resiliency," Goodman said. "And this is an area where the Jewish tradition can find comfort, find meaning and find resiliency. My goal is to ensure that we are here for students this year and beyond, especially for their mental and spiritual health, whether in person or virtually."

At Temple Beth El in Santa Maria, "We're doing all of our services by Zoom," said Suzanne Levy, a temple board member and past president. "Our rabbi [Dov Gottesfeld] is leading all of them. We've had two days for people to pick up the prayer books at the synagogue. We've set up ahead of time what readings people want, and they will come in via Zoom."

Beth El has also mailed **Yizkor** books to members of the congregation. The books are memorial records and remembrances of the European communities and lives lost in the Holocaust. The Yizkor prayer for the dead is recited on Yom Kippur.

For more information about High Holiday services, visit **Congregation B'nai Brith; Chabad of S. Barbara; Santa Barbara Hillel**.



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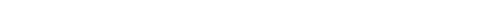
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