



RUDERMAN SYNAGOGUE INCLUSION PROJECT



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BRINGING SERVICES HOME WITH STREAMING

Nothing can match the experience of attending synagogue services in person. But when illness and other circumstances keep congregants away, streaming technology can provide a welcome alternative.

Congregation Beth El in Sudbury introduced [video streaming](#) in 2016 for the High Holidays after Rabbi David Thomas realized how much homebound congregants missed attending services.

“It became very clear, during his visits with them, that this was a huge loss in their lives,” said Susan Tohn, Chair of Beth El’s Inclusion and Membership Committees. “To be cut off from your spiritual community is just heartbreaking.”

Now, Beth El streams and archives all services and some adult education classes.

That first Rosh Hashanah, 170 people tuned in from around the globe, including Susan’s daughters. One watched from Spain and the other from Michigan, where she was away at college. The daughters also connected via Face Time so they could participate.

After Rosh Hashanah, Susan’s college-age daughter watched services every week, even though she participated in Hillel on campus. “The services became an important touchstone for her,” Susan says.

Temple Beth Elohim (TBE) in Wellesley has been [video streaming](#) services since July 2014. “We wanted to reach out to people who aren’t able to come to temple and make our services available to them wherever they may be,” says Jacob Ojok, IT manager at TBE. “We have many people who ‘join’ us for weekly services as well as for High Holidays and other holidays. And we know how incredibly important it is to family members and friends to watch B’nei Mitzvah services when, due to illness or distance, they are unable to be at TBE.”

The temple regularly streams Shabbat services, High Holidays and other holiday services, and special events.

For smaller congregations, audio streaming can be a good, lower-cost alternative. Congregation Dorshei Tzedek (CDT) in West Newton has been audio streaming High Holiday services since 2015 to meet the needs of its members. Congregants simply click on a link that’s posted on the congregation website. In addition, audio files of Rabbi Toba Spitzer’s d’vei Torah for the High Holidays are available [online](#).



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Simple and unobtrusive

At both Beth El and TBE, the video streaming equipment is unobtrusive and easy to operate. Once the equipment is installed and connected to the sound system, the congregations manage the streaming themselves. For most services, both synagogues use a single fixed camera, which is mounted where it's barely noticeable. On High Holidays, Beth El contracts for someone to operate the camera so its focus can shift from the ark to the bimah, as needed.

"I would encourage people to consider streaming, if possible," Susan says. "The feedback has been great, and it's inclusive in ways we hadn't even anticipated.

"We're just beginning to realize all the ways we can use it."