

## A High Holiday Message From Cantor Joshua Shron



It's more than likely that you will not hear me utter a single English word from the bima throughout the upcoming High Holy Day season. But if I were offered the opportunity to say a few words from the pulpit, here are the remarks I might share:

Shana Tova. It is so beautiful to stand before you this morning, looking out upon nearly 700 faces... praying, singing, celebrating together. Greeting some I may not have seen for a while. Pouring our hearts out for God to grant us health, happiness and prosperity this new Jewish year.

To many of you, the room may feel crowded, the service may seem long, the delicious lunch awaiting you at home getting colder by the minute. But to me... this is perfect. There are few sights in this world more beautiful than this. I am so grateful and humbled that you've joined us this morning.

But I have just one question: WHY?

Why are you here? Why today? When the service is longer than any other day of the year? When parking is harder to find? When the Cantor drones on longer than usual? On Rosh Hashana, when synagogue time takes away from precious family time? On Yom Kippur, when you have to endure not only the longest service of the year...but ALSO a 25 hour fast? WHY?

OK, I get it. For many of you, the answer is simple: TRADITION. (Cue the Fiddler.) Your grandparents came on the holidays, your parents came on the holidays. Love it or hate it, it's just what you do. Period.

But still, I don't completely get it. Yes, this is a beautiful experience. The melodies are familiar, the prayers are uplifting, and friends and family are all around you.

But if you asked me, I'd say "Go home! Come back another day!"

Another day? Yes! How about Simchat Torah (October 24-25), a day filled with singing, dancing, food and FUN! How about Yom Ha'atzmaut, a day on which we celebrate a miracle that took place, not thousands of years ago, but in MODERN times! How about Shavuot, when we eat lots of blintzes and cheesecake and delve into the deep, rich wisdom of our tradition? How about our monthly "Alternative Service", where we spend less time PRAYING and more time DISCUSSING what we do and why we do it? Or how about ANY given Shabbat morning, where you'll pray, sing and learn for a couple of hours, then schmooze with friends over lunch afterwards?

Why are you here today? When there's a longer service, a crowded sanctuary...and no Kiddush???

Friends, in all seriousness, I would never discourage you from attending services on the holiest days on the Jewish calendar. These holy days are simply magnificent and awe-inspiring, and are an important part of who we are as Jews. But Jewish life means so much more, and it's simply tragic that so many Jews miss out on the richness of our tradition. From sitting around the Shabbat table with family and friends to clowning around on Purim, the funniest day of the year. From singing lively songs at the VERY end of the seder late at night on Passover to waving a lulav and etrog on Sukkot. From the sacred serenity of lighting candles on Friday night to the spiritual and intellectual nourishment of learning about the weekly Torah portion.

Quite simply, if you're only joining us these three days, you're missing just about EVERYTHING.

So this year, I'd like to ask you to make a pledge. Not a financial one (though we'd never discourage those either), but rather a pledge to yourself. A pledge to experience ONE new aspect of Judaism. A pledge to join with your community for ONE service you've never attended. A pledge to take on ONE new Jewish ritual. A pledge to travel to Israel. A pledge to participate in ONE adult education class at our synagogue - or any synagogue. A pledge to explore parts of our tradition that you never experienced before. I promise – you will unlock doors you never knew existed.

My blessing to you is that you experience a brand new Judaism this year – one filled with joy, enrichment and fun. On behalf of my family (I'd list all their names but they've been edited out due to space concerns), I wish you a Shana Tova U'metukah!

*Cantor Josh Shron*