



Opening Your Virtual Gates: Making Online High Holiday Celebrations Accessible to All

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In grateful partnership with: Avodah, BJE JkidLA, B'nai David-Judea Congregation, Edlavitch DCJCC, IKAR, Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ - Greater MetroWest ABLE, Jewish Federations of North America, Jewish Los Angeles Special Needs Trust, JQ International, Keshet, Keshet: For LGBTQ Equality in Jewish Life, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, Matan, Moment Magazine, National Ramah Commission, Reconstructing Judaism, Shalom Institute, The Jewish Journal, The Miracle Project, The Women's Rabbinic Network, Union for Reform Judaism, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and Whole Community Inclusion at Jewish Learning Venture

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Acknowledgments

This document exists because of several members of RespectAbility’s professional team: Lauren Appelbaum, Eric Ascher, Debbie Fink, Matan Koch, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi and Joshua Steinberg, and the dedication of several dynamic board members, past and present, including our Jewish Inclusion co-chairs Shelley Richman Cohen and Vivian Bass, as well as Linda Burger, Judith Creed, Heidi Krizer Daroff, Ila Eckhoff, Neil Jacobson, Dana Marlow, Donna Meltzer, Gabrielle Einstein Sim and Delbert Whetter. RespectAbility also thanks two of our National Leadership Fellows, Baksha Ali (Spring 2020) and Blair Webb (Summer 2020), for their research assistance.

The toolkit reaches its true vibrance and value, however, because of the contributions of our co-authors, Rabbi Lauren Tuchman and Rabbi Darby Leigh, for bringing their learning and experience as rabbis with disabilities to this project, and Sharon Ann Dror, who provided valuable feedback to the authors.

RespectAbility would like to thank the donors and foundations who generously funded this project, as well as the other generous funders of its work, including Steven and Lisa Abramowitz; The Stanford and Joan Alexander Foundation; Sandy Baklor and Arlene Kaufman; Vivian and Raymond Bass; The Belz Foundation; The David Berg Foundation; Bernstein Family Foundation; John Bessonette; The Beverly Foundation; Stanley & Joyce Black Family Foundation; Linda and Andy Burger; Shelley and Ruvan Cohen; Cheri Fox; Friedel Family Foundation; Michael and Linda Frieze; Diane & Guilford Glazer Philanthropies; Margo Sim Gleitman; Lawrence S. and Phyllis C. Goldberg; Roberta Goldstein; Wayne Goldstein and Tara Slone-Goldstein; Nancy Grossman-Samuel; Andrew and Jan Groveman; Susan & Jeffrey Harris; Robert Horwitz; Aline and Leo Jacobsohn Foundation; Beatriz and Harold Jacobsohn; Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles; Laura Kam; Charles and Esther Lee Kimerling Charitable Foundation; Joseph & Phyllis Korff; John and Pat Laszlo; Nancy Laszlo; Levitt Foundation; Aaron and Ahuva Orlofsky; Gary and Esther Polland; Jarrow Rogovin; Ben and Esther Rosenbloom Foundation; Dr. Michael L. Ross and Elizabeth F. Ross; Yisroel and Rivka Schulman; The Charles & Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation; The Schwartz Creed Foundation; Marilyn Einstein and Steven Sim Charitable Fund; Ann and Andrew Tisch Family Fund; ; and the Weingart Foundation.

The power of the toolkit like this is when it reaches the people who will actually use it. With that in mind, we are extraordinarily grateful to our copromoters who have not only lent their name, but are the driving force to ensure this toolkit, and the inclusion that it will make possible, reach those who need it. We thank: Avodah, BJE JkidLA, B'nai David-Judea Congregation, Edlavitch DCJCC, IKAR, Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ – Greater MetroWest ABLE, Jewish Federations of North America, Jewish Los Angeles Special Needs Trust, JQ International, Keshet, Keshet: For LGBTQ Equality in Jewish Life, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, Matan, *Moment Magazine*, National Ramah Commission, Reconstructing

Judaism, Shalom Institute, *The Jewish Journal*, The Miracle Project, The Women's Rabbinic Network, Union for Reform Judaism, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and Whole Community Inclusion at Jewish Learning Venture.

We also would like to acknowledge the Jewish leaders with disabilities featured in our cover art and the photographers: Rabbi Darby Leigh, in a black-and-white action shot photographed by Tate Tullier; Rabbi Peter Levy and Amy Dattner-Levy leading services, shot by Allegra Boverman Photography; Project Moses participant Dr. Julie Madorsky ,dancing with the Torah with the Women of the Wall; and RespectAbility's own Program Associate for Jewish Leadership, Joshua Steinberg, on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah.

To all of you, we offer our thanks for helping us to ensure that Jews with disabilities can join with our communities at the holiest time of the Jewish year. May you all be inscribed in the Book of Life, for happiness, blessing and peace.

Introduction

“Judaism teaches us that we are all created b’Tzelem Elokim—in the Image of The Divine. That doesn’t mean only some of us, that’s all of us. When we include the true richness and fullness of Am Yisrael in our spiritual communities, we are truly living out our people’s mandate to be an Or L’goyim—a light unto the nations as the Prophet Isaiah famously teaches. Access accommodations don’t only benefit those directly requesting—they are emblematic of our deep-seated values. Every human being is infinitely precious. What is the fast Hashem desires, asks Isaiah? Is it one that merely makes us feel good about ourselves or is it intended to transform society and the world? Our spiritual communities aren’t able to help us transform ourselves and our world if we do not seek to include all who thirst for Torah’s life-giving waters.”

— Rabbi Lauren Tuchman

Hello my name is Matan Koch. I lead Jewish programming at RespectAbility, an organization that fights stigmas and advances opportunities so that those of us who have disabilities can participate in all aspects of society. I am also a person with a disability, and I want to thank each of you in advance for using this document. While ironically I do not have any special access needs for virtual services, as a power wheelchair user, much of my young life was spent facing significant physical barriers to the spiritual experience that I wanted. This was especially true at the High Holidays, where the excess of crowding many people into small spaces would often cause those of us who used wheelchairs, even me, the Rabbi’s son, to be pushed literally into forgotten corners.

With the unique access challenges presented by virtual High Holidays, too many could experience this equivalent lack of access, or worse, be totally unable to participate. I want to thank you profoundly for your commitment to make sure that the members of your community who have disabilities can join with the community at this sacred time. As much as I will miss the in person connection, I am also excited that the virtual format means that those of you that do utilize accessibility features will be able to extend access to people whose communities traditionally do not offer it, the silver lining if you will.

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing many synagogues and communities of worship to move at least part of their high holiday services, if not all, to an online format. The Jewish world is spending significant time and energy determining how to create a meaningful, spiritual experience online, and we want to ensure it also is accessible to the one in five Jews with disabilities. The good news is that it is easy to make online services, and related events, accessible to everyone if you know how.

Ensuring accessibility during the planning process of your high holiday events is extremely important for several reasons:

- Twenty percent of people in the U.S. are Deaf/Hard of Hearing; that is 48 million Americans. A substantial percentage of folks who are Hard of Hearing are the elderly typically found in many congregations and communities.
- More than 1 million people in the U.S. are blind and more than 12 million have low vision.
- It is likely that more than 40 million Americans have a learning disability.
- These numbers are proportionally similar within the Jewish community.
- Many English-language learners, and those following along in Hebrew, find it is helpful to have both sounds and captions when they are following content.
- A lot of the things we think of as accessibility measures, like captions, identification of speakers or the availability of materials in advance, are helpful to many people learning to acclimate to a digital world, not only people with disabilities.

The real message behind these statistics and arguments, however, is simple. The Jewish community, like all communities, is stronger when it lives up to its values – when it is welcoming, diverse, moral, and respects each other. We want children, parents, grandparents, friends, and other family members with disabilities to be able to fully participate in their communities, because that will make us the strongest community we can be.

It is vitally important to focus on how you want to utilize recordings before implementing anything. After all, it always is easier to make changes during the planning stages than after the fact. Moreover, if you are planning to post a video of the event after the fact, you also will want to ensure accessibility during the actual event, even if no live participants request one. This applies especially to classes and/or celebrations, but, with the challenges posed by the pandemic, some people may be watching your services from other time zones after the fact, which means that it might be valuable to share recordings. There has been a concerted effort in the Jewish world as part of our recognition that we must come to be together as best we can, so some resources, such as the [JewishLive Facebook page](#), are intentionally gathering such recordings.

RespectAbility wants to acknowledge that, due to differing degrees of observance and interpretations of Jewish law, use of online formats for Orthodox and some Conservative high holiday services may be unlikely. Still, this toolkit should be applicable to all classes and or events held during Elul leading up to Rosh Hashana and beyond.

The bottom line is, whether you are a synagogue, a Havurah, or any other group praying together, it is important to make your services and programs as accessible as possible. Below are some steps you should take before, during and after your service or other event to ensure it is as accessible as possible for all people.

We hope you will make your own special and holy experience this year and this offering of ours will help you to make it accessible to everyone. Shana Tova!

Before the Service or Event

“When one creates accommodations and access for all, sometimes people think doing so benefits the person or people with disabilities who now have access to services. While that may be true, it is only a partial truth. In really creating accommodations and access benefits the community as a whole. If people with disabilities aren’t present in your spiritual community, then you don’t really have a spiritual community, you have a private club with homogenous membership. In order to have a true spiritual community the membership of the community needs to reflect the breadth and depth of G-d’s creation of human beings, which, of course, includes people with disabilities. Personally, I have always been so uncomfortable with a common patronizing attitude that providing communication access is done out of the “kindness” of the organization for “my” benefit. Communication is a “two-way street” and I always feel like an organization may be missing out on something potentially valuable if they aren’t able to communicate with me. So, providing communication access is actually in their own best interests.”

— Rabbi Darby J. Leigh

Creating and Sending Invitations

During this pandemic, most event invitations are being sent via email and/or posted to social media. While email invitations may have multiple graphical elements, you should ensure that images and logos have alt text – image descriptions – for people who are blind and use screen readers. In addition, it is best practice to have an option for the recipient to click through to access a plain text version of the invite, which can improve access for individuals with a variety of disabilities. Please note that some systems, like Eventbrite, are not accessible to people who are blind or have low vision and use screen readers. Learn more about ensuring website accessibility: www.respectability.org/2020/07/training-how-to-ensure-a-welcoming-lexicon-accessible-websites-and-social-media-and-inclusive-photos.



The invitation also should list how long the event will last, as well as what the format of the event will be. Will participants be participating on video or audio, especially if praying, or will they be more like spectators watching a presentation? If there is any interactive portion, describe it to people ahead of time.

You also should list your plans for accommodation in your invitations and marketing, especially captioning services or ASL interpreters, which we will discuss further below. Thankfully, the Jewish world is now working to make these services available to Jews who are D/deaf and hard of hearing. Many such individuals may not even attempt to access your event, because they are so used to the idea that their needs will not be met. By advertising upfront that these needs will be met, you not only maximize your value proposition, you also provide a welcome to Jews who too often have been excluded.

Accessibility in the Sign-Up Process

On your organization's sign-up form, ask registrants if they need any accommodations to effectively participate in the event. Additionally, provide a name, email and phone number for someone who can assist people with accommodation requests. By offering people the option to request accommodations, it does not require you to provide every accommodation requested if your organization is too small to provide these accommodations. However, having open communication with individuals requesting accommodations is important, as they may have ideas for workarounds that are doable for your event. Luckily, ensuring accessibility for online meetings can be free or inexpensive.

Inclusion Is About More Than Disability – Ensure That All in Your Community Can Connect

It is important to have an accommodation for individuals who do not have access to video conferencing. By offering the option for attendees to dial in by phone, people with and without disabilities who do not have internet access still can participate. The pandemic is further highlighting the social and economic issues around technological privilege and access.

Further, if your congregation has the capacity, you may wish to think about pooling congregational resources to help connect those not previously connected. This could include mobile hotspots for those without internet access, tablets or secondhand or inexpensive laptops for those without screens, training for those who are not tech savvy, or all of the above. This may be an opportune place for a donor drive, as many of us have older technology that we do not even use, which could be an amazing lifeline for someone else. An initiative like this would pay dividends far beyond the midst of connecting people to services, as it also would allow them to connect to the entire digital world that has grown up to address isolation and community during this pandemic. Training the recipient to use the technology might be a wonderful mitzvah project for your tweens and teens. Let us not forget that this is a celebratory time of year. Consider including a honey cake, some apples and honey, or something equally festive (after inquiring about food allergies) along with any gift of technology.

Provide Key Materials, Including Prayer Materials, Beforehand and Make Sure They Are Accessible

If you are using any documents or a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation for your online event, distribute it to your attendees in advance. This includes online Siddurim or Machzorim, or source sheets for sermons or discussions. If you are creating a document, consider making a copy available in Braille. The National Braille Press has a service for that and will provide you a price quote based on the document at www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/business/brailleprinting.html. Please note that they request a 20-business day processing time.

Whether in Braille or not, advance documents can enable attendees who are blind or have low vision to use screen reader software to familiarize themselves with the materials being presented. Some of the major publishers are making online versions of Machzorim available during the pandemic. Link to them in your invitation, but also offer to email copies upon request. Please note that while PDF and Word document formats can be made quite accessible to people who use screen readers, proprietary formats are not. See what you can do to convert any such files into these formats. Also, unless you follow your digital Machzor packet exactly, be sure to provide the order of page numbers, which portions of the page you will be reading from, etc. This will make it easier even for sighted people, and especially for those trying to follow along by other means. If you are still determining what materials to use, the website Sefaria has an accessible, traditional, digital Machzor available.

As you work to determine whether your downloaded or created materials are accessible, you can get some basics from the webinar in the previous section. If you want a deep dive in how to ensure the materials you distribute are actually accessible, you may want to watch [Making Documents and Presentations Accessible for All](#). Note, this webinar is six years old, so your version of Microsoft Office may have the buttons moved around a little bit, but the contents and functions are all the same.

As a good place to start, PowerPoint has a built-in tool to check accessibility issues in your slide deck and gives you instructions on how to fix them. For help on how to use it, visit the Microsoft Office Support Site: <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25>. Microsoft Word has a similar feature, which can be found at <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/accessibility-support-for-word-c014d8b8-4ef3-4a7a-935d-295663f3343c>. We also recommend having a text-only version of all documents for people who request one.

Braille Machzorim

A screen reader is not nearly as conducive to prayer as an actual book. Sadly, at the time of this writing, the authors have not been able to identify any way for a congregation to purchase Braille Machzorim, in the Reform, Conservative or Reconstructionist traditions, which means that your congregants will need to obtain them on an individual basis.

The law allows certain nonprofits to create copies on an individual basis, to be made directly available to blind users at no charge. The Brooklyn-based Orthodox organization, Computer Sciences for the Blind, www.computersciences.org, provides traditional Hebrew texts to eligible blind individuals upon request, including traditional Orthodox machzorim for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Jewish Braille Institute (JBI) also works to provide Hebrew texts upon request by eligible blind individuals, although one must register with the site. The most up-to-date offerings in Braille and large print format from JBI are not listed on their website, but they are listed as Appendix C, along with the code necessary to request them. You may have a challenge finding the Machzor that you use; while the Reform Movement's Mishkan HaNefesh is listed along with Gates of Repentance, the only available Conservative Machzor is the Silverman, last updated in 1951, and the Orthodox Machzor is the Birnbaum from the same era.

Obviously, it is deeply frustrating and challenging that our blind members have to go through this extra step to obtain what is readily available to the rest of our congregants. This is exacerbated by the fact that the authors of this guide, a team of Jewish professionals, were unsuccessful obtaining up-to-date information on what was available. This would be even more troubling for the "Jew in the pew."

Although you cannot make the request on behalf of your blind members, be present with them. Acknowledge the systemic ableism, and be with them in whatever way you can. This could range from emotional or spiritual support to assistance with the process. Let us take a moment to envision a day when the onus is not on blind people to obtain their own worship materials.

As part of this advice and support, you should take special note if the Machzor used by your congregation is not available. Look at the list of what is available and try to determine which one is closest to yours. Then, engage in a dialogue with your congregant or community member about whether they feel sufficiently comfortable in their Judaic and liturgical knowledge to be following in a different book than the one your community is using. It may be that you collectively determine that the book will prove more of a challenge than a help, distracting from the spiritual experience in an effort to follow along.

Immediately Prior to the Event

To run a successful virtual event, a little bit of preparation goes a very long way. You should ensure your clergy, speakers or presenters log in sufficiently before the start time of the event to test their audio, as well as their visibility, and the appropriateness of their background. This could include whether there is too much distraction, or whether they are trying to run a virtual background that is causing blurring or fade out. While, for the purposes of this guide, it is worth noting this preparation will be of value to people who are hard of hearing or have low vision, the fact is that this little bit of preparation will increase the quality of the event for everyone.

Remember Your Most Isolated Members

This guide is about ensuring the greatest access for the greatest number of people we can, and yet we know there are community members for whom the solutions in these pages may not work. Whether it is a congregant completely without access to technology, or one whose combination of disabilities and skills, for instance, both blind or low vision and D/deaf or hard of hearing, these solutions may not work. For these community members, start by reaching out. Ask them what, if anything, they think might help them connect to your worship. If you can, try and meet their needs and requests.

Even if you cannot think of a solution together, the conversation is a good first step to make sure they know that the community is thinking of them at this time. Do not let that conversation be the last reach out. Ask if they would welcome other community members making socially distant visits, maybe with a celebratory meal, or ritual. Ensuring access to worship is important, but if that is not entirely possible, you can at least ensure access to community, joy and spirit at this time.

During the Service or Event

“When I was a child, my father was the president of our small congregation and my mother was also super active. That means that we never missed a minute of services. I’m dyslexic and have ADHD, so I was extremely late in learning to read. Hence, for many years, following the service was harder for me. Indeed, even though today I have a degree in Judaic Studies and have been to Israel literally dozens of times, I still have a hard time reading Hebrew. But the meaning and the music of the High Holidays really connects to me very deeply. I always have liked to sing the prayers with the congregation. I read the lips of the rabbi or cantor to sing. Thus, I generally don’t read the words to participate. And Kol Nidre moves me intensely. Like every year, I’ll listen to the Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond versions several times over the holiday period.

“While I’m already enjoying Shabbat services from congregations all over via JewishLive on Facebook or Zoom, I’ll miss being in person with a congregation for the High Holidays. But we’ll make the best of it. I think I will still dress in white on Yom Kippur. I’ll ask my husband to connect the computer to a larger screen and good sound system so we can get the best version we can of music, as well as the feel of the service. Of course, it’s a bit surreal to have a service over the internet. But our family will be safe, and so will all the other people who pray that way. And when we go through the prayers on ‘who shall live and who shall die,’ I know I will have quite a lot to think about this year.”

—Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, President, RespectAbility

Ensuring as Many People as Possible Can Participate

Before we jump into technical specifics, it is important to remember a few best practices that make all your events more accessible, digital or not. First, if you are speaking or presenting in English, and you drop in a term in Hebrew or Yiddish, provide the English translation. Not only people with disabilities, but many others, do not understand all Hebrew terms.

Also, consider the language used as an invitation to a traditionally standing prayer. There are many potential modifications, from “please rise if you are able” to “please rise in body or spirit.” While a full exploration of the pros and cons of each option is outside of the scope of this guide, making some intentional change to your language shows a type of inclusive mindset, by letting people know they are under your consideration.

Many high holiday services tend to include multiple speakers, including multiple clergy, an appeal from the synagogue president, and/or any number of other speakers. Whenever there are going to be multiple voices, the best practice is for each person to say their name every time they begin speaking. This helps people with a variety of disabilities, including people who are blind or have low vision, as well as individuals with cognitive disabilities, to know who is speaking.

Different formats for your services will present different organizational needs. For events where everyone is visible and can participate, every individual not speaking should be on mute and a moderator will be needed to manage taking turns. A noisy meeting environment increases listening processing and fatigue for everyone; keeping yourself on mute when not speaking helps all participants. On the other hand, a moderator should be alert to a speaker that is too soft to be heard, encouraging them to speak up.

Are you planning to have interactive portions to your holiday celebration? It is important to give everyone options as to how they share their thoughts. For people who cannot or would rather not speak, the moderator or host can read notes made in the chat box out loud to everyone. The moderator or host should announce this as an option for people to do. They, or a designated staff or board member, will then need to check the chat box so comments are not overlooked or forgotten.

To help people with different types of disabilities, when someone is not speaking, they also should turn their video off. The host of a Zoom meeting can unilaterally turn off the video of participants. The sign language interpreter's video should always be on.

If there is a PowerPoint or other visual aid, then the speaker should describe what is on screen to accommodate individuals who are blind or have low vision. Even if you made certain that the PowerPoint had appropriate accessibility features for screen readers, people will not be able to use screen readers for the PowerPoint being shown on screen. Therefore, the speaker should describe what is on screen before delivering any other talking points. If you are using a virtual Siddur or Machzor, and you will be sharing it on your screen, it is especially important to send a copy to any congregant that requests it in advance, as screen readers and other accessibility technology simply will not be able to follow. If video clips that do not include audio description are played during a presentation, the speaker should explain the visuals before the video begins. This is important not only for participants who are blind but also because it is unlikely that audio description, which is narration describing what viewers see on screen, can be added after-the-fact to a fast-paced virtual meeting. We recommend this great guide to audio description, including examples: www.superfestfilm.com/audiodescription.

One should note that there are pros and cons to screen sharing, from an accessibility perspective. On the one hand, a shared screen, especially in a prayer environment, is a way to make the text of the service available. On the other hand, a shared screen makes it far more difficult to see an ASL interpreter on Zoom and on Facebook Live. If sharing a screen on Zoom while participants follow along on Facebook, the ASL interpreter's video must be spotlighted in order to see the interpreter versus the individual speaking.

Whatever format you choose for your event, you should have a very clear plan of when there will be screen sharing and when audience participation is expected. Having this schedule will keep everything operating smoothly but also is critical so people with disabilities who need to make special plans for these parts of the event, as well as interpreters, can plan appropriately.

Live Captioning

The gold standard of captioning is Communication Access Realtime Translation or CART, where a live transcriber types what is spoken in real time. RespectAbility currently uses Zoom for our webinars (including prior to this current climate), which is screen reader accessible. RespectAbility events always include CART. Other platforms that support live captioning include: Adobe Connect and Webex. This involves utilizing a third-party closed captioning service. Thankfully, there is no shortage of companies that provide this relatively inexpensive service. A full list can be found in Appendix A: Live Captioning Companies.

In addition to live CART, technology is rapidly catching up and now a handful of high-quality automatic speech recognition (ASR) options exist. These are not particularly helpful for services, as they are not designed for Hebrew text. For more about this technology in a context other than the High Holidays, visit www.respectability.org/accessible-virtual-events/during-the-event/#captions.

Live captioning is better able to help access Hebrew, when the captioners are provided with the text, including any Hebrew words in transliteration, beforehand. As such, live captioners should be given the script and text for the service in advance, including transliteration of Hebrew, and a clear indication of when that transliteration should be in the captions. This also helps for names and technical terms. In addition, unlike ASR, a live captioner can fill in the gaps with contextual clues if the audio is poor and let participants know if they are speaking too softly or too many people are speaking at once.

Any platform can utilize the services of a live captioner with a third-party captioning service. With this option, captions are displayed in a separate browser window. Services such as StreamText and 1CapApp also allow for customization in how an individual views the captioning. Because different users of captions have different preferences in this regard, having a flexibility to choose either by window or in program is particularly good.

To learn more about what each platform accommodates, we recommend viewing this chart compiled by Connect-Hear.com: <http://connect-hear.com/knowledge-base/chart-of-videoconferencing-captioning-availability>.

CART, ASR and non-embedded captions can be useful for a few different audiences, including people who are D/deaf/Hard of Hearing, those with learning disabilities who have an easier time comprehending the written word, and people whose first language is not English. CART greatly eases the cognitive load of a video meeting or event for many people.

It is important to note that captioning solutions may not always work best for the D/deaf/Hard of Hearing viewer. For example, those that participate via mobile devices, or through small screens, may find it difficult to read the small-sized captions, particularly for a lengthy period. Some platforms allow users to increase the size of their captioning, which may or may not be helpful in addressing this issue. It is helpful to let people who are D/deaf/Hard of Hearing know that it will improve their experience if they join the service online through a device with a larger screen. Still, this is true of all people, whether they have a disability or not, as joining an online service when there is a large screen is much better than on a phone. Also, while live captioning may

work well for forward-facing events, where participants are mainly watching, but it must be noted that if the Deaf/Hard of Hearing individual does not use voice, in order to chime in or comment, they will be forced to use the platform's text chat function.

American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters

For those who are unfamiliar with American Sign Language (ASL), there is a potential misconception that it is simply a visual depiction of English. It is actually, however a, complete language, and so like any other language, it can be translated to and from English, but that does not make it identical, in either idiom or structure. It is in fact, linguistically and grammatically distinct. For many speakers, it is their native language, and they may find it far better to watch a service if ASL interpretation is available, even if there are captions.

Further, for meetings and events where participants are actively engaged in interactive discussions, some D/deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals would prefer having an ASL interpreter over live captioning to ensure their active participation. In addition, for events that involve complex subject matter, technical terms or industry-specific terminology, viewers will find that automatic captioning, and in some cases, even live-captioning solutions, struggle to maintain a reasonable minimum level of quality and legibility for the user. Appendix B has a list of interpreter services. Some provide Zoom interpretation. Whomever is organizing your services needs to email the log-in information to the interpreter with a link or an invite to the room. They also should share names of speakers and any PowerPoints ahead of time so the interpreters can become familiar with the materials.

Specifically for Zoom, when utilizing ASL interpreters, it is important to never [spotlight a video other than an ASL interpreter when sharing a screen](#). Doing so leads to all attendees only seeing the video of the active speakers. This means that attendees are unable to view the ASL interpreter's video. Instead, ensure that the meeting or event is set to gallery view. When screen sharing, ensure the video is set to side-by-side view; otherwise, participants will only see the screen share and the person speaking and not the ASL interpreter.

When hiring a sign language interpreter for a service, do so as early as possible as there is a shortage of ASL interpreters who are ready to do high holiday services. Two weeks minimum is recommended. Be sure to confirm that the sign language interpreter is certified and experienced, and let the interpreter know if the event will be shared publicly. A certified interpreter is someone who has met a minimum of hours of training on a regular basis and abides by a code of professional conduct. This is important to ensure that your communications, and the conduct of the interpreter(s), meet the appropriate quality, ethical and professional standards. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) maintains a [searchable directory](#) of interpreters and their certification status. Please be aware that interpreting a live event is very physically labor-intensive and tiring. For something as long as a high holiday service or anything longer than one hour, you will likely need to hire interpreters in pairs to relieve each other. In fact it is an industry standard that an ASL "team" of a minimum of two interpreters is required for any event two hours or longer and most certified interpreters will require a "team" for any event one hour and longer.

Hebrew Text With Captioners and ASL Interpreters

In a perfect world, it would be great if every captioner were skilled with Hebrew, English and transliteration, and every ASL interpreter were truly trilingual in Hebrew, English and ASL. Such abilities, however, are very rare, and would be difficult to find in general, and particularly difficult with the demand around the High Holidays. Hence, as noted above, you want to begin your search for the best possible support team as soon as possible.

That being said, your captioner or interpreter should at the very least be provided the complete run of the service, i.e., which texts will be said when, paired with each Hebrew text and its translation, and transliteration. The translation will allow interpreters who do not themselves understand Hebrew to translate the prayer or song directly from the provided English into ASL. For the captioner, the transliteration will serve a dual feature, allowing a non-Hebrew speaker to follow the text while giving a captioner the appropriate text to put in the captions. Whichever way you choose, the most important thing is that you have a detailed discussion with your captioner and/or interpreter before the service and agree on an approach. Many captioners will want an electronic version of the service, especially transliteration, so they can cut and paste transliterations into the text at the appropriate times. Indeed, this is something you will likely want to practice in advance of a high holiday service if you are doing it for the first time.

Two Sides of the Same Coin: Maximizing Your Investment and Acknowledging Cost

Obviously, there is a financial investment involved with providing these services. The cost can range from 80-125 dollars per hour for captioning and 160-200 dollars per hour (80-100 dollars per hour per person) for a team of two ASL interpreters. This is a relatively small amount of money to enable many people, including seniors who may have no problem following a service in person but need captions for it to work online, to be included.

Here are a couple of thoughts worth considering. You may want to have a value-based discussion with your board or speak to a few key donors who may be willing to make a gift if they know it will allow other members of the community to access spiritual life. Many will instantly understand that during COVID-19, many seniors and people with disabilities essentially are forced into even further isolation. While they may be able to hear well enough to follow and enjoy a service in person, they will not be able to connect to the service well if they are watching it onscreen in isolation and do not have access to captions.

That said, we recognize that some synagogues may be unable to afford these accommodations. In that situation, Jewish law tells us that it is incumbent upon our community to help meet the spiritual needs of our fellow community members. This year, that might mean finding out about another synagogue that is able to provide full accessibility and referring people to those resources.

For those synagogues that have made the investment in accessibility, it is vital to let your community and others know so those who need accessibility have a place to pray. Share it with your colleagues, and put it on your website. Consider creating a webpage in your local community of which synagogues will have which accommodations at what time. Please also alert us, by emailing JoshuaS@RespectAbility.org so we can share your accessible offerings via our website and social media as many people look to RespectAbility for such resources. Indeed, make sure your accessibility is celebrated and used.

For those unable to provide this accessibility this year, we urge you not to forget the feeling of regret that ought to come from having to send a member of our synagogue family elsewhere to meet their spiritual needs. Let that regret push the community to plan, and fundraise over the next year, so that whether High Holidays are virtual or in person, your congregation will be able to welcome its entire community.

After the Service or Event

Ensuring Accessible Videos for Websites and Social Media

Many organizations place recordings of their events online so they can be enjoyed and experienced later. It is vital for those recordings to be accessible as well. Indeed, 41 percent of videos are incomprehensible without sound or captions. In fact, 80 percent of viewers react negatively to videos auto-playing with sound. So now, many social media outlets auto-play videos on silent. Therefore, if you record your event and plan on sharing the video, it is crucial that you have accurate captions.

Since many people confuse subtitles and captions, here is the difference:

- Subtitles only reflect what is being spoken.
- Captions go a step further by including non-spoken information such as, [laughter], [applause] and [music], as well as environmental sounds.

Open captions are always visible. This is important for videos that will be posted on social media channels, as 85 percent of Facebook videos are watched without sound. Similar statistics exist for other social media platforms. 92 percent of mobile users watch video with the sound off.

Closed captions can be turned on/off by the viewer on TVs as well as on social media platforms. With modern web services like YouTube, closed captioning is easy to implement. If your video is hosted on YouTube and has good sound quality, basic captions similar to subtitles automatically will be added to your video at no charge. These basic captions or subtitles are never perfect. Speakers will not be identified, certain words will not be accurate, and there will not be any punctuation. Furthermore, things like laughter and applause will not be mentioned. In order for your video to be accessible for people who are D/deaf/Hard of Hearing, it is vitally important to review automatic captions and fix these issues before posting the video. This is especially important with services, as YouTube will be completely unable to cope with the varied languages of liturgy.

There are step-by-step guides on [YouTube's help section](#) that will tell you everything you need to know about captions on YouTube including how to edit captions that need fixing, as well as how to upload a transcript and have YouTube create captions from the transcript. If your uploaded video is short and has poor audio quality, the help section details how to create captions from scratch. Here is an excerpt about how you can review automatic captions and edit them:

1. Go to your Video Manager by clicking your account in the top right > Creator Studio > Video Manager > Videos.
2. Next to the video you want to add captions or subtitles to, click the drop-down menu next to the Edit button.
3. Select Subtitles and CC.

4. If automatic captions are available, you will see Language (Automatic) in the "Published" section to the right of the video.
5. Review automatic captions and use the [instructions to edit or remove](#) any parts that haven't been properly transcribed.

Even if you do not end up sharing your video on YouTube, you still can use their captioning service. Simply upload your video to YouTube, have the service create the captions automatically, go in and fix them, and then download a SubRip (SRT) file. SubRip is the standard file format for captioning, and you can upload an SubRip file to services like [Vimeo](#) or [Facebook](#) to enable captions on these platforms.

A Note About Instagram

If you are posting content on Instagram, stories and videos can easily be made more accessible with captions. For Insta Stories, captions can be added in two ways: by downloading and utilizing a free app like Clipomatic or recording the video and manually typing what is being said using the add text option. For videos on feeds, the best way to add captions are by prerecording the video and adding captions in editing software such as Inshot, Screencast-O-Matic, Adobe Premiere Pro, Final Cut or iMovie.

Webinars on How to Make Your Programs Accessible

RespectAbility, in partnership with 45+ Jewish organizations, hosted a series of free online webinars about how to make Jewish life and institutions accessible to people with disabilities. Several already have occurred and are posted on the [RespectAbility](https://www.respectability.org) website: www.respectability.org/jewish-events.

- [Inclusion as a Jewish Value](#)
- [How to Advance Disability Inclusion in Jewish Education](#)
- [How to Recruit, Accommodate and Promote Jewish Leaders with Disabilities for Paid Employment and Volunteer Leadership](#)
- [How to Ensure Accessible Events: Both Live and Virtual Across All Platforms](#)
- [How to Ensure a Welcoming Lexicon, Accessible Websites and Social Media and Inclusive Photos](#)
- [How to Create and Implement Successful Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives – Best Practices and Must-Haves](#)

The last of the initial webinars, [“How to Ensure Legal Rights and Compliance Obligations,”](#) is coming up on Tuesday, August 11, 2020. It will be on the website within a week of its completion, if you do not catch it live.

For More Information

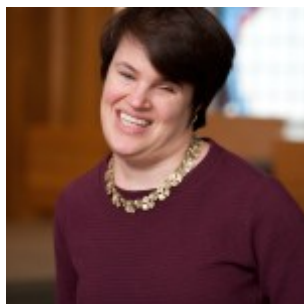
For more questions about how to ensure accessibility of your virtual meetings, please contact JoshuaS@RespectAbility.org. If we do not know the answer, we will put you in touch with someone who does. Check out [RespectAbility’s Jewish Inclusion Resources page](#) if you are looking for textual or other content to weave the disability experience into your high holiday celebration. Wishing all a Shanah Tova u’Metukah, a sweet good year.

About Our Co-Authors



Serving Congregation Kerem Shalom in Concord Massachusetts, **Rabbi Darby Jared Leigh**, a native New Yorker, is a life-long “truth-seeker.” His rabbinate is characterized by creativity, inclusivity, and a commitment to diversity. Rabbi Leigh describes himself as “committed to finding creative ways to engage Jews of all ages and backgrounds and to creating welcoming, caring communities with intellectual honesty and spiritual depth.” His rabbinate is characterized by creativity, inclusivity, and a commitment to diversity.

Rabbi Leigh received a bachelor’s degree in religion summa cum laude from the University of Rochester. Deaf himself, he then toured with the National Theater of the Deaf (NTD) and served as a social worker and counselor at the New York Society for the Deaf. Rabbi Leigh earned a master’s degree in religion from Columbia University and his rabbinic ordination and a Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.



Based in the Washington, D.C., area, **Rabbi Lauren Tuchman** is a sought after speaker, spiritual leader and educator. Ordained by The Jewish Theological Seminary in 2018, she is the first female rabbi who is blind. She has taught at numerous synagogues and other Jewish venues throughout North America and was named to the Jewish Week’s 36 under 36 for her innovative leadership concerning inclusion of Jews with disabilities in all aspects of Jewish life. In 2017, Rabbi Tuchman delivered an ELI Talk entitled “We All Were At Sinai: The Transformative Power of Inclusive Torah.”

Rabbi Tuchman has trained and continues to teach with Rabbi David Jaffe and the Inside Out Wisdom and Action Project, which provides a space for Jewish spiritual and contemplative practice for social justice activists rooted in the spiritual discipline of Mussar and the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. She serves on the board of JOIN for Justice, which trains Jews in community organizing for social change.

Appendix A: Live Captioning Companies

Company	Phone Number	Website
1CapApp	(866) 945-0250	www.1capapp.com
Carolinas Captioning Services	(704) 552-6753	www.abccaption.com
On Point Captions	(818) 279-8136	www.onpointcaptions.com
StreamText	(608) 234-4759	www.streamtext.net
Transcription Star	(877) 323-4707	www.transcriptionstar.com
Closed Captioning Services	(818) 775-0410	www.ccscaption.com
20/20	(800) 870-1795 ext. 1	www.2020captioning.com
Alternative Communication Services	(800) 335-0911 ext. 705	www.ascaptions.com
A La CARTe Connection	(888) 900-3239	www.alacarteconnection.com
CART Agency	(877) 871-2653	www.cartagency.com
Captions Unlimited	(775) 746-3534	www.captionsunlimited.com

Appendix B: ASL Interpreting Companies

This is a listing of professional interpreting companies. It should be noted that many communities have reported success, and lower cost, with independent interpreters. That said, finding the supply that you need, and the references you would like might be a time-consuming process. Further, providing quality interpretation in a Zoom format is a special challenge. We offer this list of professional interpreting companies, known to us to work well with the virtual format.

Company	Phone Number	Website
InterpretThat	(562) 400-5452	www.interpretthatinc.com
LifeSigns	(888) 930-7776	www.lifesignsinc.org
The Sign Language Company	(818) 728-4241	www.signlanguageco.com

Appendix C: Materials Available From JBI

This is a list of available Machzorim is received via email from JBI as of August 6, 2020. Please remember that in order to request any materials from JBI, you must be an individual who is blind or has low vision, and you must register as a member.

Braille Machzorim

Machzor	JBI Code Number
Birnbaum High Holy Day- 21 Volumes (Orthodox)	B-18
Silverman Rosh Hashanah (Conservative)	B-84 & B-85
Silverman Yom Kippur (Conservative)	B-86 -B-89
Miskan HaNefesh Rosh HaShanah (Hebrew-English & Transliteration 5 Volumes)	B-118
Miskan HaNefesh Yom Kippur (Hebrew-English & Transliteration 7 Volumes)	B-119

Large Print Machzorim

Machzor	JBI Code Number
Rosh Hashanah Machzor 2 Volumes (Orthodox)	L-071
Yom Kippur Machzor 2 Volumes (Orthodox)	L-072
Rosh Hashanah Machzor (Conservative)	L-069
Yom Kippur Machzor (Conservative)	L-070
Nusach Sephard Machzor Rosh HaShanah (Hebrew Only)	L-082
Nusach Sephard Machzor Yom Kippur (Hebrew Only)	L-083
Russian Machzor	L-086