

# {SANCTIFYING TIME}

by Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio

This year we have been challenged to reimagine so many moments and times in our lives: Shabbat, life cycle events, shopping, socialising, even the simple act of greeting one another. We have learned, as we have begun to don masks, how to make our eyes smile, to connect with one another in different ways and now we are called upon to do so for the most sacred and holy days in our calendar, days which for many of us, derive their power and awesomeness from the gathering of community in our sacred spaces. This year, we will not be able to gather in large numbers as we have in the past, so it is upon us to find new and innovative ways to connect to each other and to these holy and sacred moments. When we enter the synagogue we recite: *“ma tovu ohalecha*

*Ya’akov, mishkenotecha Yisrael”*  
How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel. It’s interesting that we say these words as we enter the synagogue, yet they speak about our dwellings and our homes. That is because the two are reflections, one of the other, and this year for the High Holydays we are being called to create in our homes, sacred, holy spaces. Abraham Joshua Heschel so beautifully described Judaism as a religion which sanctifies time and not space. We can create a synagogue, a sanctuary anywhere. One of my favourite poems is from Ruth Brin: “A Sense of Your Presence” She writes:

*...among our many attributes*

*There is a talent for  
worshipping God*

*Jews who wandered in the  
desert beneath the stars  
Knew their hearts were  
hungry for God*

*Jews who studied in candle-  
lit ghetto rooms  
Thirsted longingly after God...*

*Help us to seek the  
silence of the desert  
And the thoughtfulness  
of the house of study*

*Bless us, like our ancestors  
in ancient days*

*With that most precious gift:  
a sense of your presence...*  
(“Harvest: Collected Poems  
and Prayers” by Ruth Brin)

Ruth Brin, in this prayer, reminds us of the myriad of places our



people have found God and connected with prayer. We are not tied to a place, we are connected through belief, through history, through time. We create sacred moments, we sanctify time and we can do that anywhere. When the Temple was destroyed, so much of our practice, our worship of God was destroyed along with it but we were not destroyed as a people, because God was not in the Temple, Judaism was not confined to a space. It travelled with us all over the world, through deserts and snow, over land and sea, and we pray, we worship and we connect in all manner of locations: indoors and in nature, in magnificent synagogues and humble rooms, hiding in basements, freely in spaces open to the world. We make space sacred by our worship in the holiness of time.

Growing up in Adelaide I remember going to “Synagogue Place” a little lane off one of the main shopping streets, where the Orthodox Synagogue was located. It was a magnificent building, chandeliers, a carved wooden reading platform, space upstairs for the women where I sat with my grandmother, always in the front row in the middle, as she sang out loudly and called to my cousins downstairs for the page numbers. In the 1980s the community made a decision to sell that building, prime real estate, and build a new synagogue and community centre closer to where the congregation were living. So the synagogue was sold and the purchaser turned it into a nightclub called... “The Synagogue.” It has since had a name change and it was very confusing when my non Jewish friends would declare “I’m going

to the synagogue tonight” and mean the night club not the shule, but people were perplexed at how it could be that a synagogue could become a nightclub; surely it was sacred ground!

But the ground was only sacred because of the acts which were performed within it, the Torah scrolls, the dedication of that space to prayer, study, meeting and devotion, once they were removed, so too was the sanctity of the building, it became just a building.

This year, at our High Holydays we are being called to create holy space in our homes, to turn our places into sanctuaries and to reflect the holiness in time, in our houses. We have the opportunity to transform our every day spaces into sacred places for prayer and connection with spirit.



*Adelaide Synagogue 1871 - State Library of South Australia*

We will be streaming all our services, so maybe find a way to make the area in which we will be watching the service, a reflection of the day. We can drape it in white, add some flowers, dress in our High Holy Day finest and sing along with the music, allow ourselves to be drawn into the beauty of the moment, the ancient chants and prayers, close our eyes and fly free in our imaginations, travelling anywhere, connecting with the past, remembering and shaping something unique and beautiful for today.

For Yom Kippur especially, being at home provides the opportunity to do some deep reflection, uninterrupted by the distractions of the synagogue, quiet moments for you to be with yourself and your spirit. Maybe take some time to go outside, connect with nature, think about the magnificence of the world, our place in it, our

and its fragility and beauty. This year is also a chance to engage in some study, a discussion with a friend or a family member. To connect with people, maybe not in person, but definitely through the many other means by which we have chosen to link together these past many months.

And we can find community within our homes as well. Imagining as we say the prayers, the homes all over our city, our country and the world where this year, Jews will be praying, our souls together, our bodies in our sanctuaries at home. We can use the technology to link for discussion and reflection with our congregation but also with family and friends all over the city and the world. We can create a High Holyday “zoomunity” (a zoom community) where we can enjoy apples and honey, prayers and wishes for the year ahead, hear the call of the shofar, chat, discuss,

pray, sing, dance, reflect and be together in oneness of spirit. We can feel the unity of the world in ways we have never dared to dream or imagine before. And there is the bonus of not needing to find parking, remember your tickets, choose a service, find a seat...”

I am excited as we imagine all the possibilities for these High Holydays and look forward to greeting you all, connecting with community, our spirits joined, our prayers rising and creating a canopy of love over all of us, our cities, our countries and the world as we feel the beauty of the holiness we will create together in time and space. ■

May we have a year ahead of health, strength and blessings  
*Shana Tova Umetuka,*

Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio



U P J V I R T U A L B I E N N I A L

**SAVE THE DATE!**

## **UPJ VIRTUAL BIENNIAL: 2020 VISION ON SUNDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2020**

The in-person UPJ Biennial planned for 5-8 November 2020 has been postponed to *14-17 October 2021*, and we are pleased to announce that our special guest speaker Rabbi Sharon Brous of Ikar in Los Angeles will be with us at that time.

This year, on **Sunday 8 November 2020**, a **Virtual Biennial** will be offered, with an online introduction from Rabbi Brous. During July, Biennial chair Susan Kadar spent 10 days conducting interviews with UPJ congregations throughout the region to determine a program that will best suit the needs of our constituents for the Virtual Biennial. Early-bird registration, including details about the program and speakers will be launched on 1 September on the [UPJ website](#). For more information, contact the UPJ office at: [upj@upj.org.au](mailto:upj@upj.org.au) or 0416 700 613.