

Kehilat Sukkat Shalom Columbus, OH
Jodi Kushins

Kol Nidre Welcome Notes

Bruchim Habaim!

My name is Jodi Kushins and I'm the current chair of this small but very mighty kehillah. Our community prides itself on joyfully connecting our contemporary lives with the ancient teachings we have inherited. Through communal events and worship experiences like those we'll be sharing over the next 24-ish hours, educational programming, taking action on issues we care about, and sharing personal celebrations and struggles, we strengthen each other in our individual and collective Jewish journeys.

Whether you are a longtime member, perennial visitor, or with us for the first time, we're glad you're here.

Welcome to our Sukkat Shalom, our Shelter of Peace.

Welcome to our annual journey to the land of our souls. During this Shabbat Shabbaton, this double Shabbat, we'll read poetry, hear music and sing songs, and recite blessings designed to stir our souls, to help us casting away our misdeeds and shed grudges as we chart a fresh spiritual course for the new year. Through this process, we press the reset button to prepare us for inner and outer work we need to do, to make our own lives more rich and rewarding, and to pursue justice and be the change we wish to see in the world.

In this way Yom Kippur is the start of a journey, a trip into sacred space and time that provides us an opportunity for retreat and reflection, to open up and to be vulnerable. It invites us into a space of forgiveness, to share time with loved ones we have lost, and to chart a new social and emotional course into the year ahead. This year I encourage you to consider the idea that this journey does not end at Neilah (though we will say concluding prayers and break our fast tomorrow night as usual. Have no fear). The missteps you may have identified in the past ten days of Teshuva, or over the month of Elul, or read and relate to over the next few hours do not need to be rectified immediately. Indeed, as Rabbi Alan Lew suggests in *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*, anything worth contemplating on Yom Kippur will need more time than that. This business of repentance, of turning towards the light is a lifelong journey, not a destination. It is about being being present, in this moment and those that follow each and every day of your life from this Yom Kippur to the next.

I want to share one more teaching from Rabbi Lew who was a lapsed Jew and Buddhist practitioner before becoming a Rabbi. "...way back in 1970," he wrote, "I was about as distant from Judaism as it was possible to be. How distant? It was the evening of Kol Nidre, the advent of Yom Kippur, and I had no idea that it was. But the TV was on in the living room and I just happened to be walking through the room when a news broadcast caught my attention. They were doing a feature about Yom Kippur. Someone was playing Kol Nidre on the cello. It went through me like a knife. That melody stuck a deep chord. It went all the way in. It went straight

to my soul.” In a few moments we’ll hear that same sound, and if we’re lucky, it will break our hearts open so we can perform teshuva.

As we embark on this journey together, I offer this t’filat hadereach, a wayfarer’s prayer, inspired by Rabbi Yael Levy.

May it be aligned with the highest will, with the deepest truths, with the widest spirit, Life Force of All, that we enter into this Yom Kippur for goodness and for blessing. Let the ancient voices of Torah and Psalms mingle with those of contemporary poets and songwriters to touch our souls and revive our hearts. Let these calls embrace and hold us and lift us into what is and what can be. And in those moments when the prayers don’t really touch us or reach us, let that be okay as well. Let this journey towards forgiveness we are embarking upon be for love, be for truth, and be for blessing. And may it give us strength to shine our lights and live our lives for blessing and for healing for all things.

And now it is my pleasure to re-introduce our Spiritual Leader-in-Residence Elya Zissel Piazza. Elya is simultaneously working towards ordination at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia and a doctorate in Jewish studies at UC Berkeley. They will be leading us in our prayers and sharing teachings along the way. Thanks again for being here with us, Elya.

Shmitah Dvar:

This Rosh haShanah 5782 marked the start of a seventh year sabbatical known as Shmitah. The tradition goes back to the covenant our ancestors made with The One as they first entered the land of Israel after wandering through the desert for 40 years. Shmitah is mentioned in the Torah multiple times. In Exodus, we are told: “For six years you are to sow your land and to gather in its produce, but in the seventh, you are to let it go and to let it be, that the needy of your people may eat, and what remains, the wildlife of the field shall eat. Do thus with your vineyard, with your olive grove.” This is interpreted as a reminder that the land does not belong to people, it belongs to itself. In fact, it’s not just an interpretation. In Leviticus the voice that speaks for the land tells us directly, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and live as foreigners with me.” Finally, in Deuteronomy, the requirement of release is carried over to financial properties: “All of those who bear debt must release their hold.” In other words, all debts are forgiven – in today’s terms that would mean, a release from housing debt, tuition debt, medical debt, credit card debt, and more. Imagine a world where nature takes control and everyone gets a do-over on financial planning.

Totally radical thinking.

There are even more revolutionary propositions for the Jubilee year, the 7th shmitah in a cycle including all land returning to a land bank and being reallocated.

Holy wow, as Rabbi Jessica used to say. Can you imagine?

Historically, Talmudically, Shmita was required only of Jews living in the land of Israel. Today, even there, only the most Orthodox observe it and then it’s not without some serious issues.

That's a topic for another time. For some reason, it was deemed an undue burden on those living elsewhere and according to some, such observance is therefore forbidden.

However, 21st century Jewish environmentalists in Israel and around the world have been finding inspiration in shmitah for at least a decade. And this year, as we enter shmitah more attuned to injustices around basic human needs like food, housing, education, and safety, more people including our growing list of friends in Central Ohio Jews for Justice are embracing shmita as a concept worthy of consideration. As we face the challenges of climate crisis and related issues of social justice, we ask what can shmita teach us? How can it help guide us, and by us I mean all Earthlings with power and not just Jews, to live our lives in respect and appreciation for the land and all its inhabitants?

If nothing else this shmita cycle, I encourage you to learn something about shmita. It's another amazing tool that's been buried at the bottom of the Jewish toolbox for millennia but is making a comeback because it has really interesting and important things to teach us. Things we need to learn RIGHT NOW. We're starting a monthly study group supported by a national project called *Shmita Hives* later in the month and would love to have more voices. Come find me later or send me an email for more information.

Shanah Tovah. Shmita Tovah. May 5782 be a year in which all of Earth's inhabitants know peace and prosperity, health and happiness.