



Little "Shul" On The Prairie

AJC Newsletter

*AJC is a community that honors our Jewish traditions,
applies our Jewish faith to today's life, and
works toward continuation of the Jewish people.*

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Rabbi Nina Mizrahi



Ames Jewish
Congregation

The High Holy Days this year will be like no other year. The pandemic has affected all of us in many ways, and our religious observances are no exception. AJC is planning a comprehensive schedule of High Holy Day services (see [schedule](#))—but almost all of it will be online. Rabbi Mizrahi, John Pleasants, and others have worked very hard to make these services special and meaningful. Included in this newsletter are not only a schedule of services and descriptions of events but also information about how we can make our homes a [sacred place](#), how we can make these High Holy Days more meaningful as well as messages from [Rabbi Mizrahi](#) and [AJC President Mike Lazere](#).

L'Shana Tovah!

IT'S TIME TO GET READY!!!

ZOOMING IN AT HOME

ZOOM – UNITY

So, here we find ourselves in 2020, basically having been physically apart from one another for six months. Our zoom family and adult gatherings for Shabbat services have enabled us to visit, catch up, and share in the beauty of Shabbat as a community. We even held our first zoom Bat Mitzvah. Madisyn did a beautiful job, and we look forward to marking Lily's Bat Mitzvah in November and Mira's in May.

ZOOM – PRAY

No doubt services will be different this year, and the High Holy Days are no exception. We are planning for each service to be between 1¼ and 1½ hours long; no prayer-book required. The focus will be on the special High Holy Day prayers and melodies, which we all look forward to hearing and which will compel us to do teshuvah. **If you would like to participate** by doing a reading, please go to [sign-up genius](#) and indicate that. There will be no sermons, though there will be a few teachings incorporated into the services, and there will be afternoon study sessions on September 20 and 28 (see [more](#)). We also will offer Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur children's services. **If you are interested in reading or telling the children's story for the service**, please contact Sarah Miller ASAP (ajciowa@gmail.com). (We also invite families to join us monthly for Community Shabbat services, beginning in October.) **The Zoom links for services will be sent out in AJC's Blast** (or emailed to those who don't get the Blast and [email a request](#) at least 24 hours in advance).

ED-ZOOM-CATION

Our adult ed program has continued on Zoom, and discussion is as lively as ever. We hope you will join us for our adult learning on [Rosh Hashanah](#) and [Yom Kippur](#), and also monthly, beginning in October.

(see page 3 for more details about
High Holy Day services and offerings.)

HIGH HOLY DAY SERVICES SCHEDULE

(Unless otherwise noted, all services will be led by Rabbi Nina Mizrahi via [Zoom](#); click on links for more info)

Selichot: **Saturday, Sept. 12, 7:30 p.m.**

Rosh Hashanah

Friday, Sept. 18

7:30 p.m. – Erev Rosh Hashanah services

Saturday, Sept. 19 – Rosh Hashanah services

10:00 a.m. – Morning services

2:00 p.m. – Children's service

DIY – Tashlich (see [more](#))

Sunday, Sept. 20,

10:00 a.m. – Rosh Hashanah Seder (see [more](#))

2:00 p.m. – Study session (see [more](#))

4:00 p.m. – Shofar blowing (AJC parking lot; see more)

Healing Service

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 7:00 p.m. (see [more](#))

Yom Kippur

Sunday, Sept. 27, 7:30 p.m. – Kol Nidre

Monday, Sept. 28

10:00 a.m. – Morning service

1:00 p.m. – Study session (see [more](#))

3:00 p.m. – Children's service

4:00 p.m. – Yiskor (see [more](#))

6:30 p.m. – Neilah followed by Havdalah

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GATHERING

We will not be able to gather in our AJC sanctuary for the High Holy Days. And, we will all certainly miss being gathered together in person, hearing the choir, and singing all our familiar prayers and special melodies. But, we will be "together" safely in our own homes. This year, we have a unique opportunity to create [sacred space](#) in our home, a *mikdash m'at* for the High Holidays and beyond. The suggestions on the next page are meant to help you enhance your High Holy Day experience at home while creating a communal atmosphere for us all.

(continued on next page)

GATHERING (CONTINUED)

Transforming Your Home into Sacred Space for These Days of Awe

Your experience will be greatly enhanced by intentionally transforming your homes into sacred space. Here are some easy ways to invite in the joy and create a special, festive ambience:

Create a Sacred Space! – Do not be tempted to participate in the service from your office, or from your kitchen. Choose your prayer space carefully in advance by spending a few moments of individual contemplation/family discussion. Do not wait for the last minute!

- Set up your laptop or tablet in a nice, comfortable area in your home, or use your living room television. Face east if at all possible.
- Once you have chosen your space, you may even want to create a blessing over this space as you set your intention for how this space will enhance your experience. Consider incorporating a sacred text, such as shown below.
- What chair will you sit on? Put a cushion or festive pillow on it, or drape it with a tallit, special piece of fabric, or scarf.
- Find meaningful objects to grace your space. Put on a nice, white tablecloth with candle sticks, a kiddush cup, and a shofar if you have one. Place a vase of fresh flowers nearby.
- Include a framed photograph of loved ones on your table, next to your Zoom device, to connect you with family and friends in this pandemic time (this may be especially meaningful on Yom Kippur when we say Yiskor memorial prayers);
- Get some pomegranates, apples, and honey, and place them in a visible spot. Your environment matters.

So, practically, how do you create a meaningful High Holy Days experience in front of the screen? Here are a few suggestions that I urge you to try.

Minimize Distractions! – If using your computer, close all your browser tabs. Emails and social media can wait. Change your phone setting to “do not disturb.” We are used to being available 24/7, but trust that the world will continue to turn if you allow yourself to be 100% present for a couple of hours. You are not missing out on *that* much!

Dress up! – Yes, we all enjoy staying in our comfortable sweatpants 24/7, and online retailers report that they are selling a lot of business shirts but very few pants. Tempting as it may be, staying in “home clothes” is not a great way of creating a festive experience. Dress for online services the same way you would if they were in person. You will feel completely different. Kippa and tallit are welcome if they help you express a connection to this special worship.

Sing! – You may be muted, and maybe nobody else can hear you, but this does not mean you cannot sing out loud. Now is your chance to sing as loud as you want without any fear of judgement. Doing so transforms you from a spectator to a participant.

No, none of these suggestions will make the Holy Days feel normal. There is nothing normal about them. But normal is not always what we need. Maybe being forcefully removed from our comfort zone is just what we need at this particular time. In any case, what have we got to lose?

צַעֲרֵי בְּרֹא לֵא שֵׁי עֲרַב־זָה
 צַרְהֵת בְּרֹא לֵא הִדְיֵה בִּזְאֵת
 בְּהֵלֵהֵת בְּרֹא לֵא הִדְלֵת בִּזְאֵת
 מִחֵלֹקֵת בְּרֹא לֵא הִמְחֵלֵקֵה בִּזְאֵת
 וְשֵׁלֹם בְּרַכְהֵת הִיֵּהֵמ קֹוֹם בִּזְהָה

HOUSE BLESSING
 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.

Many thanks to all of the clergy who help create these suggestions!

Exodus 20:21:
 אֵלֶיךָ אֲבֹרָא אֲתִשֵּׁמֵ יִאֲזַכֵּנִי אֱשֶׁר־בְּרַב־כְּלֵה־מִקֹּוֹם
 וְיִבְרַכְתֵּנִי יְיָ

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

Exodus 3:5
 אֲדַמְתִּיקֶדֶשׁ עַל־יְוֵעוּמֵי דַאֲתֵהֵאֲשֶׁר־הֵמִקֹּוֹם כִּי־נִי
 הָיֵא:

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

Psalms 121:8
 וְעַד־עוֹלָם מִמְעַתָּה הוֹבֹרָאֲךָ יֵשׁ מִרְצֵאתֶךָ יְיָ הוֹרֵה
 Adonai will guard your going and coming, now and forever.

The last line of the blessing said at havdala separating Shabbat from weekday can be used to “separate” this sacred space:
 לְחֹלְקֵי דִשׁ בֵּינֵהֵמ בְּדִילֵהֵאֲתֵהֵב־רֹרְךָ
 Baruch atah Adonai, hamavdil bayn kodesh lechol.
 Blessed are You Adonai, who separates between holy and ordinary.

SPECIAL HIGH HOLY DAY SERVICES AND OFFERINGS

High Holy Day Study Sessions

Rosh Hashanah Study Session (Sunday, Sept. 20, 2:00 p.m.)

We will explore the following texts to gain greater insight about how we are to judge others and ourselves:

- “. . . to keep the way of YHVH by doing what is just and right (*tzedek u'mishpat*).” (Genesis 18:19)
- “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly (*Ya'aseh mitshpat*)? (Genesis 18:25)
- “You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, [at the gates of] all your settlements that the YHVH your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice (*mishpat tzedek*). (Deut. 16: 18)

Yom Kippur Study Session (Monday, Sept. 28, 1:00 p.m.)

- “Pay attention, and listen Israel.” (Deuteronomy 27:9)

The shofar is a vessel for listening to the pain of others. Systemic racism occurs daily, and we are not yet paying full attention to the lived experience of the inequity and oppression it brings. Only when we make ourselves into vessels of listening, driven by love and empathy, can we hear the depths of this pain. We begin by turning inward and opening to the depths of our own pain.

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Rosh Hashanah Seder (Sunday, Sept. 19, 11:00 a.m.)



On the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah, the rabbi will host a zoom Rosh Hashanah Seder for children and adults. Check out [this Haggadah](#) or this [link](#) to learn what you need to know about the experience and how to prepare—you'll need to

create a “seder plate” or place each food on a separate plate or in a bowl. Feel free to add other foods to those listed and consider what blessing they represent to you. Be playful and creative. One fun custom is to make puns about each of the foods to represent the blessing we are looking for example, “May work go well this year and may you get a raise in celery!” Items representing the blessings and wishes we are asking for in the new year include: (a) round challah; (b) wine/sparkling grape juice; (c) dates; (d) pomegranate; (e) green beans or sesame seeds; (f) leek or scallion; (g) beet or beetroot leaves; (h) pumpkin or gourd; (i) carrot; (j) fish or fish-shaped crackers or gummies; (k) head of lettuce; (l) apples & honey. What other foods would you include as symbols of blessings you are asking for?



[Free Rosh Hashanah Go-To Guide](#)

Many of us are about to face our first High Holidays observed entirely at home. But fear not—PJ Library has created a free everything-you-need family guide (click on link above). Not only is the guide itself beautiful, but it has enough holiday info, easy-to-learn prayers, songs, and fun activities to create a beautiful, memorable celebration of your own. There's an interactive version with fun videos and music, plus a PDF download to print or read any time.

Shofar Blowing (Sunday, Sept. 19, 4:00 p.m. @ AJC)

As of press time, the idea is to have everyone gather in AJC's parking lot for the shofar blowing. Look for details in the *AJC Blast*.

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Tashlich (*appropriate anytime between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*)

Although there will not be a community Tashlich this year, we hope everyone is able to make their way independently (or in small groups) to a body of water and cast their “sins” upon the water. Some places in Ames that would serve this purpose include Brookside Park, Stuart Smith Park, Ames Arboretum (all of which have bridges over the water), and River Valley Park. Links that may help you are [DIY Tashlich](#) and [A Personal Tashlich](#) as well as the interesting alternatives [seeds and sins](#) and a [feminist Tashlich](#) or this Tashlich [meditation](#). The following links are geared to children: [Explaining Tashlich to Kids](#), [Tashlich at Turtle Rock](#), and [A Bread-Free Tashlich for Kids](#). NOTE: If there is expressed interest, the rabbi is willing to lead a virtual Tashlich for those who are unable to go out; please email ajciowa@gmail.com if you are interested.

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Healing Service (Wed., Sept. 23, 7:00 p.m.)



In his poem, “[This is the Season of Healing](#),” Alden Solovy identifies healing as an important part of our journey through the Days of Awe. This contemplative service, led by Rabbi Mizrahi, provides communal support for those seeking healing, strength, hope, and courage for themselves and those they love.

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Yiskor (Monday, Sept. 28, 4:00 p.m.)

The full list of names will not be read for Yiskor this year. Instead everyone “attending” the service will be invited to state their loved ones’ names during the online Yiskor service at the appropriate time. If you would like to volunteer to read one or more names of former AJC members who have no family to say their name, please contact Denise (ajciowa@gmail.com). **Also contact Denise with names of loved ones who passed away during the preceding year.**

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FROM THE RABBI



Mrs. Durkin, my mother's best friend, used to talk about how she, an Irish Catholic, always knew when her neighbors were preparing for Jewish holidays. The sound of "hocking" (chopping) could be

heard in the hallways and through the open windows in her apartment building. As she spoke, my mind drifted to memories of my mother and aunt "hocking" liver, apples, and walnuts. I even recalled when this job was turned over to me. Years later, using the same hocker and wooden bowl, I turned the job over to my daughter.

Growing up in a traditional home meant spending lots of time with my mother and aunt in a very sacred space—the kitchen. As we prepared festive meals, they would share stories of their childhood. I learned about relatives whose recipes we still followed many years after their passing, like Mrs. Hellinger's chopped liver and stuffed cabbage. My mother would get teary-eyed as she recalled her mother's delicious cooking. Year after year we baked the same apple-cinnamon-walnut cake, which was far more delicious than anything bought from the bakery. Some memories are connected to specific sounds. I can still close my eyes and imagine the sound of mixing the egg noodles with eggs, sour cream, sugar, and fruit for the noodle kugel—sprinkling the cinnamon on top before popping it into the oven. Being together in the kitchen was not a chore; it allowed for bonding, transmitting memories, and engaging in the creation of new memories and traditions.

All the mundane, every-day activities stopped as we settled into preparing and celebrating. Cooking, baking, setting the table beautifully, using special ritual objects, humming favorite holiday melodies, anticipating the family gathering, and even getting dressed in "yuntif" (holiday) clothes all heightened the excitement. One of the last things I would get to do was to help create a centerpiece for the table. My mother would give me a dollar and tell me to see what the florist would give us. I walked a mile (remember having to walk places?) to the florist while my mother went outside and gathered cuttings from around our property. Out of everything, she would create a beautiful centerpiece.

Family arrived in their yuntif clothes (I was, of course, wearing my Mary Jane shoes), the house smelled wonderful, and the table looked beautiful. My father would lead us in the blessings. On Rosh Hashanah we sampled various kinds of orchard fresh apples that, in those years, could be found only in New York, the apple state. We savored freshly baked round raisin challah. We dipped whatever we could



into rich, amber-colored local honey. Alongside that was a big bowl of plump, crimson pomegranate seeds. Everything was transformed, and I felt soooooo happy.

This joy extended to joining our community for services and catching up. The year after I was born, my congregation was founded by a small group of Jewish families who wanted to be able to worship in their own town. An old house, on Old Schoolhouse Lane, was bought and refurbished to provide a sanctuary on the first floor and an office for the rabbi and three classrooms for the Hebrew school on the second floor. During the renovation period, religious services and Hebrew school were conducted in the New City Firehouse. I have vivid memories of, as a little girl, running around the property outside the building with other children during the holidays. Going forward, the shul became like a second home. At that time, it was a traditional Conservative synagogue. Today, six decades later, my rabbi's daughter is a rabbi and the congregation is egalitarian. This picture is of



the sanctuary in the (first) new building, where I became a bat mitzvah on a Friday night in 1973. I led Aishes Chayil (A Woman of Valor, which is found in the Book of Proverbs), chanted haftarah and gave a drash; which is what girls were allowed to do back then.

During the High Holy Days, I spent a lot of time at shul. For those hours, we were in a time bubble that removed us from mundane, everyday life. I loved the ladies who wore hats, especially those that were ornate and adorned with feathers. I listened in as they gossiped about who was eligible and with whom they might be fixed up. I recall the Chazan using his pitch-pipe as he prepared to sing the beautiful liturgical melodies reserved for the holiday. It's true, one can walk into a synagogue and know what holiday it is by the special melodies and prayers. I can recall seeing the Rabbi and Cantor in their white robes, the Torahs dressed in white mantles adorned with newly polished and gleaming silver breastplates and decorations—even the ark curtain was white velvet. The sanctuary would be filled to overflowing, families sitting together—often with multiple generations. I loved the feeling of sitting between my parents, knowing we would pray and snuggle for the next few hours. My father (z"l) followed every word in the Machzor (special High Holy Day siddur) in English, because he couldn't read Hebrew. He believed with complete confidence that God accepts sincere prayers in any language.



(continued on [next page](#))

AJC ANNUAL FALL “FOOD” DRIVE

AJC won't be holding its annual food drive this year, but this doesn't mean we can't still support local food pantries, etc. Food pantries and other nonprofits are fulfilling an extraordinary need this year with so many people out of work due to the pandemic, and they need our support more than ever! Please consider giving monetary donations, which actually go much further than do donations of nonperishable food and supplies (food banks can purchase food at a deep discount). You may send your donation(s) directly to the organization(s) (see [High Holy Day donation flyer](#) for suggestions) or to AJC (c/o AJC Treasurer, 511 Oliver Cir, Ames, IA 50014) to distribute. Thanks!

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Shalom

I hope this finds you well physically and emotionally/spiritually. As for the latter, I find that I have been on a roller coaster of up and down days. This time has been particularly hard for my 81-year-old mother, which weighs on me too. This is certainly a time when community is important. The board and the rabbi have been making efforts to reach out to you and to provide opportunities for connection and worship, albeit in a more virtual and socially distanced manner.

We have held regular Friday night “schmoozes” on Zoom and offered short services twice a month since late March. The rabbi has also used Zoom to lead adult education classes and to meet regularly with the three Bat Mitzvah candidates. Last week, three of the board members took the time to contact every member family by phone. Despite these efforts, you may feel disconnected or have unmet needs. Please feel free to contact me if you need anything. I assure you that the AJC family is ready and willing to help.

On August 22nd we celebrated a wonderful “hybrid” Bat Mitzvah, with Madisyn and her family at the synagogue and the rest of the congregation joining virtually. A big thanks to John, the rabbi, and Madisyn and her family for helping to pull this off. Seman Tov and Mazel Tov!

The Religious School is set to start on Sept 16th! The plan for the fall is for each class to meet in person once a month outdoors at the synagogue (as long as the weather holds out!). Teachers will meet virtually with their classes on the other Sundays. The teachers are committed to making online classes short and engaging! The Religious School is also adjusting fees in consideration of the changed format.

Rabbi Mizrahi and John are working with a volunteer committee who are helping plan the High Holy Days amidst the pandemic. They are working on creative ideas that will likely include some physically distanced events (e.g., Tashlich) as well as shortened services on Zoom (as described earlier in this newsletter). We will be looking for feedback that can help us make the High Holy Days safe and meaningful during this challenging time.

Looking forward to a Good, Sweet and Healthy New Year!

Shana Tovah
Mike Lazere

FROM THE RABBI (continued)



Services were followed by a delicious lunch of yummy leftovers, which was followed by a walk along the Hudson River, where we did Tashlich. The path was lit up by foliage of gorgeous fall hues. This special place to which we returned year

after year is where my parents taught me to look closely at every leaf, pod, tree—a wonder practice I shared with my children. Tired and happy, we returned home and indulged in a nap.

This year I look forward to sharing our fourth Holy Day season together—and to welcoming a new year—5781. May it be a year that brings healing, hope, and inspiration to Jews around the world. May each of us be an advocate for peace and justice for every human being!

L'Shana tova tikateivu,
Nina J. Mizrahi, Rabbi



Here's a sketchnote from Steve Silbert illustrating Bayitt's tips and suggestions for how to make the most out of this year's Zoom Days of Awe.

Your bayit.org

