



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
304 E. Midland Avenue ~ Paramus NJ 07652- 201.262.7691

A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday July 8, 2022 ~ Parsha: Chukat

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Start Thinking About the High Holidays Right Now

This may be a strange way to start a Shabbat message, but here goes.

I want you to start thinking about the High Holidays right now.

Rosh Hashanah (September 25) begins 11 weeks from this Sunday night. Believe it or not, we are already working on High Holidays. You have all received your High Holiday ticket application (which we thank you in advance for returning to us soon). The office staff is reviewing our rather extensive High Holiday checklist to prepare the building. There is a lot to do, and we are in the process of doing it.

But that's our problem. That's not what I'm asking you to think about right now.

What I want you to think about right now is where you will be for the High Holidays this year. I want to say this as clearly and unambiguously as I possibly can. I want you to be here, in person, at the JCCP/CBT.

The pandemic has been hard on religious institutions throughout America. Our congregation is no exception. We announced to the congregation from the very beginning that we would prioritize the health and safety of our membership and we took active steps and made hard decisions to ensure that this value would be upheld. I am proud of the way our board and officers communicated with the congregation since the pandemic began so you would understand the decisions we made, and how and why we chose from among the many options that were presented to us.

I like to think that we were successful in these efforts. By sticking with our plan, we were among the first Conservative synagogues in Bergen County to resume in-person Shabbat services in June 2020. While some congregations made the difficult decision to host only virtual High Holiday services in the fall of 2020, we offered both in-person and virtual services. I am proud of the fact that even as many congregations suspended their in-person services during the rise of the Omicron variant in January and February, we stayed open, conducted in-person services, and people attended.

High Holiday in-person attendance in 2020 and 2021 dropped precipitously relative to pre-pandemic levels. I had no trouble understanding why that was the case in 2020, yet I must confess that I was surprised in 2021, which was certainly better than 2020 but still off tremendously.

Now we are preparing for High Holidays 2022. It's time to get back on track.

So yes, we are going to livestream our High Holiday services this year for those who do yet not feel comfortable returning to synagogue. I want to say that is a legitimate choice given the fact that the pandemic is not over. We want you to be part of the High Holiday experience and if the best way for you to do that is via livestream, that's great.

But now I want to talk to those who are engaging in activities outside of their home. I'm talking to those who are going to restaurants, going to the mall, attending the theater, gathering indoors with family and friends, which is the majority of those who are reading this Shabbat message today. I want you to think about where you plan to be for the High Holidays this year. I want you here, in person, with your synagogue family and friends.

There are those in the community who once came regularly on Shabbat and holidays and have stopped attending since the pandemic began. We are actively trying to encourage their return. People have gotten used to not attending. The same can be said for the High Holiday experience. It's important for us to gather in our normal big numbers to celebrate our holiest days of the year. The High Holidays are about breaking old patterns and establishing new ones. Prioritizing in person attendance on the High Holidays must be at the top of our list in the new year.

I will remind you that our commitment to your health and safety remains unchanged. As indicated in the High Holiday ticket application, we are requiring masks and proof of vaccination, so that you will feel confident and secure. As you may have noticed from your in person or virtual participation last year, our High Holiday services are approximately half the length of previous years. Sadly, it took the pandemic for us to understand that our High Holiday services were too long. We want to take all that we have learned during the pandemic to improve your religious experience in the synagogue while maintaining the structure and dignity that has always characterized religious life in our community. We want you back! I can't say it any more clearly than that.

So please, start thinking about High Holidays right now. Even 11 weeks before Rosh Hashanah, I want you to make the commitment to be in the synagogue on the High Holidays if you are able. Send that application in today. I will look forward to welcoming you personally.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner