



Creating a Mikdash Me'at (Sanctuary) at Home on the High Holy Days

By Rabbi Allison Berry, adapted by Rabbi Michael Ragozin

As long as the Jewish community has existed in the United States, we have gathered together to pray on the High Holy Days. The reality this year will be very different. On Erev Rosh Hashanah, for the first time, we will turn on our computers or our televisions and participate in High Holy Days from our couch or our dining room table. As the holidays approach, I am filled with trepidation about this undertaking. But I have also decided to see it as an opportunity for change and growth.

While the location and medium of services will be different, the sounds and words remain the same. We will not be alone; hundreds of fellow congregants and millions of Jews world-wide will be observing these same rites. We will still ready ourselves to start the year anew, with hope and resilience.

We are not the first Jews to worship without our Temple. 2,600 years ago, when the Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people were exiled to Babylonia, gone was the sanctuary, gone was gathering on Shabbat, gone was the glue which held life together. Ezekiel cried out to God and God replied, "I have become to them a mikdash me'at, a small temple" (Ezekiel 11:16). According to the Talmud (Megilah 29a), God will dwell in the holy spaces we create, for they are the Temple in miniature.

This year, knowing more than ever that our homes will be central to our experience, there are simple things we can do to create a spiritual mindset and refuge that can move us outside the ordinary routine of our lives.

The following are a series of suggestions, thanks, in part, to Rabbis Allison Berry and Elyse Goldstein, to help you transform your home into a Mikdash Me'at:

1. **You do not need to be perfect and there is no perfect space!** It is ok to work around your everyday messiness. Real life, and the beautiful, imperfect home you have created will only add texture and depth to how our prayers resonate.
2. **Choose the prayer space in your home carefully and in advance.** Once you have chosen the space, **tidy up** and do something to bless it—recite a prayer (you can make something up!) or take a moment to simply allow yourself to feel something special in the context of this space.

3. **Consider your seating.** In which chair will you be most spiritually alert (and comfortable)? Do you prefer the couch?
4. **Try broadcasting the service from a larger screen, maybe a television.** This way the audio and visual can fill your space in a way that your computer can not.
5. **Add something to the space that feels beautiful or special.** This could be photos of loved ones, a beautiful piece of art that you can see from your seat, or even flowers that can add some life to your prayer area.
6. **Consider the content of each service you will attend.** On Rosh Hashanah, is there something you can bring into the space that represents the new year or life? At Yizkor, do you have photos of loved ones who have died on hand so their presence and their love surround you?
7. As services begin, turn off your email and, if you are able, most especially **turn off your phone!** Do all of the things you would normally do when you come in person to the synagogue.
8. **Dress for the occasion** in a way that makes these days special for you. If pajamas make it hard to focus or don't feel special then wear something that makes you feel good and connected to the community.
9. **The Temple will offer times that you can come to pick up your Machzor (prayer book).** Please do so—we want you to follow along and participate. Even if you aren't physically sitting in synagogue, our prayers are not a performance. We need you to be part of it.
10. If your children's behavior isn't perfect, or you feel distracted, that is ok. **It is ok** to let your kids use technology so you can focus and pray and it is ok if it takes you some time to relax into the space and into the moment. This is new for all of us!

May you and your family be inscribed for a year of blessing, abundant kindness, and peace.

Rabbi Michael