

## Welcome to the United Synagogue of Hoboken!

It is our belief that the High Holidays can be a truly transformational experience, an opportunity for each person to engage in deep reflection and soul-searching within the context of a community. This pamphlet includes some suggestions for making the High Holidays work for you.

### About the service

The raised platform at the front of the sanctuary is called the *Bimah*. From the *Bimah*, Rabbi Scheinberg and members of the congregation lead the community in prayer. The *Aron Kodesh* (ark) holds the Torah scrolls, which are taken out and read during the study portion of our service. Above the *Aron Kodesh* is the *Ner Tamid* (eternal light), which represents God’s eternal presence among us.

On the High Holidays, we dress the Torah scrolls in white garments, symbolizing the “clean slate” and new beginning that each of us has at the beginning of a new year. It is also customary for the rabbi and cantor to wear a special white garment called a *kittel*, which is reserved for moments of special holiness and transition in the Jewish calendar.

The basic structure of the liturgy of the Days of Awe is the same as on ordinary weekdays and Shabbat. However, there are so many additions and modifications on these days that instead of the Siddur, the regular prayerbook, we use a special prayerbook called a *machzor*. Our services include singing in Hebrew, as well as communal readings in English translation. Other parts of the service are read silently by each individual.

According to Jewish tradition, *Rosh haShanah* marks the anniversary of God’s creation of the world. The piercing call of the *Shofar*, the ram’s horn, reminds us to look deep within ourselves and evaluate our lives. A total of one hundred blasts of the Shofar are blown on each day of *Rosh HaShanah*. (Some years, when the first day of *Rosh HaShanah* falls on Shabbat, the shofar is not blown on that day.) On the first afternoon of *Rosh haShanah* (or the second afternoon when *Rosh HaShanah* begins on Shabbat), we walk together to the Hudson River for the *Tashlikh* ceremony. Using bread crumbs, we symbolically cast away all of our sins, expressing our hope to enter the new year fresh and pure.

*Yom Kippur* is the most solemn day of the Jewish year; according to Jewish tradition, this is the day when God’s judgment of each person for the coming year is sealed. The recurring theme of the liturgy is confession and repentance; during the *Al Chet* and *Ashamnu* prayers, we read lists of sins that we and others have committed during the past year. On Yom

Kippur eve, the *Kol Nidrei* prayer reminds us of the seriousness of the vows and promises we make. In the morning, we remember our loved ones who have died during the *Yizkor* (memorial) service. In the early afternoon, during *Eleh Ezkerah* (the *Martyrology*), we recount some of the most painful chapters in Jewish history and recall our ancestors who were martyred over the centuries. In the early evening, we stand for the *Neilah* service (the “closing of the gates”), as Yom Kippur comes to a close with a final blast of the Shofar.

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### Our recommendations:

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#### Bring your own agenda

Look again at the cover of this pamphlet. It is adapted from a sign spotted in a new age bookstore in Berkeley, CA. Any effort at spiritual awareness requires discipline, patience, and energy. Prayer is not a spectator sport; the “congregant” takes an active role rather than a passive role. Prayer requires an investment of energy. If you sit back and wait for something to happen, nothing will. You must devise your own agenda.

Especially on the High Holidays, the real work of the service goes on in your own mind. How do you evaluate the past year? Where have you succeeded? Where have you fallen short? And by what criteria do you make such judgments? You may get the most out of the prayerbook if you view it as a repository of topics for your own personal reflection.

#### Pretend you’re riding on a train

When you’re riding on a train, the train keeps on moving in the same direction, even though each passenger can walk from car to car, going forwards or backwards or staying motionless. Everyone arrives at the same destination in the end.

This can be a useful analogy for our services. Jewish worship is a cross between individual and communal prayer. The community will be moving along through the prayerbook at a swift pace, but each individual need not move with us at exactly the same time. Go at your own pace. If a particular phrase speaks to you, dwell on that phrase for a few minutes. You can always catch up with us later on.

#### God understands English too.

For communal and historical reasons, much of our prayer service is chanted in Hebrew. There is something very powerful about uttering the same words that have been used by our people for centuries, and that are being used today all around the globe. However, Jewish tradition holds that God understands all languages, and it is acceptable to pray in whatever language one understands. One of the reasons we chose the *machzorim* (High Holiday prayerbooks) we use is because of their clear and accessible English translations. Use the translations to enhance your understanding of the service. Transliterations (the Hebrew prayers written out in English letters) are also available; ask the ushers.

#### Meet your neighbor

If you are new to our community, please let us know! Introduce yourself to one of the ushers or board members who are wearing name tags. Or introduce yourself to whoever is sitting near you. We look forward to getting to know you and welcoming you into our community. Also note our full schedule of activities, including social programs, religious services, educational programs for adults and children, and volunteer opportunities.

#### Topics for Reflection

What follows are some topics for individual reflection during various parts of the synagogue service. Alternately, you can take this pamphlet home and focus on some of these issues by yourself, at your leisure, or use them as discussion topics with friends or family. The most important thing, however, is to use the High Holiday season to give yourself a spiritual audit. It’s the best way (as well as the most traditional way) to get the most out of the High Holiday season.

#### Rosh HaShanah

- Think back to each month of the Jewish year that has ended (roughly September to September). Try to identify one significant event in your life, positive or negative, for each month that will stay with you as we enter the new year.
- Focus on each of the important personal relationships in your life (parents, spouse/partner, children, close friends): What about the relationship am I thankful for? What are problems and points of tension? Which aspects of these problems and points of tension might be generated by me? Which aspects of the relationship will I consider working on during this period of *Teshuvah* (repentance)?

- Judaism views the body as a Divine gift, a temple for the soul. How well have I cared for my body this past year? What didn't I do that I could have done? (e.g., eating appropriately; exercise; vacations; clothing and appearance; self-presentation)
- What does my relationship to Jewish community and practice look like? My relationship with God? Is there one new Jewish behavior that I would like to take on in the coming year? Is there one new Jewish thing that I would like to learn?
- *Shofar* service: Our tradition views the Shofar as analogous to an alarm clock, waking us up and reminding us that life is all too short. Suppose I knew that this were to be the last year of my life. What things might I do differently? How would I prioritize my time?

## Yom Kippur

- If you're fasting, calculate how much you spend on food on an average day. Then, after the holiday, contribute the money you saved by fasting today to a charitable organization that deals with hunger issues. (Two suggestions: MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger; the Hoboken Clergy Coalition Shelter.) At our congregation, we also conduct a food drive on the evening of Yom Kippur to support food pantries in our local community.
- *Al Chet*: the lists of sins in the *Machzor* were meant only as a guide, not an exhaustive list. Take some time during the service to compose your own *Al Chet* - a listing of the specific things about yourself that you would like to change for the coming year.
- People sometimes find it difficult to relate to the word "sin." However, the Hebrew word *chet*, which is often translated as "sin," is actually derived from an archery term that means "missing the mark." "Missing the mark" is something that we are all much more likely to be able to admit to. In what ways have I "missed the mark" this year?
- "On Yom Kippur, one may be forgiven for transgressions between people and God. However, on Yom Kippur, one may NOT be forgiven for transgressions between people and other people, until the one asking for forgiveness has pacified his fellow." (From the *Mishnah*, Jewish legal text, c. 200 CE) In what ways have I

"missed the mark" on issues involving other people? Have I asked for forgiveness? If not, how will I go about asking for forgiveness?

- The Jewish traditions of *tzedakah* (charity) call us to donate 10% of our income and possessions to the needy. This is a hard challenge to meet! We each determine how close we can come to that standard. How close have I come this year? How close could I come next year?
- What are some things I wish I had done more often during the past year, but didn't seem to have time for? For many, such a list might include: spending more time with relatives; spending more time in self-exploration and study; doing more volunteer work. All of these actions are time-consuming and unlikely to happen without careful planning. How can I make these activities more likely in the coming year?
- Focus on each of the important personal relationships in your life (parents, spouse/partner, children, close friends). What about the relationship am I thankful for? What are problems and points of tension? Which aspects of these problems and points of tension might be generated by me? Which aspects of the relationship will I consider working on during this period of *Teshuvah* (repentance)?

We hope that you will feel comfortable, challenged and inspired by your worship experience with us. We look forward to seeing you again during this year. *Shanah Tovah u-Metukah*, and *Gemar Hatimah Tovah*. May you have a good and sweet year, and may you and your loved ones be sealed for a good year in the Book of Life!

Rabbi Robert Scheinberg  
 United Synagogue of Hoboken  
 115 Park Avenue, Hoboken NJ 07030 (201) 659-4000  
[www.hobokensynagogue.org](http://www.hobokensynagogue.org)

# High Holidays at the United Synagogue of Hoboken

**Synagogues**  
 don't work.

**The High Holidays**  
 don't work.

**The Shofar** doesn't work.

**Sermons** don't work.

**Fasting** doesn't work.

**Praying** doesn't work.

**The Al Chet** doesn't work.

**Yizkor** doesn't work.

**Kaddish** doesn't work.

**Kol Nidrei** doesn't work.

**Unetaneh Tokef** doesn't work.

**Neilah** doesn't work.

**Ashamnu** doesn't work.

**Responsive Readings** don't work.

**Tashlich** doesn't work.

**Torah readings** don't work.

**Prayers** don't work.

**Yom Kippur** doesn't work.

**You** work.