

THE CANTOR'S VOICE

Bringing BIJ's High Holy Days into the Internet Age By Cantorial Soloist David Morgenstern



There were a number of “firsts” that happened here at BIJ during the High Holy Days: our first Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services with Rabbi Gottlieb on the bimah, the use of new *machzor*s for the New Year and for our family services, a new healing service on Yom Kippur, and last but not least, the streaming of our services live over the

Internet.

The streaming was a great success, according to some of those who connected to our services. There were members who couldn't make it to BIJ for the High Holy Days and were able to watch and hear our beautiful services.

In a High Holy Days planning meeting, Rabbi Gottlieb said web access was appreciated at Temple Kol Ami, his previous synagogue, and he wanted to offer it this year at BIJ. However, when I heard Rabbi Gottlieb's request, the first words out of my mouth were “We will try,” not the more biblical (and gung-ho), “We will do.” Why the worries? After all, here in the Bay Area, the hub of technical progress for the whole world, we should be able easily to stream the services, right?

Back in the days of the dotcom boom, I worked at a startup Internet video company, so I have some understanding of the technology. While web-video appears simple enough to accomplish — after all, any piano-playing feline can be a star on YouTube and many of us have used teleconferencing such as Skype — the live streaming of video and audio makes significant demands on computer hardware, software and infrastructure. And to be honest, the technology we had available at that moment in-house (or in house-of-worship) wouldn't do the job.

First, we had to find a computer and camera that could handle the streaming, then get that video stream from the sanctuary all the way to our server room on the other side of the building (it's in the hallway behind the Fireside Room), and finally, find and test a streaming video company that would let our members watch our services. Oh, and do this without a significant cost. Or perhaps any cost.

The computer hurdle was overcome when I was able to borrow a newish Apple iMac computer from a neighbor — only in the Bay Area, right? He is a software developer considering creating some iPhone apps in the future. The

purchase of a powered USB extension cable allowed me to mount a web camera on top of the divider in the back of the sanctuary.

The hardest task was the networking. The logical choice would be Wifi but a wireless connection wouldn't be reliable enough for our purposes, since we couldn't check and restart the video or the router during the service. It had to be a wired connection. Thankfully, Blair Horst, Chair of the House Committee, has experience in computer networking and he was able to pull ethernet cable through the ceiling! Phil Hartman, an audio engineer and Torah Study regular, helped with attaching the connectors.

After looking at several video companies and calling Toronto to talk with Kol Ami's tech guy, I chose the Livestream.com service. It works in a web browser and allows an unlimited number of simultaneous viewers for free (it serves up ads to viewers).

I've heard from some of those who enjoyed our services online, including a member who had recently undergone surgery. My father watched Kol Nidre and the Yom Kippur afternoon services; he said they “sounded great.”

Barry and Evelyn Adler wrote: “A thank you on behalf of a friend who linked up to our holiday webcast. She was so happy to be able to join the congregation for services she could not have attended. It is a wonderful idea that should be repeated.”

Now that the hard work is done, there's no reason not to stream next year's High Holy Day services. Many thanks to everyone who made it possible.

The Talmud says: “The Shabbat was delivered unto you, not you unto the Shabbat.” With the Internet, this text takes on a whole new dimension.

And many many thanks to everyone who contributed their voices, time and spirit to singing in the Nashira Choir for the High Holy Days! You made such a difference to our worship. *Kol Hakavod* (All the Respect)!

B'vracha (with blessing),

David Morgenstern