

Creating Your Mikdash M'at – Your Personal Worship Space

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 we 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 CBI services. What can help us create both that spiritual mindset and that spiritual refuge?

We are not able to gather in our building for the High Holidays. We will all certainly miss being in person together, with the majesty of large crowds standing close, singing in harmony all our familiar and moving tunes. But we will be “together” safely. This year, we have a unique opportunity to create a sacred space in our home – a *mikdash m'at* – for the High Holidays and beyond. These ten suggestions are meant to help you enhance the High Holiday experience at home, while creating a communal atmosphere for us all.

1. Choose your prayer space carefully in advance by spending a few moments of individual contemplation/family discussion. Don't wait for the last minute! Since some prayers are traditionally done facing east towards Jerusalem, notice where east is in your home. If this "true" east does not feel suitable, feel free to choose a "metaphorical" east that makes you feel connected – such as a window, an entryway, or a beautiful painting or photograph.
2. Once you have chosen your space, say a blessing or *kavannah* (intention) over it to mark it as your *mikdash m'at*. Suggestions of verses and blessings are on the back of this guide.
3. What chair will you sit on? Put a cushion or festive pillow on it, or drape it with a special piece of fabric, or scarf.
4. Change where you put your computer from a work space to a contemplative space by covering the desk or table with a white tablecloth, white runner, or white placemat, and a vase of flowers.
5. Find meaningful objects to grace your space. On Rosh Hashanah include holiday objects like candlesticks (Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat this year) and a kiddush cup. On Yom Kippur you can place cherished mementos, family heirlooms, and photos of loved ones to surround you. Or perhaps you'll bring some other object that connects you to a powerful spiritual moment in your life. If you own a shofar, put it where it's visible. This year you'll have the opportunity to blow it along with us (you'll be muted of course, so no pressure!).
6. If possible, move the computer space back so that you are “watching” the screen more than “manipulating” it. Consider connecting or casting your computer to a TV screen so it feels less like a work device.
7. Try to limit or disconnect auditory distractions. You can turn off your email and text message ping sounds, and/or close your email program and other apps so you can be fully present during the service. However, it would be totally appropriate to bring a tambourine or a drum to help you keep the beat and sing along to some of the prayers.
8. Wear clothing that makes you feel as if you are entering a spiritual space. Kippah and tallit are welcome if they help you express a connection to the worship experience.
9. Be sure you have your *machzor* (prayer book) with you, just like on past High Holidays when we gathered. As you feel its cover and edges and flip its pages, remember the times you've used it before – who you sat near, what moved you in the service, the first time you used it, etc. We will use Mishkan HaNefesh as we do every year. If you do not have a print copy at home, you can access a digital version online that will be sent to you.
10. Consider what is behind you and what your zoom screen will look like to others. Perhaps you'll decide to use a virtual background or to decorate your own background space.

Many thanks to Rabbi Elyse Goldstein for graciously allowing us to adapt her ideas into this guide. We all appreciate the time and effort it takes to make your "small sanctuary" a reality. Think of it as a work in progress! May it add joy and meaning to your holiday. We wish you a very happy Shanah Tova!



1. Numbers 24:5

מה־טֹבו אֱהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

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

2. Birkat Habayit (home blessing):

בְּזֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֹא יָבוֹא צָרָה
בְּזֹאת הַדִּירָה לֹא תָבוֹא צָרָה
בְּזֹאת הַדֶּלֶת לֹא תָבוֹא בְּהֵלָה
בְּזֹאת הַמַּחֲלָקָה לֹא תָבוֹא מַחֲלֹקֶת
בְּזֶה הַמָּקוֹם תְּהִי 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:

בְּכֹל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶזְכֹּר אֶת־שְׁמִי אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבִרְכִיתִּיךָ

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 לְחֻקֵּימַיִם, וְהוֹי מִתְאַבֵּק בְּעַפְרֵ רַגְלֵיהֶם, וְהוֹי 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. The last line of the blessing said at havdala separating Shabbat from weekday can be used to “separate” this sacred space:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל

Baruch atah Adonai, hamavdil bayn kodesh lechol.
Blessed are You Adonai, who separates between holy and ordinary.

8. The traditional prayer for healing can be used to “heal” a space too:

רוּפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר, וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת, בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'

Baruch atah Adonai, rofeh kol basar, u'maflee la'asot.
Praised are You Adonai, healer of all flesh, doing wonders.