

# FINDING SHALOM

Tammy Cohen



The High Holy Days are a period of reflection and evaluation - how was this year for me? What did I learn about myself? What do I want to leave behind? What opportunity might the new year hold?

Our tradition focuses on the word *t'shuvah* - meaning return and repentance which leads us towards 'shalom' - wholeness, peace and our true-selves. Returning ourselves to community and to God doesn't always mean we return to the practices and habits that we've always done. Finding shalom, finding wholeness, allows us to leave behind whatever we need to and perhaps even find new ways to enact our values, goals and actions.

For as long as I can remember, my High Holy Days at TBI have involved sitting in awe as each Torah scroll is removed from the Ark and *Kol Nidrei* is recited; moving to different seats through the Sanctuary alongside different family and friends as we participate in various services. I've also had the privilege to lead our family and tot services, to chant Torah, to create family programs and sing with our healing service choir.

Last year, as for all of us, these moments, which help me refresh, reset and re-engage for a new year, were significantly altered. I never imagined that I would find myself (despite my experiences on and offstage) spending the majority of the High Holy Days behind multiple computer screens and sound boards, producing services, editing pre-recorded service videos and mastering website management. At times, I found myself in the surreal position of being the only person in our Sanctuary, alongside the Cantor and music team. Our Sanctuary, usually full, almost empty, cold and reliant on very good internet (thank you Lightning Broadband!).

Now, as we continue to re-open and re-engage after the height of the pandemic, we see the 5782 High Holy Days ahead. We don't know yet exactly what these days of celebration and reflection are going to look like. However, we do know that we can't go back to exactly how our community held High Holy Days in the years that preceded the pandemic. Now, limited by density numbers and QR check-ins, we won't be running parallel services.

Instead, each and every service we offer this year will be led from the bimah in the main Sanctuary. To me, this is a blessing. After over a year of physical distance from TBI and as we re-engage following the pandemic, we all need the opportunity to be in the Sanctuary, to reconnect to each other, our Sanctuary and to reset ourselves for the new year.

Our Family Services and second *Kol Nidrei* offering, usually hosted upstairs, will be led from the main Sanctuary, prior to our main services. We have aimed to make the timing of these services as accessible to our community members as possible, particularly young families. As we strive to connect with all ages, traditions, and ways that our community connects to prayer, ritual and community, we are also incorporating some new offerings over these High Holy Days, including:

- *Binah (B'nei mitzvah)* High Holy Day preparation program
- Shabbat Shuvah Shofar Service and Picnic - an offsite program for families
- Break-out activities and discussions for various ages and interests throughout the High Holy Day period

Our decisions have been guided by the principles of accessibility, balance, meaning and shalom. We hope to engage with each member of our community, and recognise that these days are not just about prayer, but experiences, too.

As we journey together through these High Holy Days, may we each find shalom – peace, wholeness and our true-selves – guided by our learning from the past year, leaving behind what holds us down and embracing this opportunity for renewal.

## *L'Shanah Tovah*

