

Susan McCord
High Holy Days Begin:

The solemn Jewish high holy days begin at sundown

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ALBANY- Judaism's holiest days, a 10-day period of reflection and repentance, begin at sundown with the start of Rosh Hashanah. The period concludes Sept. 22 with Yom Kippur.

"It's a very intense period. The 10 days in between are the 10 days of repentance", said Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, who leads Temple B'nai Israel in Albany.

The holy days are a time of serious reflection, both personal and communal, which also may bring the less actively practicing into the synagogue, Kaplan said.

"This is a time of year that people consider their lives and what they are doing", he said.

"We all want to live up to our own potential to be consistent with our own lives, with our own values", Kaplan said. "On the other hand as a community, we have various issues facing us."

B'nai Israel dates from 1876 and is Albany's only synagogue, with the nearest one located in Thomasville.

"We're the only synagogue for quite a while in any direction." Its small but active congregation includes members from Albany's oldest Jewish families as well as newcomers from around the world.

"We have different theologies as well; we have a little bit of everything." The High Holy Days also mark a year since the synagogue began its "Synaplex" program of services reflecting the differing theologies and tastes of its diverse congregation, Kaplan said.

B'nai Israel has held a variety of services including a traditional Hebrew Saturday service, a formal, Union prayer book service, a service for families with young children, a spiritual, meditative service and even a wine and cheese discussion of Judaism, he said.

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The congregation has been receptive to the varying services, held regularly during the last year, he said.

“There is something nice about consistency”, Kaplan said. “But it doesn’t seem to bother people. They seem to accept the opinion that you have to provide something for everyone.”

An 8 p.m. service today begins Rosh Hashanah. At a service beginning at 10 a.m. Thursday, two congregants will blow the shofar, a ram’s horn which signals the start of the High Holy Days.