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Prayer in the Pandemic: High Holy Day Digital Worship in the Age of COVID-19

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Abstract

This capstone will use field research to reflect on how Reform Jewish clergy transferred 2020-1 High Holy Days to digital platforms. I investigate 2020's service offerings primarily with some examples from 2021. I will use qualitative research, in-depth interviews, and video footage viewing - to ask the following questions:

- What happens when we recreate/reconstruct something on a visual canvas where engagement is limited and largely symbolic?
- How do we uphold prior aesthetic commitments (how we expect to view, experience, and judge) to a religious holiday experience while navigating a new medium with different material/experiential constraints and possibilities?
- What substitutions, compensations, and outright reappraisals functioned most successfully during the 2020 pandemic's High Holidays?

The importance of aesthetics in this undertaking rests on our ability to maintain a sense of continuity amidst radical rupture. Through aesthetics - the sensory experience of worship - we sought to bring Judaism to a virtual, imaginary space. What "bring" meant in practice, however, varied across congregations. Some simply moved their services online without adaptation. Others modified services. Others reimagined services. As we sought to translate an embodied experience to the virtual domain, we chose varying strategies to best honor the spirit of the holiday. Those strategies each reflect aesthetic priorities that should be made explicit. Our aesthetic struggles and successes offer a very extreme and specific example of Jewish history's ongoing adaptation to change. They furthermore point to our capacity to adapt to a slower process of change that Judaism faces today amidst globalization and social media.

This thesis begins with the hypothesis that worship adaptations served as a primary clerical response to the pandemic's spiritual and social crises. Qualitative research allows this study to adopt its findings to the priorities articulated by its subjects. My research will allow me to measure the impact on congregational life and prayer during the pandemic. This study considers each subject's account and evaluates it based on its specific experiences.

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Introduction

In March 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared a global pandemic as COVID-19 reached the United States. This deadly and highly contagious airborne virus endangered individuals and spread through proximity. All forms of community life shut down. Public officials set "social distancing" restrictions such as the mandate to "stay in place" (to stay at home and avoid public space) and to stay at least six feet apart from others except for immediate household members or COVID pods. Activities such as group gatherings (parties, concerts, ceremonies, public rituals), singing publicly, playing musical instruments, speaking into microphones, sharing food, and making physical contact became COVID infection hot spots.

While any human might turn to prayer and religion during such a catastrophe, religious institutions became one of the most dangerous sites for COVID-19 exposure. Many clergypeople, including the rabbis and cantors of the Reform Jewish movement in North America, closed the doors of their houses of worship and ventured into the brave new world of digital worship.

The pandemic and its restrictions forced religious leaders to reconsider how they could lead worship and tend to their communities without regular, shared in-person access to public spaces. Reform rabbis grappled with the new technical limitations that impacted fundamental Jewish religious modalities and experimented with technological possibilities to bring Jewish prayer to congregants safely. As Jewish leaders turned towards High Holy Day preparation in the Spring of 2020, the Conservative Movement leadership offered a teshuvah to temporarily allow the live-streaming of services on Shabbat and festivals (The Rabbinical Assembly 2020). Across North America, the pandemic suspended Jewish life and its calendar's many rhythms. Each religious community navigated unique conditions that characterized its distinct culture and

culture. Jewish congregations struggled to grapple with Jewish identity's communal nature and orientation in physical praxis (Ben Lulu 2021).

Through communal gatherings and enacting Jewish rituals, Jews cultivate a sense of belonging and relationship with God that plays an integral role in Jewish affiliation (Furman 2012, Shokeid 2001, Sklare 1971). Reform Jewish rabbis supported their Jewish communities through innovative remote Jewish delivery systems. From Zoom Shabbat services (Ben Lulu 2021), drive-throughs, and music videos to progressive neighborhood Bibliodrama pageants, Reform clergy relied on innovation to foster Jewish practice during the pandemic. [1]

As a service leader and ritual designer for 2020 High Holy Days, I remember the panic, excitement, and curiosity that permeated digital Reform clergy spaces as ritual innovators like myself envisioned how we might construct the holiest days in the Jewish calendar in cyberspace. The idea initially seemed both absurd and pregnant with possibilities. Could the holiest days in the Jewish calendar retain their sanctity online? What would High Holy Days even look like on a digital platform? What did this mean for the future of Jewish ritual expression? My partner Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz and I juggled endless choices with no sense of how they might play out before a congregation. Our work required us to rethink the very task of service leadership and I knew from my engagement with colleagues that we experienced an unprecedented transformation in Jewish life. My experience inspired me to reach out to ten Reform Jewish service leaders across the country and study their ritual design process during this exceptional moment in Jewish history. The following study examines digital ritual design in the age of COVID-19 and its technical implications for our Jewish future.

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[1] I refer to Congregation Or Ami's Simchat Torah event in August of 2020. They asked congregants in a set of neighboring homes to create a scene from the Torah related to the theme "creation". Congregants took objects from home like old Halloween costumes, boxes, tablecloths, and more to create their own interactive exhibitions on their chosen Torah story. These kinds of creative events constituted a large part of Reform Jewish clergy's response to COVID and the loss of community.

Technology Drives Religious Change

In my interviews, Rabbi Alan Rabishaw of Congregation Or Rishon in Tahoe, California, identified the pandemic's liminal moment as a *gilgul*, a time to harken the newest spiritual and structural spiritual incarnation of Jewish life. Accordingly, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerates nascent trends in Jewish communal life that point to a dramatic shift in 21st century Reform Judaism's practice, emphasis, and structures. Dr. Steven Windmueller's commentary on the pandemic and Jewish life helps conceptualize this transformative time and digital worship's relevance amidst this change (See Windmueller 2020, Windmueller 2021). Above all, he identifies the shift to digital Judaism at large as a reflection of a broader "structural revolution."

The findings of this study reflect another trend Windmuller identifies as part of "Redefining Judaism" (Windmueller 2020). Amidst the pandemic's isolation and separation, he, like many others, predicts that a "relational Judaism" with "attention on personal connections" and relationships will remain a core defining element both in the structures and ideology of North American Reform Judaism. My interviews demonstrate the import of personal connections in ritual creators' design decisions in worship. However, they also show determination to learn from these choices to shape future worship settings. This research supports this conclusion as I examine their ritual designs from their inception to their impact on each community's worship practices.

Windmueller predicts that these service leaders will rely on "New Jewish Delivery Systems," such as digital worship. He writes:

> Zoom participation will likely be a prevalent expression of communal and religious practice in the aftermath of this virus. Technology and social media may become core structural elements in defining the 21st century Jewish model of practice (Windmueller 2020).

Digital worship facilitates religious participation by transcending geographic and physical barriers, such as deadly viruses. Structural changes from the pandemic might provide a mechanism to sustain deep collective engagement within religious communities far beyond this exceptional event. The future of Judaism is digital.

Windmueller's analysis aligns with scholarship on digital religion and, specifically, the work of historians and ritologists[2] such as Robert Ong and Stephen O'Leary (O'Leary 1996, p. 784, Ong 2012). Robert Ong describes how technological landscapes and developments impacted Western religious dogma and praxis developments. Ong supports his claim by evaluating the printing press's spurring role in the Protestant Reformation. Christian religious life before the printing press relied on a chirographic culture in which trained clergy inscribed manuscripts and led ritualized public recitations of scripture. The wide distribution of vernacular printed Bibles ended the Church's interpretive monopoly as reformers proclaimed *sola scriptura* as the ultimate reference for authoritative claims.

Jewish religious practice also hosts its own distinct historical relationship to technology and medium. For example, Dr. Ruth Langer explains how the Torah became a ritual object as the codex technology replaced scrolls for worship (Langer 2000). Langer's article discusses the Torah's sacralization as a scroll in response to technological change. As a ritual object, the Torah emerged from a *gilgul* that shifted the locus of Jewish worship from centralized worship to diasporic worship. This adaptation echoes the pandemic's push for worship accessible from any location. The printing press similarly instigated revolutionary changes that shaped Judaism's evolution in the early modern period, in some ways standardizing Jewish life and in other ways distributing information that incited rivaling interpretations and philosophies of Jewish practice. The reorganization and popularization of Talmud study, the siddur's standardization, and the

[2] A word used to describe scholars of ritual.

widespread proliferation of kabbalistic texts that would eventually fuel modern Jewish movements such as Sabbateanism and later Chassidism all reflect technology-inspired changes to the platforms, mediums, and methods where religious engagement could occur.[3]

Stephen O'Leary's 1996 article, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space," drew from Ong's findings to predict massive changes in religious modes of expression and authority with our contemporary digital revolution (O'Leary 1996). O'Leary hypothesized that digital platforms in the 21st century could similarly foster change in religious practices. This survey examines how technology influenced Windmueller's Judaism - contemporary Reform Jewish High Holy Day praxis - as it encountered a rapid and mandatory encounter with new technological mediums during 2020-1 and the COVID-19 global pandemic.

One study already exists on Reform Jewish ritual praxis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Elazar Ben Lulu examined Israeli Reform communities' online Jewish Shabbat practices through a "netnographic" lens to investigate technology's influence on participants' experience of Jewish life (Ben Lulu 2021). He applied anthropological ethnographic tools to study Zoom Shabbat's ritual impact on its participants to articulate difficulties and possibilities unearthed in participants' engagement with this new digital prayer modality. His article reveals how online services helped congregants navigate and reconstitute their relationship with clergy, Jewish practice, and Israeli society during the pandemic.

This study similarly examines Reform Jewish ritual practice from the perspectives of ten ritual authors, both rabbis and cantors, who designed digital High Holy Day rituals during the COVID-19 pandemic. I frame my insights in Bruce Kapferer, Catherine Bell, and Nadja Miczek's contributions to ritual theory as I examine how ritual designers changed Jewish rituals and how

[3] For more information on this subject, see Ruderman, D. (2010) *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History.* Princeton University Press.

2020 rituals changed Jewish life. These ritual designers fostered innovative prayer experiences and revitalized communal expressions of Jewish identity. Ultimately, this historical encounter with technology stimulated a burst of creative Jewish expression that highlighted the new ways in which Judaism can flourish in a more technologized society.

Scholarship

During the preparation process in 2020, many feared that they could not replicate a sacred High Holy Day service online. As a ritual designer, I initially dismissed this new online HHD platform as somehow 'less than' its 'real' counterpart in live ritual settings. My own experience and interviews taught me to question my understanding and relationship to the "virtual" and its role in transmitting and shaping meaning.

This study's theoretical framework examines the notion of the *virtual* within ritual theory to understand the dynamics of ritual, representation, and the impacts of ritual's relocation to cyberspace. This investigation into the notion of *virtuality* considers its evolution from its aesthetic origins into its evolution in post-structuralist philosophy and contemporary theories of ritual dynamics. While early ritual theory and conceptions of the virtual both suggested that ritual's form merely reproduced pre-specified meanings, post-structuralist notions of the virtual suggest that rituals serve as liminal "virtual realities." The ritual, as a virtuality, bearing a reality of its own, compresses reality into a structured, liminal ritual context that creates the possibility for mutual engagement in ritual meaning and the authorship of new meaning. In this way, the digital ritual itself gives way to new meaning in Jewish religious life and promotes change in its participants and in prayerful innovations that it kindles.

Digital ritual innovation's place in scholarship relies on contemporary intellectual movements in ritual theory that reframe ritual from its formalist anthropological origins in 19th

and early 20th-century anthropology. Early anthropologists like Emile Durkheim argued that ritual replicates and preserves a culture's indigenous symbols and social hierarchies. They regarded ritual as a mimetic instrument by which cultures reproduce traditional forms, maintain a collective consciousness (its signs, symbols, and shared set of meanings), and legitimize the dominant order (Bell 1992, p. 20). They understood symbols as set forms that convey pre-existing meanings.

A similar conception of symbols and their functioning influenced Susanne Langer, a philosopher who developed the first aesthetic analysis of the "virtual" as a specific kind of symbolic formation. The virtual relies on its forms' particular material arrangement to evoke a sense of the represented object. An artist's chosen arrangement of lines and color in space operates as if the projected image or experience is the "real" object. However, it remains merely an uncanny representation or a "virtuality." Langer offers the example of a mirror's reflection, which appears as if space behind it existed. The mirror needs its material, glass, to show that image. In plastic arts, an image's physical arrangement evokes a sense of virtual space that relies on its composition to exist. In music, the sequence of notes in time and volume (rhythm and dynamics) evoke the sense of virtual time that relies on the musical notes for its perception.

Langer's focus on material forms that produce fixed meaning classifies her as a structuralist philosopher. Her influence permeates ritual thinkers such as Van Goennep and Geertz, who understood ritual as a symbolic performance of specific social dramas through mimetic imitation of forms. When applied to digital religion, structuralism might argue that a digital space recreates such a form through digital tools. Some interviewees in this study will demonstrate this attitude towards their ritual efforts. However, a structuralist approach to digital religion ultimately does not consider how a medium shift's structural changes will impact the

meanings that the rite conveys or fosters amongst participants. When Rabbi Karyn Kedar told me that she strove to play to the medium to create the most compelling service possible, she understood one of this study's core assumptions. Form itself takes part in a ritual's dynamics of meaning-making (what Bruce Kapferer called *ritual dynamics).* Furthermore, a structuralist approach will not consider how the pandemic's specific context influences the meaning portrayed by the ritual or the potential to generate new meanings amongst its participants.

With the postmodern turn, scholars such as Victor Turner argued that a ritual's symbols do not simply reproduce set cultural meanings. Turner rejected the idea that ritual's function derives from a culture upon which it exclusively depends to gain its symbolic value. Instead, ritual, something inherently dynamic, transforms and authors meaning beyond those preexisting in a culture. Turner understood ritual as a structured liminal arena by which a community undergoes a transformation. Similarly, in my research, my participants' stories reveal how in 2020, ritual design spaces helped both designers and participants articulate new meanings and make sense of their chaotic and tragic context.

A ritual's *liminality* — its radical suspension of ordinary, everyday realities — shapes its transformational power. The ritual space creates a generative field beyond social constraints that helps resolve conflict and create new meaning. Through a ritual's liminality, its separateness, a ritual space generates and resolves paradox. Regarding ritual liminality's capacity for meaning-making, Turner writes, "Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence. [...] there is a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the factors of existence, experience, and knowledge, with a pedagogic intention" (Turner 1979). A ritual offers a space and time amidst social structures wherein a community can discover ways to resolve communal and personal tensions to find *communitas*, the

shared experience of collective belonging, and togetherness. Internal dynamics in a rite, including its social criticism, creativity, and its playfulness, all point to mechanisms through which rituals help break participants out of their quotidian experience and to generate novel understandings. (see Bakhtin 1988, V. Turner 1982, Kapferer page 46) In this sense, a ritual not only resolves structural conflicts; its material form creates an arena where participants join together and generate new collective understandings.

Turner's conception influenced contemporary ritologist Bruce Kapferer to turn to post-structuralist formations of the "virtual" to understand the representational dynamics amidst a ritual. According to Deleuze, the virtual exists as a reality on its own rather than as a representation of reality.[4] The ritual moment — the ritual enacted on the day of Yom Kippur, for example — acts like one frame in a film or a cross-section of the entire ritual formation process from the ritual's history to its surrounding context to its creation and, finally, its performance.[5] At the same time, reality emerges from and creates the same morphogenic processes that make the virtual. A virtuality thus scaffolds reality through ordering techniques that give shape to a ritual's form and draw attention to specific dynamics in the wider world.

Kapferer demonstrates this concept through repetition, a typical structure in ritual praxis. Repetition captures a sense of time that humans can grasp. Each repetition emphasizes both time's redundant nature, like the ticking of a clock, while it also highlights time's progression. In Jewish prayer, some repetitive forms act like a clock's bells as they mark the end of one rite and the beginning of a different rite (such as the Chatzi Kaddish). Thus the ritual helps its participants grasp a sense that they move through a ritual experience from start to finish as they navigate its beginning, middle, and end.

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[4] (and he contrasts 'virtual' with 'actual' following the Henri Bergon's philosophy)
[5] (called a multiplicity, according to Deleuze)

Kapferer argues that ritual's virtuality births its liminality. A ritual designer weaves together rites, texts, music, movements, the ritual's mise en scène (staging), etc., in order to create a texture that gives rise to meaning-making dynamics upon its performance. He writes that a ritual's composition "interweaves such forms as…plastic arts, liturgy, music, song, narrative storytelling, and drama [...]" which, in their performance, manifest "varying possibilities for the constitution and ordering of experience, as well as for the reflection on and communication of experience." (Turner 1986, p. 191). He stresses:

> The directionality of performance and the media of performance are structuring of the ritual context; together they constitute the meaning of the ritual, variously enable communication of its meaning, and create the possibility for the mutual involvement of participants in the one experience or else distance them and lead to their reflection on experience perhaps from a structured perspective outside the immediacy of the experience.

A rite's disjunctive space promotes its non-representational nature. The unique, liminal space encourages a novel, open-ended reconceptualization of the world outside of ritual. Thus ritual can integrate seemingly paradoxical categories such as cyberspace and ancient Jewish symbols of atonement into novel outcomes like new prayer modalities or ways to build community.

Kapferer's notion of virtuality echoes the work of Catherine Bell, a scholar who grounds the idea of ritual in its praxis with the process-oriented term *ritualization.* Bell defines ritualization as "the strategic production of expedient schemes that structure an environment in such a way that the environment appears to be the source of the schemes and their values." (Bell 1992, p. 140) Through the process of ritualization, a ritual author orders ritual building blocks like media, voice, prayer, movement, and thematic content to differentiate a virtual space and time. The actual performance of the ritual event affirms the ritual's existence, much like the way a

ritual's virtuality provides an accessible window into the ritual design process. Through the ritual design process, ritual designers make choices as design goals, medium, and context interact. New possibilities emerge for ritual designers to integrate old ritual forms with new contextual realities. This "structured and structuring structure" (Wulf 2006, p. 404; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996, p. 161) allows a ritual designer to straddle the opposition of old forms and new meanings inherent in ritual.

Ritual does not rely exclusively on the literal reproduction of specific rites deemed sacred by authority. Instead, it acts as a process in which a ritual actor mediates old and new forms via their physical content to create new meaning. If Kapferer understands a ritual performance as a virtuality that conveys meaning upon its performance, Bell understands that the ritualization process itself becomes a virtuality. In 2020, this process gave rise to meaning-making dynamics by which ritual authors crafted new ways to make sense of the pandemic and the chaotic context surrounding their work.

Ritual Building Blocks and Transfer

This study draws from Bell's definition and considers digital ritual by examining its parts — its contextual aspects and its ritual building blocks. These building blocks might include a ritual's internal dimensions, such as its script, performance, performativity, aesthetics, structure, interaction, symbolism, etc. Researchers at the University of Heidelberg categorize these building blocks as ritual's "internal dimensions," in contrast to a ritual's "contextual aspects," such as its media, geography/space, culture, religion, politics, society, and more. Scholars of ritual dynamics consider the relationship between a ritual's external context and its internal parts.

When ritual transfers from one medium to another, scholars predict its building blocks or internal form will change. According to the theory of ritual transfer, as articulated by Langer,

Luddeckens, Radde-Antweiler, and Snoek, “when a ritual is transferred, i.e., when one or more of its contextual aspects is changed, changes in one or more of its internal dimensions can also be expected” (Langer et al., 2006, p. 1). The chart below is adapted from their study to demonstrate some of the contextual and internal dimensions under consideration in this study (Langer et al., 2006, p. 2).

Contextual Aspects
Media
Geography / Space
Ecosystem
Culture
Religion
Politics
Economy
Society
Gender
Group carrying the Ritual Tradition
History

‘Internal’ Dimensions
Script
Performance
Performativity
Aesthetics
Structure
Transmission of Ritual Contents
Intentionality (Strategic Use, Instrumentalisation)
Self-Reflectivity
Interaction
Communication
Psycho-Social Functionality
Mediality
Symbolism
Ascribed Meanings

A classic example of ritual transfer lives at the heart of rabbinic Judaism. The destruction of the Second Temple demanded adaptations in priestly Judaism’s sacrificial rites so that devotional practice could continue amidst exile. Jewish rituals and practice transferred to the context of the Beit Midrash, where the remaining authorities on Jewish tradition were situated. They adapted Jewish rituals such as Torah chanting in synagogues by adapting older Torah reading practices to fit their situational environment - the Beit Midrash. This case is an example of the “diachronic transfer of ritual,” which occurs when a group has a considerable continuity of location and composition of its membership, whereas the historical context changes. Such dramatic historical changes often result in “changes in, for example, the religious or political, contextual aspects, or in the media involved in the practice or transmission of a ritual” (Langer et al., 2006, p. 3).

Ritual's dynamic nature becomes similarly pronounced in the Internet age when individuals can access religious ritual texts online or participate through online mediums like Zoom or Livestream. In this example, contextual change occurs through the medium. Ritual transfer theory predicts that internal changes in the rituals themselves will happen with this significant contextual change. In the case of medium shifts, this usually takes place in the internal dimension of "form." The chart above demonstrates other internal dimensions that might shift in the transfer. I will investigate these changes more fully in Chapter 2 on ritual context.

One can characterize specific modifications to a ritual's internal dimensions through heuristic strategies, i.e., using terminology to better identify particular techniques in ritual creation. Nadja Miczek draws from the theory of ritual transfer to identify three categories of changes to ritual, including inventions, eliminations, and transformations. Inventions include new additions to rituals in a new context. Eliminations reference aspects of rituals subtracted from the recontextualized ritual. Transformations include restructured rites within ritual that draw from the ritual's original form but shift to fit the medium. In my abstract, I offer a similar set of heuristics, including additions, subtractions, and innovations. However, in my analysis, I employ Miczek's categories to analyze the transferred ritual's composition and gain insight into the transfer's impact. Attention to ritual praxis frames this study such that readers might simultaneously draw new insights into their ritual authorship while deepening their understanding of its theoretical dynamics.

This study uses Kapferer, Bells, and Miczek's insights to relate to ritual as something curated from specific textures and compositional features to create something entirely new - in this case, virtual High Holy Days. As clergy navigated the new digital environment, they experimented with various ritual textures and unearthed new possibilities to accomplish their

compositional goals. The theory of ritual transfer suggests that when a ritual moves between media, its internal form will change. This study elaborates on this change and the repercussions of ritual transfer as a process of *ritualizing*. A process-based examination of ritual will help illuminate the engagement between ritual components and their external context, a dynamic powered by the ritual designer's aesthetic and worship philosophies and their specific communal needs.

The 2020 High Holy Days were not about taking offline rituals and creating "virtual" rituals (in Langer's sense of the word) online. Instead, the ritual's design demonstrated a negotiation between the ritual designer's worship goals and philosophy of ritual design, their idealization of these Jewish rites, the new digital medium's infrastructural capacities, accessible, expressive mediums within cyberspace, communal expectations, and their communities' crisis-driven pastoral needs. [6] In this study, the digital medium itself became a factor that influenced these internal ritual dynamics, and in turn, ritual designers engaged the digital and the religious to reimagine Judaism in cyberspace.[7] I examine a question posted by Kristin Radde-Antweiler in her study of ritual transfer: What happens when one moves a 3D ritual onto a 2D audiovisual digital platform?

First, this study will present the worship goals that informed ritual designers and ritual examples that demonstrate how these goals influenced their design choices. Next, this study will specify limitations and conditions that demanded the ritual's transfer to cyberspace and shaped service designers' creative decision-making as they navigated this transfer. Finally, I use Miczek's hermeneutics to navigate the most common adaptations to High Holy Day ritual as they migrated

[6] Consider virtual infrastructures to encompass the formats and interfaces predetermined by the software designers who create interfaces such as Zoom and Livestream.
[7] This process of ritual transfer, when a ritual undergoes change in response to change in context, becomes a platform that encourages changes that help the ritual's meaning retain its relevance amidst changing conditions. This concept derives from contemporary scholarship on online ritual and thus will be explored more fully later in this introduction.

to cyberspace. This study gathers service designers' creative design solutions to the problem of ritual transfer, reveals common techniques and innovations, and investigates these choices amidst their community practice.

Methodology

Case-study analysis best supports this process-based approach to ritual investigation. This study highlights case studies and analyzes emergent themes through a grounded theory approach. Case studies helped demonstrate how individual congregations navigated their unique set of circumstances, communal norms, demographic patterns, and site-specific pandemic conditions, with distinct responses. The survey and observations helped answer this study's core question: What happens when you take a 3D service and bring it to a 2D space". Initially, I formed a hypothesis based on my literature review: context drives ritual changes in the transition to digital worship.

This capstone synthesizes data compiled from interviews and archived service recordings from 2020 and 2021. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 rabbis from various sized congregations in Florida, California, Texas, Illinois, and Indiana. Participants were selected through word-of-mouth recommendations from peers and rabbis in the field. I conducted semi-structured interviews on Zoom for 60-75 minutes from August to November 2021 with standardized questions (included below). I then observed recorded videos from the participating synagogues' Yom Kippur Shacharit services in 2020 and 2021. Interviewees discussed all High Holy Day practices and congregant systems (services, programming, outreach, etc.) and often included reflections on Shabbat services in relationship with High Holy Day practice.

Survey Questions	
Q1a-f	Background questions: a. Size of your production budget? b. How many families? c. Clergy partners d. How long have you been there

	e. Were you multi-access, all online? f. Do you have access to recordings of 2020 services?
Q2	When the congregant leaves the worship experience, what do you want them to have felt?
Q3	When you, the rabbi or cantor, leave the worship experience, what do you want to feel?
Q4	Tell me about the process of your preparation with your clergy team to build the service. - Can you describe how you ultimately structured the service?
Q5	What priorities informed your choices in your service design?
Q6	What elements of the service did you: - eliminate - reimagine - substitute - add due to the digital platform?
Q7	What changes will you retain in the future?
Q8	What extra forms of in-service communication did you think were necessary to have with congregants because of the digital environment?
Q9	How did you work with the Torah and shofar services in the digital environment?
Q10	What were your “pain points” - the most difficult aspects of online worship?
Q11	What were you most proud of?
Q12	What kind of feedback did you receive?
Q13	If you could at all, did you find aspects of the service to be prayerful? 2021? Do you think that impacted how you led?
Q14	What did you learn as a service leader from the experience?

The approach used for analyzing the responses followed an open coding and integration methodology.

- Conducted interviews over Zoom with participants
- Transcribed interviews

- Examine high occurrences in the transcription text
- Observe and code themes as they arise
- Used word clouds to analyze themes

After I analyzed the data and drew up themes, I decided to focus primarily on 2020 services to heighten attention to the relationship between a certain context and a ritualization process. I include some examples from 2021 in order to emphasize 2020 trends. Furthermore, I limit my analysis to Yom Kippur Shacharit, with occasional examples from other services when appropriate.

Note of Caution:

This study did not seek to measure congregant responses to digital worship. This study sought to understand how and to what ends did clergy adapted their services to the digital environment. The goal of this study is not to establish what is or is not effective, but rather to help clergy understand the range of choices they navigate in adapting to digital worship.

Chapter 1: The Reform Yom Kippur Rite

Jews pray from the machzor during the High Holy Days, a prayer book with liturgy specific to Selichot, Rosh Hashana, and Yom Kippur. Across Jewish tradition(s), the machzor[8] serves as a basic framework that halakhic Jews can follow and, to some extent, return to and replicate each year in their HHD worship. This notion is grounded in the etymology of the word itself, machzor, which implies a cyclical return (also demonstrated in the term for the *siddur*, from the word 'seder' or order). Machzorim offer a clear ritual matbea tefillah (service order) which consists of a specific arrangement of prayers, piyyutim (medieval prayer poetry), and choreographed rites.

While the machzor might be an appropriate place to begin a discussion about digital transfer to compare some kind of standard with 2020 and 2021 rituals, Reform Jewish worship emerges from a non-halakhic Jewish movement and thus lacks mandated religious-legal standards for service order and content.[9] One might argue that a study that considers adaptation in the face of contextual triggers might compare 2019 services with 2020/1 services to understand how the ritual changed from year to year. For most participants in this study, 2019 services followed similar patterns in their service design. Most included essential atonement rites such as the Vidui, recognizable pieces of nusach, thematic discussions on atonement and forgiveness, and more subtle stylized elements such as hair, robe, tallit choice, and flower arrangement to differentiate this sacred day from other sacred moments. This "linear service order," as one of my respondents identified it, "makes you feel like you should keep flipping to the next page." The services flowed like many Reform Jewish services between the rabbi and cantor (or music makers) in a

[8] The machzor is a prayer book used specifically for High Holy Days.
[9] Though siddurim in and of themselves differ across major Jewish subgroups and their respective traditions including the Ashkenazi rite, the Sephardic rite, and more.

"ping-pong" effect, as Rabbi Karyn Kedar articulated. Clergy partners take turns reading the next part of the service according to the machzor with occasional honors for certain congregants.

These ritual details each serve to create the many distinctions that communicate Reform Jewish High Holy Day services each year. Bell explains the ritualization process as a ritual's shaping and reshaping over time with each semi-recursive performance. Every year, clergy teams return to the drawing table with a similar set of ritual design tools and yet another year's worth of meanings, social commentary, and reconciliation to foster through the ritual space.

Bell writes that "ritual is built out of widely accepted blocks of traditions generating a sense of cultural continuity even when the juxtaposition of these blocks defines a unique ritual ethos" (Bell 1992, p. 195). Reform Jewish ritual authors base their rituals on loose, collectively-understood notions of 'traditional' order. In my interviews, rabbis offered a variety of titles and metaphors to schematize these unspoken communal expectations, such as those mentioned above. In one of my interviews, a rabbi considered their services "more traditional" because they once employed Rabbi Richard Levi's *On the Wings of Awe* machzor, which contains more rites that make up an Orthodox machzor, including more Hebrew text. Others understand more minor rites to reflect the building blocks (see Bell 1992) that they arrange to build towards a specific goal or experiential effect. Rites such as Avinu Malkeinu, Unetonetokef, the confession (Vidui), the shofar service, the Torah service, and the Kaddish make up what Rabbi Seth Limmer calls the "High Holy Day Greatest Hits," "High Holy Day Sacred Cows" in the humorous words of Cantor Vicky Glikin. Rabbi Mara Nathan's team at Temple Beth-El in San Antonio used these ritual building blocks to guide her service design when they learned that they would design online services for the 2020 HHDs:

> It started out on paper, and we created diagrams that showed the different parts of the service, what is essential, what is the mix of 'normal liturgy that people are comfy with, the hit parade of HHD stuff that we can't do with, and then we decided to get rid of everything else because we didn't want people to get Zoom fatigue.… We [strongly felt that we needed to] keep it to the hour. We slashed so much of the liturgy, yet there were certain things that we couldn't get rid of [like] Avinu Malkeinu.

Instead of halakhic standards, unspoken communal expectations attenuate the unlimited freedom that ritual authors might otherwise enjoy. Nonetheless, with its non-halakhic emphasis on articulating relatable religious experiences and practice, Reform Judaism ideologically allows its ritual authors the freedom for robust ritual innovation to create experiential outcomes.

The ritual authors described in this study play an essential role in the ritualization process. Their own goals and perspectives heavily impact how they choose to design services and, in turn, how rituals pass on through non-halakhic communities. They act as the mediator "in whose body lies the schemes by which to shift the organization or significance of many other culturally possible situations" (Bell 1992, p. 85). Ritual designers develop "schemes of practical [ritual design] mastery are acquired through the interaction of the body with a structured environment. Through extensive ritual experience, the very perceptions and dispositions of the body in ritual embed themselves "deeply into the bone" (Grimes 2000), and over time ritual officiators understand them merely as "the way things are done" (Bell 1992, p. 107). My respondents expressed worship goals, their long-culled experience in service, and the schema they use to help ritualize Jewish worship in the contemporary world.

Ritual Design as Art

In my interviews, art, drama, and theater recurred pragmatic schemes for worship design. Rabbi Jonathan Aaron explains how his theater background influences how he understands his task as a rabbi and ritual designer: "what we're doing is poetry. People live their lives in prose. When we go into Shabbat, that's poetry. I say to my wedding couples… 'You tell me the 'what,' and leave it up to me to make it poetic and artistic.' That's our job - to take a moment and heighten that moment so that it's more beautiful than simply saying, 'Ok, we're drinking a cup of wine to a tune.' You want to create these dramatic moments - it's drama." Drama similarly informs Rabbi Denise Eger, who explains her approach to ritual design using the metaphor of theater: "We have approached our High Holy Days from a production standpoint using the theater, not the language of the synagogue. It references how we set things up. We have always used the theater as our measuring stick for many reasons." Theater as a heuristic tool helped her approach the arrangement of ritual components into a meaningful design. "That means," she explains, "Beginning, middle, and end." Eger draws from a classic structure from fiction, rhetoric, and art.

Rabbi Karyn Kedar similarly structures her worship from her phenomenologically-informed approach to prayer. Her liturgical philosophy developed with her clergy partner Cantor Jen Frost in response to what they call the "Traditional Reform Liturgical Experience" or "ping-pong," the way in which they see most Reform clergy leaders facilitate services:

> The cantor sings, the rabbi speaks, and the cantor sings. We decided that we were going to create an experience that would be more like ricochet. Ricochet would be when the cantor and the rabbi link the musical and the spoken experience. The experience of worship ricochets off the intellect into the soul, off to the people, into the liturgy, into a sense of

> wow, into a sense of transcendence, into a sense of intimacy. We developed three modes of worship that should happen simultaneously. One is transcendence, a moment in which the person is experiencing a moment of transcendence. The other is conversational - a moment in which you feel that there's almost a conversational tone in the worship experience. And the third is intimacy. You have the worshiper actually feel like they're talking, you're talking or singing exactly to them, and you've entered into an intimate relationship. [So that's how we do it.] We go in and out of transcendence, conversation, and intimacy. The ways to do that are multifold. But just to pause here, I'll say that we pay a lot of attention to the beginning of the worship experience to the end of the worship experience.

Rabbi Kedar describes modalities that emerge from a ritual's material construction and the dynamics that it fosters amongst participants. She understands that worship takes many modes and enables many different outcomes, including both connection to others and God and the internal experience of prayer as she describes it: "For me personally, [worship] is internal — it's an internal sensation of which I have elevated beyond the text and be in the moment, responding to the moment. The sense of calm, peace or inspiration or ecstasy depending on the moment." She understands ritual as a kind of liminal experience, an experience that takes an individual outside their normal state of being into a form of prayer. A ritual can drive transcendence and deepen social connectivity. At the end of her statement, her stress on beginnings and ends echos Rabbi Eger's final comments on beginnings, middles, and endings. Both tend to the ritual's structure to create an experience that awes, connects, and fosters transcendence.

Ritual Design as a Container

Other participants implicitly conceived their ritual designs as a therapeutic, sacred space constructed with specific material techniques and attention to sense elements. Rabbi Meir Bargeron, for example, shares that his "primary goal is to create a space where they can feel and be aware of their nefesh." Rabbi Bargeron explains further:

> One or two things are happening, or they're both happening [when designing a ritual space where people can sense their nefesh (soul)]. Some people will respond to one, and some people may respond to another. So what I mean by that is I'm creating a space, a container, a spiritual space that promotes people being able to connect to theirs, to their soul. And I guess I have an idea of that being a real thing and a real place inside of people, and everyone perceives it personally very differently.… Some people need support to do that. If I was immediately trying to create a space [without that support, then] there might be spiritual crickets because they don't have that. They need help. They're growing. Growing isn't even quite right. It's just like sometimes, when you're in yoga, you have a prop that will help you.

With his background in social work, Rabbi Bargeron offers an image of ritual as a therapeutic space that helps its participants gain self-awareness, foster their spirituality, cultivate well-being, and promote growth. Though he does not use the plain language of catharsis, he paints a picture of a ritual space as a safe environment to turn inward, cultivate spiritual awareness, and foster emotional health through environmental means. Turner's emphasis on the ritual's separate, liminal space's generative role resonates in Rabbi Bargeron's worship philosophy.

Schemes such as drama, art, and therapeutic containers help ritual authors through something scholars call "framing" (Handelman 2006). Rabbi Eger's emphasis on beginnings,

middles, and ends reflects one of many tools that help ritual authors shape an experience and craft a liminal space. Rabbi Kedar emphasized the importance of transitions in her planning process as another way she shapes the ritual's structure and space. These rabbis focused on crafting a separate, transformative arena or elevating everyday actions through artistry and plot structure to distinguish a moment as unique and sacred. These techniques exemplify the tools of the ritualization process.

Worship Goals

In the ritualization process, a ritual author's worship preferences and goals shape the choices they make and the ritual they shape. By goals, I do not refer to articulated visions for service design, though one clergy team, in particular, did write out a clear set of plans for their HHD 2020 services. As Catherine Bell writes, "ritual symbols and meanings are too indeterminate and their schemes too flexible to lend themselves to any simple process of instilling fixed ideas" (Bell 1992, p. 221). Instead, I asked participants to describe the emotional impact they wished to make through the worship experience. This question solicits the undefined (and often unarticulated) hopes ritual designers hold as they shape ritual experiences. Before a ritual materializes into its final form, its form twists and changes under the social and emotional pressures asserted by its ritual designers. These pressures played a more significant role in 2020's HHD ritual design than in more stable years since the context impelled ritual authors to create something entirely new.[10] For practitioners in the field, a full exploration of worship goals will

[10] In other words, ritual authors had to create radically different rituals for High Holy Days in 2020, and so they inevitably thought more about their creative ritual arrangements as they endured the pandemic's social and psychological pressures. As such, they had more opportunity for their context to impact their choices and the goals that they set. Additionally, the pressures of Covid drove rabbis to treat this as a very unique moment of time. For example, the title of the facebook group "Dreaming Up High Holy Days 2020" (one of the main social media networks for ritual designers in 2020) in and of itself points out how rabbis saw this as an activity in reimagining their work.

help reveal structuring possibilities since many Reform Jewish clergy share similar goals in their worship design.

Each respondent expressed specific attitudes towards digital worship and the pandemic that influenced their approach to service design. Above all, my respondents named "connectedness" and "experience" as the dominant worship ends they seek to cultivate. Some respondents consciously shaped their rituals' internal dynamics for specific experiential outcomes. In contrast, others approached their ritual craft to facilitate deeper social ties within the community in a general way. These goals influenced the technological and ritual design choices they made. In particular, clergy that set out to create immersive prayer experiences increase their production value[11] and model their services structure from external points of reference, such as the therapeutic container or audiovisual artistic mediums like television, theater, and film.

I asked participants to articulate what outcomes they generally seek in services in terms of congregant and clergy prayer experiences. The top two responses included *connection* and *experience*.[12] The figure below (Figure A) demonstrates significant words in participant responses. Word size indicates the frequency of word choice. The word cloud represents an array of words that capture a trend across interviews: the ritual designers wanted to design experiences that facilitated connection to spiritual, social, and emotional life. They conveyed a desire to facilitate transformative, transcendent experiences that could inspire and move people with a sense of sustenance, resilience, joy, holiness, and comfort. They envisioned worship experiences that would help participants experience transcendence and release. This worship goal aligns with

[11] Production value refers to the quality of a production based on the amount of time, effort, and money invested in the its design process and its outcome. In this study, higher production values mean more postproduction editing, higher quality visuals, quality equipment, etc.

[12] The word *sense* also came up frequently as in 'I want congregants to feel a sense of…'. Since this word points to efforts to create an experience that drives certain sense impressions, I do not examine this word and instead focus on the word 'experience'

Victor Turner's notion of a ritual as a transformative, liminal space that catalyzes transformation, catharsis, or internal change of some kind, in this case, from atonement.

Figure A: Responses to Question 2: “When a worshiper leaves the service, E
what do you want them to feel / have felt?” Word size correlates with the frequency of use in participant responses.

Participants used the words “connection” and “experience” to reveal their attitudes towards their ritual design task. Rabbi Paul Kipnes and Rabbi Alan Rabishaw interpret the word “connection” similarly but understand “experience” differently, suggesting diverging worship

philosophies and consequent ritual design schemes. Rabbi Alan Rabishaw refers to connection as a social experience that is additionally prayerful, but that is not centrally so, nor does it primarily define the quality of connectedness. The Jewish theological notion of 'peoplehood' captures his spiritual notion of social connection. Rabbi Rabishaw explains:

> There are moments that don't call for this, but I want people to feel a sense of joy, a sense of connection. I want them to feel as though they've had the opportunity to pray and to engage with our tradition, with each other. [Rituals build] our connection to each other and our sense of belonging and peoplehood. And that, to me is prayerful and spiritual as well.… I like to leave room for people to have their own experience, but I also like to control things enough so I know that whatever we're putting out there is quality from an objective standard.

Rabishaw contrasts experience as something that people independently feel instead of the controlled aspect of the ritual that he designs to polish the ritual. Similar to Rabbi Michael Shefrin, he notes a tension between the quality of the service and its community-centric design. Rabbi Rabishaw ultimately chose his digital platform based on his community-oriented worship goals. Unlike my other respondents, he wanted people to "see as many faces as possible" rather than cultivate a highly curated audiovisual experience akin to filmmaking. His ritual innovations each serviced his goal for greater community engagement, such as his communal kazoo-blasting shofar extravaganza.[13]

Rabbi Paul Kipnes similarly understands connection as an explicitly social experience that can take on spiritual dimensions for those who resonate with a more interpersonal expression of spirituality. In contrast, however, he aims to create a highly curated experience that can draw

[13] Each congregant played the kazoo at home along with their official shofar blowers. See Chapter 3.

participants' attention away from the *tachlis* (the nuts and bolts) of "ritual" so that they can feel submerged in something that impacts them. He states:

> I want them to feel connected to other people and the community…. I want them to be connected to others and be able to release…. I would like them to have an experience of holiness, whether that's with God or the Holy One or with the kahal, which is a manifestation of God's presence. That's fine too. I would like them not to feel like you're doing a ritual, but that they have experienced something meaningful…. [Like Disneyland,] you go in there, and you have an experience from the moment you walk in….[14]

Here the word "experience" has a more specific usage that references a highly curated event or encounter that causes people to experience a sense of significance. He crafts the experience to draw people into the participation mystique so that their sense of the experience subsumes the sense of a "ritual" occurring. He similarly states in response to the second question (What do you want to have felt leaving the worship experience?) that he wants to feel "carried away" so that if he closes his eyes and just listens to the Cantor, he might even lose his place in the service, despite being its facilitator. His word use implies something memorable, transcendent of daily experience, and possibly even transformational, similarly evoking Turner's conception of liminality.

When Rabbi Kipnes's team learned about Rabbi Kipnes' HHD rituals ultimately wove in

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[14] See Kipnes, 2019. Rabbi Kipnes draws his ideas from several analogies in his external writings on the future Jewish synagogue. He argues that a synagogue should be like Disneyland so that people come for the experience rather than the rides alone. A synagogue should share the personalization that early Starbucks stores offered with name personalization on coffee cups and quality music. The synagogue community should offer a place for any person to feel like they can belong, like in the show Cheers, when everyone meets at the bar including "Norm the schmuck" (Rabbi Kipnes's words). Finally, a synagogue experience should remind someone of a visit to their grandparents house. The experience should make them feel completely at home and cared for. Each of these examples come together in his article to suggest that synagogues should create immersive, personalized experiences for congregants.

phenomenal musical performances with his renowned cantor, Doug Cotler, who chose professional-quality singers from their community. The clergy team did away with a fixed matbea. Instead, it fostered an experience that flowed from prayer segments to a music video featuring congregants to meditation and at-home ritual gestures such as holding family members close during the Priestly Benediction.

Rabbi Kipnes's experience-focused strategy overlaps with Rabbi Karyn Kedar's articulated worship ideal. She takes the notion of 'experience' to a phenomenological level through a technique she calls "ricochet." She states, "the experience of worship ricochets off the intellect into the soul, off to the people, into the liturgy. 'Wow.' Into a sense of transcendence, into a sense of intimacy." Rabbi Kedar understands experience as a multisensory, complex phenomenon that fosters particular feelings and resonances in participants. Her philosophy resonates with that of Susanne Langer, discussed above, in her understanding of aesthetic structures as a unity of feeling and form. Kedar's neologism came from her extensive partnership with Cantor Jen Frost and their accumulated perception of ritual flow. Over time they articulated a heuristic to capture how they repeated differentiated their services and elevated their content. This example demonstrates how ritual experts bring their own embodied experience into their design schemes. Later in this study, I will examine her notion of ricochet from a technical focus. She uses the word both to categorize the experience of ricochet and as a term for the ritual design technique that kindles this experience.

Other uses of connection capture a diversity of preferences and outcomes in worship. Rabbi Seth Limmer understands his goal as a ritual designer to identify the many ways in which people connect to Judaism to cater an experience to their preferences. He explains:

> [I want people to feel] connected. People connect to different things…. Some connect to sermon, some connect to music, some connect to mood, some connect to liturgy, some connect to community. So how do you create a meaningful experience that hits on all of those things and allows them to happen but doesn't do any one at the expense of the other?

He uses the word connected to refer to the things that draw people in or what people enjoy or find meaningful. Connectedness as a goal helps him craft a worship experience that weaves varying connection points for diverse congregational needs. His use of the word experience references the whole - all the sources of connection in one worship experience, including connection to the means (sermons, music) and the ends (other people, God).

In contrast to Rabbi Limmer, Rabbi Denise Eger and Cantor Vicky Glikin use the word connection to capture the many ends of connectedness that ritual can foster in an individual. Eger stated: "I want [congregants] to feel engaged and connected. Connected to community, connected to God, connected to tradition, connected to a sense of hopefulness and comfort." She refers to connection as a multi-faceted word that captures the ultimate goals, or ends, of our search for connection. She focuses less on a goal for congregants' connecting to the specific components or ends of Jewish worship at her disposal, like music or liturgical units.

Similarly, Cantor Vicky Glikin seeks to foster a more general sense of connection in worship. She explained that she wants her congregants "to be transformed by the experience and to feel connected - more connected to ourselves, to each other, and to something beyond ourselves." Her response captures the three-fold dimension of connection: a rearticulated sense of one's own emotional life, belonging and purpose in a community, and a spiritual awareness of the sacred. Her use of the word connection demonstrates that connection occurs on multiple levels and moves from the individual to the communal to the transcendent in an experience within and

beyond the ritual. In 2020, her team sought to "ensure…a sense of welcome throughout the worship experience and leading up to the worship experience." The worship experience does not constitute the whole experience, which extends to the moments leading up to worship. The ritual, a separate space where a unique experience occurs, fosters multiple senses of connection and transformation.

Following my analysis of High Holy Day "sacred cows" as the baseline for Reform Jewish rituals, I wondered how my respondents conceived of Jewish tradition and its role in fostering worship outcomes. Three respondents mentioned tradition with varying degrees of fidelity to the Jewish tradition's actual body of culture and practice in their responses. Rabbi Alan Rabishaw expressed that he wanted his congregants "to feel as though they've had the opportunity to pray and to engage with our tradition." However, he never specifies how he fosters this, and he does not clarify which aspects of tradition to which he refers. Rabbi Denise Eger explained that she wanted to foster a connection to tradition with similarly loose language. The word "tradition" indicates the felt sense of connection with Jewish tradition's practices, liturgy, choreography, and ritual engagement. Rabbi Seth Limmer recognized that "some [congregants] connect to liturgy," while he acknowledged that worshipers each connect with a different aspect of Jewish life.

However, tradition could also reference a more vague sense of looking toward the past. Rabbi Michael Shefrin seeks a more explicit sense of turning back to the past in order to inform the future. Through prayer ritual, he seeks "to take people back to the years past to remind them of what they've accomplished each year since, and then going forward. It's not that the future's forgotten about. Still, there's a real harkening back to yesteryear." Rabbi Shefrin emphasizes the semi-mimetic nature of ritual as something that gestures towards a referred object without fully evoking the thing itself. He considers himself "more traditional" than his clergy partner, Rabbi

Brenner Glickman. “The example I often give is he doesn't wear a yarmulke, and I do. He wears a skinny tallit, and I wear a big one,” he explained. One of his most significant insights from the process was that cuts to liturgy did not impact his prayer goal, as articulated above. I will discuss his approach to service eliminations further in Chapter 3, Ritual Transfer.

A final consideration in worship goals is how rabbis perceive quality in their ritual design. Rabbi Alan Rabishaw expressed a need for balance between quality and community, both of which could contradict the other if taken to some extreme. Some rabbis felt that overdoing the production could counteract their goal for connectedness while others believed that heightened attention to production-related details facilitated connectedness. Rabbi Michael Shefrin explained that he and Rabbi Glickman wanted to create a smooth experience for the congregants that fosters their ability to pray. He explained, “I want my congregants to not notice a lot. I want them to be as much in the prayer space as possible because we didn't make any weird mistakes. Nobody tripped and fell.” On the other hand, Rabbi Shefrin also expressed a reticent conservatism…they tried not to go so overboard as to be “obnoxious Hollywood.” This nuanced attitude towards quality demonstrates the sensitive balance the ritual designers had to strike in building their ritual’s virtuality.[15]

[15] In Chapter 2, ‘Context 2: Medium’, I investigate more fully how television and audiovisual mediums require an extreme attention to details in order to engage participants in a sense of shared presence. A televised ritual’s virtuality requires a nuanced attention to the minute-by-minute flow of its programming, so ritual designers here navigated the balance between this new need and past ritual formations.

Chapter 2: Context & Ritual's Internal Dimensions

This section discusses how external factors during the pandemic impacted internal dimensions of ritual with a direct focus on causality instead of technical analysis of those changes. Chapter 3 will offer an analysis of the rituals' internal changes.

Worshipers came to the 2020 High Holy Days amidst a highly volatile political and social climate with rigid spatial restrictions to prevent the virus's spread. All forms of physical proximity endangered peoples' lives. The pandemic context demanded ritual innovation that could respond to the structural, emotional, social, and psychological conditions unique to 2020. This section highlights the critical contextual factors that shaped the pragmatic design choices that ritual designers navigated for the 2020 High Holy Day rituals.

According to the theory of ritual transfer, changes in a ritual's external context drive internal changes. Langer and Snoek name medium, geography/space, politics, society, and significant historical events as examples of contextual changes. Their article explores ritual transfer examples in which one contextual aspect changes. During the pandemic, all of these contextual aspects shifted so that the High Holy Day rituals could not rely on their most fundamental components, such as location or live participants.

Context 1: Health, Safety, and Structural Contextual Conditions

The core context that impacts this study comes from the pandemic itself. Physical proximity's danger radically altered how people could gather and required massive adaptation. The stay-in-place strategy asked people to stay in their homes unless they were essential workers, including medical professionals, grocery store workers, post office employees, and municipal employees. Emergency rooms turned many people away as they reached capacity or ran out of essential supplies. Musicians could not play music together without a high degree of proficiency in digital recording technology. In terms of 2020 ritual innovation, public health measures created the most significant contextual change because the mandate for social distancing created a structural barrier to in-person person gathering. The dangerous environmental context meant that both process and final production needed to occur on online networks, or clergy teams had to form COVID pods to work together. The conditions' limitations drove creative responses to collaboration styles and outcomes. This section analyzes innovations in process and working style, and the final section in this chapter on medium examines how rabbis engaged with digital media's context.

Impact on preparation: Rabbi Paul Kipnes recounted his team's initial response to the pandemic-born planning process: "Okay. It started with something like this. Aah!!! Okay.

Everybody, everything's fine." Clergy entered into their High Holy Planning season without the critical information needed to assess their services' most basic components, such as location. The pandemic's context challenged the planning process since clergy could not meet as teams to plan and prepare materials. Social distancing impelled clergy members to design new ways to collaborate and ultimately design services that fit the current public health policy's recommended constraints. These recommendations changed rapidly throughout the pandemic with further information from the scientific community about the virus and its transmission. "No one knew what they were doing, and no one knew what online services would be like," Rabbi Kipnes recalled.

COVID created a world in which physical interaction was dangerous. It forced service designers to change a fundamental internal dimension of their service: medium and geography. COVID's no-contact climate drove other contextual challenges and respective innovations in rituals. Some of these context-driven changes led to innovations beyond those anticipated by the ritual designer. For example, yearly preparation for High Holy Day services occurs almost as a ritual for rabbis. Many rabbis prepare their sermons for the whole year leading up to the sacred days. Mara Nathan recalls how social isolation demanded clergy find innovative ways to work within their confines, for better or for worse:

> We pre-recorded all the sermons, which was the worst. I mean, it was fine, but you know what it's like. You work really hard on your holiday sermons. Part of the reward of the sermon is the emotional feedback you get in the room in the moment and also the energy you derive from speaking to a large congregation. So finding the energy to speak to nobody was really difficult. We asked our staff members, "Hey, could you please be in the room" as we pre-recorded. It helped, but it really wasn't enough. We had ten people in the

> room. Someone would be on their phone playing Candy Crush while you're trying to deliver your sermon.

Rabbi Nathan's anecdote emphasizes that innovation around limitations could never recreate the lost context of in-person preparation and service delivery.

On the other hand, other rabbis' process-based innovations promoted their ability to innovate in their service design. Rabbi Alan Rabishaw offers a notable example: During the pandemic, he partnered his congregation with two neighboring A-level congregations to provide joint offerings to all three communities. He and Rabbi Evon Yakar met for weekly meetings where they could "dream ahead" and support each other's work throughout the pandemic:

> [We shared] late-night conversations that sometimes lasted until two or three in the morning with Evon and me just sitting here, chatting away and dreaming away and arguing away and doing everything we had to do to kind of wrestle through all the things we had to wrestle through to make it work.

Rabbis Rabishaw and Yakar designed a shared High Holy Day experience that addressed all three participating communities simultaneously. Their collaboration produced such notable innovations in worship that the Jewish Federation mentioned their example in their 2020 report detailing exemplary Jewish innovations and partnerships during the pandemic (Cousens 2020).

Similarly, rabbinic networks and organizations fostered a national collaborative culture. Clergy Facebook groups such as 'Dreaming Up High Holy Days' facilitated national collaborations amongst Reform and Conservative rabbis. The URJ offered courses in ritual design with experts such as Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman. These collaborations produced a tangible impact in my interviews; respondents participated in their offerings and, in turn, frequently formed

similar solutions to shared technological challenges,[16] imitated one another[17], and incorporated innovations adopted directly from other clergy people.

As another example of process-based innovation, Rabbi Paul Kipnes used a congregant's professional survey collection company to collect data about his congregants' HHDs preferences and communicate a sense of engagement with the design process in a climate of endless unknowns. They asked congregants questions such as, "What are the most powerful parts of the high holidays? What makes them meaningful? How long if we did it online - how long could you sit? What's the ideal time?" Rabbi Kipnes explains:

> We gave them a list of various things [and asked] which of these are most important. Then we threw out some scenarios that we got feedback on…. What came out of that was that the music and the Cantor [Doug Cotler] were critical. An hour was the length that could happen. Services had to be warm and welcoming, which is what Or Ami does. So we had to convey that.

Congregation Or Ami's survey helped its clergy team establish guiding parameters to shape its ritual design decisions. They ultimately created a one-hour service that demonstrated the same ritual decisions that all my respondents navigated as they determined their ritual's medium, such as medium and service length. Their choices often aligned with the worship goals they set for these services or as described in the section above.

Rabbi Kipnes's example points to another trend that participants shared in interviews. Clergy and synagogue staff heavily engaged with congregants as part of the preparation process. Though congregant engagement always remains a part of the High Holy Day preparation process,

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[16] See the section on opening montages in Chapter 3.
[17] Rabbi Mara Nathan shared with me that Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York inspired her opening montage building scene.

in 2020, congregants made personal videos and wrote rich reflections to share during services. Congregants shared abilities and services with their clergy.[18]

Context 2: Psycho-social and Political

Clergy used the ritualization process, from service creation to execution, as a means to address and critically respond to their psycho/socio-political context. COVID bore down on peoples' physical and emotional well-being. Many people lost their jobs or prospects of employment. Fear permeated daily life as this unknown virus took lives regardless of age or health. For most, isolation drove intense emotional and psychological responses like insomnia, depression, and hopelessness (Panchal et al. 2021, July 20). Domestic abuse and homelessness rates rose significantly (Taub, 2020, April 6). Politics fanned the flames of an aggressively divisive political climate and an already unbearable psycho-social climate. The pandemic received very little federal attention forcing localities to make determinations about public health issues that would inevitably impact other regions. By June 2020, COVID-10 had taken nearly 500,000 lives worldwide, but social distancing meant that people could not grieve deaths in standard ways. No public acknowledgment, memorial, or vigil took place in the US until January 19, 2021. Meanwhile, the 2020 elections intensified vitriolic discourse. Protests broke out across the country after the murder of George Floyd. Police violence broke out in attempts to quell social unrest. The summer catalyzed intense public scrutiny of systemic racism in American institutions.

2020s devastating sociopolitical and emotional climate heavily impacted how rabbis approached the task of ritual design for the HHDs. Many interviewees named the emotional climate as one of the core contexts that influenced their worship goals and design strategies. Rabbi Meir Bargeron explains:

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[18] I examine congregant engagement in the ritualization process further in Chapter 3.

> The context in which I found myself as a prayer leader and a prayer-er was one in which the members of my kehillah were just completely unrooted, utterly unsettled. [They were] experiencing, I think, a real existential crisis. The way we were used to living had changed and might not be going back to the way it was -- ever. That's COVID, just for starters. And then you add the social environment of the riots and the real difficulty that I think many tender-hearted people who work for justice had to experience in hearing the experience of people of color and realize that despite our best efforts, maybe there are moments when we are part of the problem.

Earlier in this study, I recounted Rabbi Bargeron's therapeutically-influenced worship philosophy. His comments here reflect the emotional and spiritual conditions to which he responded as he shaped a worship container to help people reconnect with their inner lives. Similarly, Rabbi Denise Eger explained that she remained very intentional about moving to online-only services, keeping in mind the "emotional and spiritual pieces" and the "traumatic pieces."

Rabbi Alan Rabishaw explained in our interview that he designed his service to respond to the "traumatic" climate with "handholding," "hugging" (in spirit), and warmth. He sensed that congregants felt tentative about the notion of digital High Holy Days, and so he catered the experience to reassure and convey stability. He shaped his services to communicate to congregants that "it's going to be okay, we're going to do this. Just trust us where we're going. You're going to have a sense of what we do. And there's going to be some new and exciting elements that we're going to bring to the experience as well." At Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, Rabbi Jonathan Aaron and his clergy team choose annual themes that inform the messaging during their High Holy Day services. In 2020, they chose the theme "P'tach Libi B'toratecha"

(open up my heart), accompanied by heavy use of texts from Pirkei Avot to guide congregants during a time of social isolation and civil divisiveness.

Rabbi Kipnes' survey, as mentioned earlier, used the preparation process as a pastoral tool in and of itself. His survey brought transparency to the clergy team's preparation process to offer clarity, foster a sense of ease, and solicit buy-in from their congregants. He explains, "I wasn't asking should we do it in person or online because it became clear that we wouldn't know, and people couldn't make a decision." Instead, he asked questions so that people felt engaged with the process. I observed a similar effect with the opening shot of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hill's Erev Rosh Hashana 2020 service, which featured a drone shot of the synagogue's interior where filming equipment and lights filled the space like a production studio. (The picture can be viewed below). By pulling back the curtain, they communicated to congregants how they responded to the crisis and the lengths that they went to to ensure that their community could experience meaningful High Holy Days.

Context 3: Medium

Ritual designers determined how to bring their services to their congregations without physical proximity. However, as they chose technologically mediated audiovisual forms of communication such as Zoom or pre-recorded live-streamed services, they navigated the unique dynamics of communication and representation in the medium and how these dynamics could best support their worship goals.

Bringing a live ritual into a form of audiovisual communication changes the dynamics of communication and representation. Ritologist Günther Thomas examines how rituals can occur in "technologically mediated audiovisual communication, where people are not present but dispersed over space" (Thomas 2006, p. 118). The topic prevails in ritual studies, where scholars such as Ronald Grimes argue that media events like a televised presidential event count as secular ritual forms (Grimes 2006). The contention rests on the role of the body in such an incorporeal medium, and some ritologists argue that scholarship cannot consider such media events as rituals because people cannot be present at the same time or place to engage in the shared experience.[19] This sense of shared presence helps ritual participants dissolve their sense of separation from others and join in collective expressions and meaning-making. Rabbi Karyn Kedar argued that live ritual's physical choreography suggests a kind of "dance" between the service leader and participants that one cannot recreate online.[20] She thus excluded ritual elements such as the Barechu, which require bowing and responsiveness.

Thomas, however, argues that perception can act in and of itself as a form of presence, and thus viewers can watch a televised ritual and engage in it as if it were real, or more accurately, as its own domain of reality. Perception implies the recognition of patterns or movements and forms

[19] This is what Emile Durkheim would call the "collective effervescence."
[20] I examine her argument further in the 'Eliminations' section of Chapter 3.

that tend to be generalized. Perception and information processing occur almost simultaneously in human consciousness; the speed by which one processes their perceptions allows a person to suspend their sense of the production's artificiality without losing a sense of reality. For example, one can lose oneself in a very compelling film and still get up and stop watching whenever they wish. They do not confuse their physical reality with the film's reality. Nonetheless, perception itself acts in place of physical presence, and viewers allow themselves to get immersed in the experience projected on the screen. Thus a digital, online ritual still invites a kind of presence that emerges from the viewers' perceptions of its contents.

Technologically-mediated audiovisual forms of communication must make up for the loss of multi-sensory experiences and address the speed by which perception occurs through textures in camera angle, lighting, the speed of the unfolding plotline, and the fast pace of changing topics (Thomas 2006, p. 124). Film and television producers highly orchestrate their productions in terms of the details above and music, color, composition, dialogue, shot sequences, and more. "To make this story short: every piece represents a costly selection that carries the difference between information and utterance," writes Thomas. The careful attention to detail in audiovisual communication allows users to participate in the virtuality. They experience a reality that is not *fake* but is heavily constructed to represent highly complex sequences of events and sensory details into a 2D frame. This orchestration of sense detail acts like a virtuality. The details form an independent reality that helps participants or viewers make sense of a wider reality.

Mistakes, cheap production efforts, or poor technique can quickly detract from audiovisual communication. Some of my participants demonstrated their practical understanding of this point. For example, I explored some participants' attitudes to production quality and particularly Rabbi Michael Shefrin's comment: "I want my congregants to not notice a lot. I want them to be as

much in the prayer space as possible because we didn't make any weird mistakes. Nobody tripped and fell." Shefrin then expresses reservations about the over-determination of sense details as he and his clergy partner tried not to be "obnoxious Hollywood." I think Rabbi Shefrin understood the tension in televised production in terms of attention to detail. Too little attention and the production does not invite immersion by the viewership. Too much attention (particularly gaudy, inappropriate manipulation of physical details) also limits immersion by viewership.

Deleuze's notions of a virtuality and a multiplicity best explain the careful economy of detail and control in audiovisual communication. Deleuze understood any moment in time as a *multiplicity* that bears all other moments in time preceding it. Both ritual events and artworks (including film) represent processes extended in time that come together into one viewable form. Ron G. William and James W. Boyd, who articulate the relationship between the art, rite, and Deleuze's processed-based metaphysics, write a classic Deleuzian question:

> Consider, for example, an artwork such as a painting. Does it begin with the first application of paint or with the stretching of the canvas or the cutting of the tree to make the frame, or the artist's training? How does its meaning vary as a result of interpretation, encounters, historical forces?

These questions demonstrate how a virtuality's role in communicating a *multiplicity,* a moment that bears the vestiges of all other moments, preceding processes, and each form of sense expression. Like art in general, a ritual thus communicates a greater reality by compiling, ordering, and presenting its multiplicity to participants. The ritual's virtuality offers a frame where participants can engage with the stream of life's countless multiplicity without becoming inundated. An artist or ritual designer pulls out a given story, idea, or framework from life's greater flow, singling out and schematizing some aspect of life that otherwise might remain

undistinguished and thus incomprehensible. Through a ritual's virtuality, people can focus on their prayer and discover their place and purpose amidst life's chaos. Thus a ritual's virtuality allows people to engage with their context and negotiate their sense of self in accessible terms. Framing suggests the perfect balance between under and over-representation of the processes, decisions, and interpretive acts that came together and created the ritual moment.

I understand the ritualization process to reflect ritual as a multiplicity, which the following discussion will unpack. A multiplicity bears all its components, including the sequence of decisions and solutions that ritual designers had to make with the digital ritual transfer during COVID. As rabbis shifted their ritual to digital media, they navigated a sequence of decisions starting with the best digital platform for their needs. Their articulated goals influenced the choices that they made. In turn, their choices influenced further decisions that they would navigate in their preparation process so that the ritualization process took shape with each choice they made.

The Digital Ritualization Process: A formative decision in the ritualization process rests in the digital medium itself. Ritual designers determined whether they would pre-record services or use a real-time digital platform like Zoom. All my interviewees led other synagogue services on Zoom, and some already live-streamed services. The choice became a choice that reflected the worship designers' goals and experiences they sought to craft.

Originally, Zoom created its software for conference calls in which one person speaks at a time with a PowerPoint that they can share from their computer desktop. This design informs the medium's technological and communicative capacities. Zoom allows people to send messages in real-time to the entire group and individuals, share emoji-based emotional responses, change

backgrounds with greenscreen-style backdrops, and display a close-up view of each participants' real-time emotional affect. It supports a greater degree of interactivity with a prayer community.

As a digital medium, Zoom offers both possibilities for connection and risks for interruption.Zoom best facilitated connection-centered worship goals in my experience at Congregation Emeth of Morgan Hill and Rabbi Alan Rabishaw's Temple Or Rishon. Rabbi Rabishaw explains that he chose Zoom as his primary format because he "wanted everyone to have access to as many faces as possible during these services." He explains that he wanted this arrangement because, "I suspect - and this just is based on informal research - that people were looking more for the connection than for the prayer." Whether or not our assumptions are accurate, our preferences and beliefs drove our choices around medium in the face of the pandemic's context changes.

Zoom notoriously creates real challenges for worship design and risks. During my cantorial internship, a family member logged onto Yom Kippur services and forgot to use Zoom's mute button. She used a curse word that Zoom transmitted to every participant's speaker system. This fun and embarrassing anecdote demonstrates one of several limitations that drove my other respondents to choose different media for their digital services. Zoom's interactivity brings the messiness of human interaction right into one person's desktop space, something that can detract from the sense of sanctity that marks the High Holy Days. Additionally, Zoom software's design inhibits high-quality, seamless productions that give a ritual designer the ability to control each moment, like television or film. Rabbis such as Paul Kipnes noticed that they wanted to use Zoom initially to foster warmth and a sense of closeness amongst congregants, but these limitations barred their ability to simultaneously make a visually and audibly rich service with an uninterrupted flow.

Pre-Recorded Services: Respondents who sought to shape experiences as their primary worship goal chose pre-recorded services for some of the aforementioned reasons and other reasons that I will articulate here. First and foremost, pre-recorded services promise seamless productions with a much smaller risk of technical problems or interruptions. While Zoom services rely on the 'share screen' feature for visuals (and thus require users to make powerpoints or similar kinds of visuals that lack a degree of sophistication), pre-recording allows for post-production editing. Post-production editing gave Rabbi Karyn Kedar the ability to edit transitions carefully, a critical tool that she used to shape her services' moment-by-moment flow. Thus nine out of my ten interviewees pre-recorded their services and live-streamed them during worship times.

Congregations that chose to pre-record could choose several different platforms from which they could stream their services on the day of the actual ritual event. Some congregations like Kol Ami in West Hollywood, CA and Emmanuel in San Antonio chose based on their pre-existing streaming accounts, such as Livestream, Youtube, or Vimeo. Rabbi Jonathan Aaron's team streamed a pre-recorded service on Youtube, which features smaller real-time opportunities for communication with its live comments section compared to Zoom. Participants can share feedback in the chatbox and watch responses from other users as a video streams at a set time online. He noted that the communicative capacities (the live chat feature to the right of the streaming video) on Youtube offered enough engagement between participants that he could meet his first priority, to provide a rich, artistic and introspective prayer experience without sacrificing his second priority, to build connection.

Congregations that chose pre-recorded services sought out production companies to assist in the video production and editing. In this selection process, geography, social milieu, goals, and

congregational culture came together to create specific options and opportunities for participants. Their choices both impacted their expressive and financial possibilities. For example, Rabbi Jonathan Aaron hired a "highly artistic" film student who made music videos for Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills in the past. Thus they could create a special music video with Rabbi Aaron's original music and lyrics that spoke visually and musically to the moment's emotional difficulties. This choice brought artistry to High Holy Days but cost the congregation financial resources available to an affluent, Beverly-Hills-based congregation. Or Ami serves as a congregation for two notable producers from Fox and Jeopardy! who volunteered their expertise to facilitate production in the design, personnel, equipment, filming, and post-production editing. Cantor Vicky Glikin at Temple Emanu-El in Dallas found a congregant who attended the synagogue's class on prayer book literacy called "Prayers and Pray-ers." The woman felt a solid connection to the liturgy and possessed an artistic ability to translate her liturgical sensitivity to production. The congregant helped Cantor Glikin shape liturgical moments with unique technical approaches, such as a meditation fused with a Vidui musical setting that bears specific emotional resonances for the community.[21]

Production:

Working with production crews required rabbis to make studios out of their sacred spaces. Just as so many apartments became small studios with green screens and lights during the pandemic, clergy transformed their sanctuaries into recording studios. At Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, the production team included a shot of the synagogue recording studios in the final video, which can be viewed below. The image helps demonstrate how lighting, cameras, staging, and recording all took place within the synagogue space itself and could capture the sanctuary's interior using multiple shots and perspectives.

[21] See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of this example.

Rabbi Jonathan Aaron stands inside the sanctuary at Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills during 2020's service production.

Earlier in this subsection, I reviewed Günther Thomas's scholarship and his assertion that technically-mediated audiovisual communication requires careful orchestration of details. My interviewees keenly articulated specific details that they considered fundamental in the process though seemingly insignificant out of context.

The Direct Address & Eye Contact

Both Rabbis Paul Kipnes and Jonathan Aaron emphasized the importance of eye contact in our interviews. Eye contact in live television constitutes a camera technique called the 'direct address'. Jérôme Bourdon, Professor of Communications at Tel Aviv University describes the direct address:

> Where do we find the 'direct address', the look to the camera of the 'I and you together'? In a very systematic manner, in the opening and closing sequences of continuity television programs, when the host greets us, enumerates the list of his guests, and gives an

> appointment for next week (or for many weeks to come). There are variations according to genres, but the basic pattern is present in newscasts (be it reduced to a simple ‘good day’ and ‘goodbye’), in talk shows, in game shows, in variety shows, or in political debates (Bourdon 2004).

A direct shot creates a personal relationship with the viewer in which a viewer can more easily see subtle emotional expressions and understand spoken words with visual aid. Umberto Eco claims that the direct shot stresses contact with the viewer (Echo 1990), as it emulates a face-to-face conversation. Zoom allows for face-to-face contact, but cannot produce true eye contact due to camera positioning. Viewers look at their screens to see others’ faces while their cameras (often built into their computers or devices) rest above eye-level. Pre-filmed productions can easily capture eye contact and thus some respondents like Kipnes and Aaron applied the 'direct address’ to clergy shots during their entire production. Others, such as Rabbi Mara Nathan, chose not to use direct shots at all.

Kipnes and Aaron’s choices come from their worship goals or philosophies. Kipnes’ team chose to emulate a variety show as their point of reference for a digital production format. Kipnes reported that his team deliberately sought to emulate a variety show. Aaron offers an explanation, “I have a theory on live events. Nobody thinks you're going to look them in the eye when you're there, live. But everyone expects you to look them in the eye when you’re on camera.”

In 2021, when services became hybrid for all my respondents, the split medium made eye contact difficult to accomplish. Pre-produced videos capture eye contact at any angle. An in-person service, however, requires rabbis to look out at congregants in front of them. Kipnes and Aaron offered two strategies to reconcile the difference. First, both purchased television prompters, which allowed the rabbis to keep their eyes on their at-home audiences while they

delivered their sermons. Kipnes bought a teleprompter online for $450, a reasonable price for a piece of technology that allows service leaders to easily foster a sense of intimacy and contact. Rabbi Aaron also considered possible camera positioning strategies to address the issue: “What we could do is you take the cameras and put them right in the back of the chairs, with the chairs. So [as I lead] I’m basically looking over people into the cameras. So they feel like I am kind of looking at them because I'm looking straight out, but I'm actually looking at the camera.” While this final strategy remains untested, creative camera positioning offers a variety of solutions and new possibilities to craft worship experiences that I will address when I examine visual ritual innovations in Chapter 3.

Air Time

In audiovisual communication, viewers carry heightened attention to details and the flow of images, sound, and plot. Airtime thus became a common issue that challenged my participants to build out their rituals.

Rabbi Denise Eger explains:

> [Additionally, we needed] to fill up the airspace because you don't want to have dead air. Air is a different kind of production value, right? And when you do radio, you can't have dead air time. Television - You can't have dead air, right? You need something to hold the space.

Similarly, Rabbi Jonathan Aaron states, “If the camera captures me and I’m not talking for 5 seconds, everyone is going to be like ‘What’s going on!? What’s happening?!’ It would be the worst.” Within the audiovisual medium, content must uninterruptedly draw in viewers while drawing attention away from its digital location. Dead airtime reminds viewers that a gap exists between their embodied experience and the experience on the screen. Thus rabbis like Eger and

Aaron sought more modalities to engage their congregations and draw their attention toward prayer and atonement.

The need to fill each moment with content impacted how clergy could engage with critical service mechanics like congregant honors. Rabbi Michael Shefrin reported that his team cut most congregant honors because they involved physical actions like opening the ark or passing Torahs amongst board members, which took up too much airtime. "It just was weird on camera," he recalled. "It takes like 30 seconds just to watch someone open the ark. So in the interest of shaving time, we just said, "please rise," and then the camera would pull back, and the ark would then be open right." Shefrin's example demonstrates the repercussions of the medium shift in terms of ritual design and decision-making. The shift to an audiovisual, live medium demanded content in every second of programming. Ultimately, this impacted how clergy interacted with congregants in the ritualization process.

Congregant Engagement

Later in this study, I address how congregations foster new ways to include congregant participation in services. During production, this engagement took place technically in several different ways. Some types of congregant participation required congregants to submit home-filmed video clips captured on iPhones or other small recording devices. This type of engagement fit within inclusions such as congregant welcome montages at the beginning of the service.[22] In other cases, congregants came to their synagogues one-by-one so that production crews could film them. Rabbi Michael Shefrin comments:

> It took a village. There were a ton of people that helped with little parts that we prerecorded…. If I remember correctly, [we] weren't sure how we were going to do honors. And so there was like a minute where we thought that maybe we just wouldn't do

[22] See Chapter 3, "Additions."

> honors, and that would be easier. [Instead] we ended up filming about a hundred people separately and then edited them in. And it was fantastic. It was a huge production.

The audiovisual medium required a greater degree of involvement from people across the congregational community for the final ritual production to capture the sense of a shared congregational presence despite its at-home delivery to individual screens. Rather than consider this presence to be "virtual" in Langer's sense of the word - as something that partially recreates the real thing - this study's theoretical framework considers this ritualization process a part of the final outcome, the ritual virtuality. Widespread congregant involvement in the production process meant widespread congregant involvement in the ritual that exceeded its non-digital counterpart for any congregation that included this kind of material.

Chapter 3: Ritual Transfer

The previous chapter examined how context impacted the ritual design process to examine the relationship between the external environment and the ritualization process. This chapter offers a framework to navigate internal changes in the ritual as a consequence of the ritual transfer process.

Ritual transfer refers to a process in which a ritual moves from one context to another context. Initially, scholarship considered ritual transfer in contexts such as major historical events ("diachronic transfer of ritual") or intercultural exchange (Langer et al., 2006). When a ritual moves from one context to another, its internal dimensions -- script, performance, aesthetics, structure, interaction, communication, media, symbolism, ascribed meaning, ritual participation -- change (Heidbrink 2008). Thus during the transfer process, a ritual designer removes separate

elements of rituals, combines them in different variations, and moves them to a new context (Radde-Antweiler 2006). This study already examined the active part of this process, in which ritual designers navigated new limits and possibilities to ritual expression in their new context in order to transfer the High Holy Day ritual online. In this chapter, I examine the changes as they manifested in their virtuality, the actual ritual event that emerged from the ritualization process.

Nadja Miczek argues that heuristics best direct analysis of ritual transfer processes. From her investigation of online neo-pagan rituals, Miczek identifies three types of change that reshape ritual's material makeup in the transfer process: inventions, transformations, and eliminations. Ritual designers bring inventions to rituals — completely new additions that come from a vastly different context. They restructure rites from the original ritual to fit the new medium's technical constraints, what she calls 'transformations.' Finally, eliminations constitute the parts of a ritual that designers completely remove from the ritual during the transfer process.

To some extent, Miczek's heuristics help organize the changes that I encountered in the 2020 High Holy Day digital rituals. For Reform Jewish digital worship in 2020, the concept's application grows in its complexity given the digital developments and the cultural weight of Jewish tradition. As such, I think heuristics grow in their importance in order to navigate the oceanic change made to rituals to bring them from in-person delivery to the digital screen's audiovisually oriented online space. This chapter highlights the most common techniques across my respondents' services and explores the unexpected ritual outcomes that emerged from the ritual virtualites.

Inventions

The material face of audiovisual communications demands greater attention to details with content in every second of airtime. When High Holy Day rituals moved to digital formats, they

required significant adaptations and additional content to make the service impactful. Digital formats offer more opportunities for nonverbal communication through images and video, so ritual designers created multimedia services with various textures. They used frameworks like opening montages to weave prayer, reflection, and communal memory into the ritualized moment.

Opening montages:

Nearly everyone included opening montages for multiple medium-driven limitations and their aging community's needs vis-a-vis the digital transfer. Denise Eger explains how their opening montage came about:

> We made adjustments in particular around how to begin services. We knew that it took a few minutes of lag time for the Zoom product to connect to our streaming products [and for congregants to log in]. And so we couldn't simply begin with words of welcome - "Shalom, Shabbat Shalom, everybody," which is what I do, what we do normally in the sanctuary to kind of signal that services were going to begin. We never had a prelude [in person]. Where I grew up, the organ played for five minutes until it was absolutely quiet. Online, we knew there was this lag between what we were doing and what was pushed out into the universe or multiverse. [Additionally, we needed] to fill up the airspace because you don't want to have dead air. Air is a different kind of production value, right? And when you do radio, you know, this, you can't have dead air time. Television - You can't have dead air, right? You need something to hold the space.

Rabbi Eger used her theater-inspired worship philosophy to navigate the technical gaps that she articulates in her statement above. Ultimately, like many participants in this study, they did a location-inspired opening montage with music from their piano accompanist, something I examine more fully at the end of this chapter. They used drone footage to capture Rabbis Eger

and Chaiken walking into the sanctuary and opening the doors with music from their piano accompanist. They ended with slides that offered closing credits, a practice also replicated by some participants. Rabbi Eger discussed the importance of framing devices in our interview in order to create the drama she understands as integral to a ritual's functioning. In this case, framing devices gained an additional value because ritual designers shaped them to respond to the lag between real-time and digital loading times and in order to emulate social experiences and aspects of communal identity lost from the move to the digital realm.

Many respondents filmed shots of their synagogue and emulated the process of entering the building because they sought to foster a sense of familiarity and community within the digital space. They created partial, "virtual" representations of the act of walking into their synagogue buildings. Rabbi Mara Nathan explained to me that she saw opening footage by Congregation Rodeph Sholom in NYC, which boasts an architecturally stunning building, and immediately turned to her team and asked if they could "make it happen" for Temple Beth-El of San Antonio's building. She stressed to me in our interview that, like Rodeph Sholom, her synagogue's financial capacities enabled this short film of the synagogue space because they could afford to pay for the production team and equipment that allowed for high-quality footage. In line with her reasoning, Temple Emanu-El in Dallas offered a similar opening sequence that featured their synagogue's iconic stained-glass windows to the backdrop of a beloved and sacred congregational melody. Cantor Glikin's team took elements such as building images and deeply recognizable music to create an experience that evoked Temple Emanu-El, including sites, sounds, and spaces.

Building montages offer one example of a pre-show, but other respondents offered different approaches to their opening montages. Congregation Or Ami's opening video did not feature shots of the synagogue in order to create a sense of sacred communal memory since they

operate out of an office suite during the year. Instead, they incorporated the kind of slapstick humor that so often characterizes services with Cantor Doug Cotler and Rabbi Paul Kipnes. In their opening sequence, Rabbi Paul Kipnes comes to the building where services take place each year and discovers that his clergy team is not there. He calls up his clergy team on his cellphone, and the video shows Cantor Cotler and Rabbi Julia Weisz in their home offices, ready to lead remove services. Later in the film, a volunteer from the congregation pretends to check the bag of the person behind the camera as if the viewer themself is entering the space with all its different check-points as a way to idealize the act of entering the building. Susanne Langer might suggest that all these approaches depict a partial and idealized act of entering the synagogue, but aesthetics here serve to create something already intangible - communal identity. Service designers emphasized different physical aspects that capture specific cadences to their congregation's communal life, memory, and character. Based on both Bell and Kapferer's assumptions, opening montages helped integrate communal memory into the virtuality so that the community's own signs and symbols (including the synagogue itself) became an aspect of the ceremony.

Visual Inclusions

As I articulated earlier, each moment in the technical audiovisual modality requires content and any moment of dead air time becomes significantly more noticeable than in in-person mediums. Thus the digital screen and its medium rely on the inclusion of visuals such as photos and videos to create seamless transitions between each moment. This aspect of the medium created significant opportunities for my respondents to create beautiful prayer moments with inspiring or thematically relevant imagery.

Imagery offered service designers a significant opportunity to include photos of congregants in various parts of the service. Rabbi Mara Nathan, for example, featured pictures of new babies in the congregation during the Ashrei in order to create a sensation of joy and make up for missed opportunities to meet new infants in the community. Many opening montages included short video messages from congregants, particularly community leaders, sharing warm messages for the new year. Many Yizkor services incorporated photos of congregants and family members that passed in the year prior. This simple inclusion bore significant emotional consequences considering the context. No public memorials or vigils had yet commemorated the hundreds of thousands lost by COVID and private funerals during COVID were often remote and thus deeply unsatisfying for mourners. Thus visual inclusions helped foster the collective presence that sets ritual moments apart.

Most respondents employed camera techniques in ways that offered new vantage points for participants and, ultimately, more points to connect with the prayer experience. For example, Cantor Vicky Glikin's team placed a camera in a seat on the bima to film her face as she sang the words of Avinu Malkeinu and other pieces of liturgy in which the chazzan typically turns away from the kahal. Consequently, viewers could see her facial expressions, a critical means by which she communicates the feelings that emerge in prayer. Thus her community could witness new physical aspects of the prayer experience normally obscured by an in-person service's physical setup. Similarly, many respondents employed additional camera shots during the Torah service that captured the text of the Torah as the reader read its words. This allowed everyone to follow along with the words of Torah in a way that resonates with the stories and images that inform how the traditional in-person Torah service functions. Many respondents drew inspiration from the URJ's Biennial, where they first witnessed this specific digital ritual technique, amongst others.

Visuals frequently substituted portions of services with unintended consequences. In particular, visuals - often congregant video submission montages or pre-filmed clips of congregants by production teams - replaced congregational honors such as readings. As noted earlier, this meant that more congregants participated in shaping the service and could see their participation in the service itself. While an in-person service cultivates presence by the attendance numbers, digital services demonstrate presence and participation through congregant visuals. In a montage of people offering new years greetings to the community, everyone sees everyone's welcome. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, the switch from live congregant honors to audiovisual inclusions (photos and videos) saved significant time compared to in-person services. This cut back on the need to "slash all the liturgy," as Rabbi Mara Nathan put it.

In-Service Communication, Congregant Participation & Engagement

The virtual worship modality required new forms of communication and opened up new possibilities for in-service communication. Firstly, clergy teams determined new ways to bring the words of liturgy to congregants without regular access to machzorim. In some cases, congregations mailed out machzorim. Many relied upon the CCAR's visual tefillah on the Reform movement's machzorim (*Mishkan HaNefesh* and *Gates of Repentance*). Some producers overlaid text on video clips, a technique that allowed Rabbi Paul Kipnes's clergy team to share a QR code on-screen during the High Holy Day appeal. People could immediately make contributions in the moment, just as people might give envelopes with checks during an in-person service. New in-service communication modalities allowed Rabbi Kipnes to raise enough money through fundraising so that he could keep high-quality digital services free.

Both Zoom and Youtube offer methods through which congregants can share their own words in the middle of services. This allowed service designers to ask congregants to share

responses to prompts or share words of welcome to one another as the service took place. These digital platforms thus offer one way to foster a real-time sense of reciprocal communication and engagement for a physically distanced group of ritual participants.

My respondents reported the highly deliberate inclusion of congregants in parts of the service, such as kavanot (the framing of prayers). Rabbi Kipnes invited an emergency room doctor to speak about her experience in COVID ERs. He asked a congregant who nearly died from COVID to share his story during the 2021 fundraising appeal instead of himself. The clergy team at Chicago Sinai gave congregants prompts on topics related to the High Holy Days and COVID to replace their own prayer explanations and iyyunim. Rabbi Michael Shefrin's congregation similarly invited targeted and highly personal reflection and sharing opportunities for congregants as a part of the prayer experience.

> Normally on Yom Kippur Afternoon we would have an open discussion in the sanctuary, and people would stick around…. In 2020, we had people tell their Jewish stories on cameras…. It was lovely. Then we had all this extra footage from people coming in and telling their stories, and we had these short moments so we interspersed them throughout the holidays, and it just made it really personal…. [We did it to make it feel] like you were interacting with people with your fellow members and that it wasn't like you're at the rabbi's house on Zoom, which we were doing every Friday. For tthe holidays, we decided we're going to be together.

Examples such as those above demonstrate a significant outcome in my respondents' digital High Holy Day ritualization process. Clergy found ways to weave in meaningful contributions by congregants from short video clip responses to prompts to full-on conversations between demographics as prayer framing devices. Congregants at Emanu-El of Sarasota wove their stories

into the ritual framework to shape a space where collective and personal identity could reckon with the forces of life and death that become so tangible amidst a global pandemic.

As mentioned earlier, so many of the categories mentioned in this study overlap. Rabbi Jonathan Aaron described one way to use video clips that opened a wholly new kind of discourse amongst congregants in his community. Typically at Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, the clergy team hosts both a classic service and a service for younger generations. In 2020, they offered one service but instead included video clips that featured congregants from different generations as they shared dialogue over discussion prompts related to life during the pandemic. The conversations opened an avenue for connection not shared between age groups before and thus formed a ritual space where participants shared new conversations and found new meanings made possible by the ritualization process. As a virtuality, the service thus shaped an arena where the ritual contextualized High Holy Day themes such as life, aging, and memory within the context of the pandemic, an experience shared by people of all ages. The story of Yom Kippur and the story of these communities during COVID-19 joined together in a textured arena shaped to foster a sense of shared presence and social connection.

Exclusions / Eliminations

Digital services produce a condensed, multimedia-based ritual packed with meaning. Clergypeople made significant eliminations from their typical repertoire in order to save time or because the liturgical elements could not translate to the audiovisual, 2D space.

Service length:

Service length became a "hot topic" for clergy in 2020 as the notion of Zoom fatigue became popularized. The pandemic's psycho-emotional impacts - particularly with the sudden move to digital workplaces and learning environments - encouraged many of my interviewees to shorten

service length for their congregants. The technological context in 2020's medium change drove people to consider cuts to their services that at times violated the "sacred cow" list and required all rabbis to reconsider their High Holy Day essentials.

Eight out of my ten respondents cut services. Many rabbis made this choice from the outside and based their service times on their own experience and common sense, such as Rabbi Mara Nathan and Rabbi Brenner Glickman's clergy team. Rabbi Glickman's team decided not to repeat liturgical units across services or at least liturgical settings to units such as the Janowski Avinu Malkeinu (so that one service featured the folk version and the other service featured Janowski's setting.) Other rabbis used communal resources to help determine service time. As mentioned earlier, Rabbi Paul Kipnes at Or Ami used data from a freely-offered professional survey of congregational preferences. Cantor Vicky Glikin's team at Emanu-El in Dallas took recommendations from a health advisory board.

The second school of thought around the topic of service length emerged from respondents such as Rabbi Alan Rabishaw and Rabbi Karyn Kedar. Both explained that they leaned into the technology rather than present some lesser form of the ritual. Rabbi Kedar explains:

> It was a huge debate. In the rabbi world, all on Facebook, etc., the rabbis were saying people don't have an attention span on zoom. You need to make it shorter, or people will get bored. The four of us kind of looked at each other and said, "It'll be boring if it's boring, but if it's engaging, it won't be boring." So we took on the challenge of not cutting services by the hour. We did have a shorter service because we changed the Torah service around, but that was not because we wanted to make services shorter. We took the new medium as a challenge to create a thing that was compelling.

Rabbi Kedar directed her team to make choices that best translated High Holy Day services amidst her greater worship commitment to shape specific internal experiences through the ritual's material construction. She considers the shortened service a form of pandering to peoples' attention spans instead of rising to the challenge of engaging with the service material components to form their own digital prayer reality. Her assumptions reflect both Bell and Kapferer's close attention to the physical details of services as compositional elements that generate a specific reality in and of itself that drives change and meaning-making (or, in the words of my correspondents, that create certain kinds of impactful prayer experience). For Kedar, the service's physical composition generates engagement.

Rabbi Alan Rabishaw's approach similarly reflects an attitude that shortening services means a lessening of the ritual's value. He and Rabbi Evon Yakar "didn't shorten stuff. We just said that we don't have to shorten, dummy down, or lessen. The truth is that people who want to stay with us will stay with us, and people who don't want to stay with us or want to buzz out will have an opportunity to do so." Interestingly, while Rabbi Kedar explains that a boring service will be boring, Rabbi Rabishaw explains that people who don't want to stay won't stay. He and Rabbi Yakar created a space in which people could join when they wanted and leave when they wanted:

> Both years, we gave people a detailed catalog [with all the HHD events, service times, links, and descriptions.] So at 11 o'clock, you can sign-on, click here, and sign-on for the Torah reading by congregations.[23] [...] From day one, we really leaned into Zoom. We leaned into Zoom for community. We leaned into Zoom for the technology.

In our interview, he proceeded to explain various fun elements in his services such as the shofar kazoo extravaganza, his joint, illustrated sermon with Rabbi Yakar, because he understood those elements to represent how to make an online ritual engaging regardless of time. For Rabbi

[23] They had 3 Torah services in one

Rabishaw, “playing to the medium” suggested the integration of fun elements that gave congregants the freedom to choose their own experience rather than attempting to create a service that intrinsically captivates people with its videography or audiovisual presentation.

The debate on service length reflects a broader theme in this survey. While context creates the need for ritual change, the style and execution of such changes rest in the hands of ritual authors. In this case, the medium change did not force changes such as shortened service time. Rather, the service designers, communities, and decision-making processes responded to the question of service time with distinct strategies that reflected their own expertise, culture, and context.

Liturgical Exclusions:

Ritual designers thus excluded ritual elements according to ritual expertise, a combination of their personal worship philosophies and deep liturgical literacy in the prayers, their meanings, their traditions, and their choreographies. Rabbi Karyn Kedar chose to exclude ritual elements that required choreography, such as the Barechu, the Amidah, and the Aleinu:

> Because prayer is in addition to being music and spoken, it's also a dance, but how do you dance when you're sitting at your seat in your bedroom or at the kitchen table or in your office, and you don't even have the right clothes on - you're wearing shorts, or you're wearing leggings. And if everyone sees you rise, you're not even dressed properly. You're in an environment that -- well, clergy could recommend how to fix your environment and what to do, but who knows how [to actually manage that.] It’s during the soup, and we've got the high holidays on! Instead of fighting that, how do you incorporate that reality of the home in it? So we took away the traditional dancing. If there was going to be any dancing, it was that they were gonna lean in to hear better.

Rabbi Kedar here argues that choreographed rites do not work in a digital space based on criteria that other respondents do not share. They are accordingly subjective and interpretive in nature. Her experience-shaping philosophy of worship influenced how she curated the service to "play to the medium." In comparison, Rabbi Paul Kipnes included the Barechu as a natural liturgical inclusion for his pre-show opening montage since, as he put it, the Barechu literally invites people into worship just as the opening montage operated to help people enter the digital ritual space. Both rabbis anchored their liturgical choices in their history and experience as ritual experts, but only Rabbi Kedar's ended in exclusion.

Hakafot:

While Rabbi Kedar's philosophy uniquely motivated several liturgical cuts, every respondent eliminated the hakafah in the Torah service as what they considered to be an untranslatable part of the service. This principle did not extend to other moments in services when the Torah moves around the room in ritual action. Several respondees use visuals to recreate the passing of the Torah during Kol Nidre, such as shots of board members carrying the Torah filmed separately and woven together. Several reasons could exist for this discrepancy, but above all, lay leader engagement and exposure seem to be the most important justification for my participants. Typically, the Kol Nidre ritual serves as an important moment to affirm synagogue leadership through the orchestrated honor of passing the Torah between board members. In an audiovisual medium, clips of individual board members with the Torah served many respondents' communities in place of the in-person Kol Nidre ritual. The Torah service's hakafah, however, moves differently throughout the room and thus translates less clearly into the audiovisual format. Clergypeople lead the Torah Hakafah, carrying the Torah around the room so that every member of the congregation can touch or kiss the Torah. Torah moves through the room and reaches nearly

everyone. In the pandemic context, this ritual directly invites danger. My respondents each chose not to invent around this custom to create some digital version of the kahal to circle in cyberspace. Some simply moved into the Torah service without this transitional rite, and others, like Rabbi Paul Kipnes, offered completely different prayer forms in its place, such as guided meditations.

Congregant Participation:

Just as digital rituals offered new opportunities for congregant participation, they similarly made other forms of participation impossible. In some cases, this benefited service designers because they could take out redundant readings (both in English and Hebrew, for example), and they could encourage more personalized forms of service participation like the example of Chicago Sinai's congregant reflections. Many respondents reported that congregants missed their choirs above all. Rabbi Aaron and Cantor Lizzy Weisz's team recreated one community choir, the intergenerational choir, through a mediated format, the Zoom-format inspired music video, in order to recreate the sound and structure of a choir with people standing in rows before a conductor. Thus the digital sphere introduced new possibilities for interpretive formats that helped people like Cantor Weisz navigate the many complexities that barred in-person choir performances. This example, in particular, demonstrates how digital transfer opens avenues for possibilities as much as a medium transfer introduces limitations. In more complex cases like this one, most respondents simply chose to eliminate. In this particular example, the choir serves not just as a musical platform or a beloved component of communal life but additionally represents a union of generations that come together despite the barriers of the pandemic to make music. For this reason, the clergy team chose to transform rather than eliminate.

Above: Cantor Lizzie Weisz joins her synagogue choir on a pre-recorded, edited video that shares the same "Brady Bunch" Zoom format. Live comments on the right demonstrate how users socially engaged during the service on a platform other than Zoom.

Transformations

The aforementioned example demonstrates both the technical aspect and motivations for transformations in ritual. Transformations, according to Mizcek, occur when a ritual designer takes the components of a rite and rearranges them to fit the new medium. In the case of digital High Holy Day rituals, this work involves a much more complex process of ritual artistry that took advantage of new digital formats and sense modalities, combined them, sampled from them, mixed them, arranged them, and then some. In the example above, Cantor Weisz took a digital format with the ability to organize direct camera shots of participants in order to create a video that demonstrated an organized musical ensemble with multiple parts and polyphonies merged together into one cohesive image. Ritual transformations demonstrated the height of my participants' ritual design creativity as they navigated complex transformations with their worship philosophies and goals to direct their compositional choices.

Cantor Vicky Glikin offered an outstanding example of such artistry in our interview. She discussed the role of silence in her digital service design as an essential component of services that her team attempted to increase in their online offerings. Her team consciously crafted digital moments of silence with the artistic nuances involved in creating moments of prayerful silence in a digital space. We discussed how multiple forms of silence could exist, including the silence experienced in COVID and silence conveyed on a digital medium:

> **Cantor Vicky Glikin:** [...] we value beautiful music, and we value silence, you know? We had to think, 'What does silence look like in an online medium?
>
> **Interviewer:** It's an interesting point. As a musician, you know that silence isn't *silence*, right? When you have a pause, you can hear all sorts of things - that's John Cage's point right there. Online, we have a different kind of silence. There isn't much ambient sound at all with the audio processing.
>
> **Cantor Vicky Glikin:** And it's also silence that comes at a time of deep, deep isolation, right? So there's one silence that's connective versus a silence that is isolated.

Cantor Vicky Glikin prevented the loss of silence - a crucial ritual element for her community - through a textually innovative creation that led to a novel moment of meditative, prayerful art music.

> First of all, we ended up creating what we call visual meditation. Our sanctuary is gorgeous - we're so blessed. We have this amazing stained glass; we have this gorgeous wall that has a beautiful sparkle in it. So the visual meditation was on different sacred objects within the space - the stained glass, etc. So we would have about 30 seconds of silence, let's say, and then we would start and have a little bit of organ, like soft organ underlay, as I call it. So basically creating a sense of spaciousness for the congregation.

Interviewer: Was it a sustained chord, a soft melody, or something else?

Cantor Vicky Glikin: We have this really beautiful choral version of the Vidui by Kirschner. [...] So on Yom Kippur morning, the organ underlay was actually that Kirscher Vidui. So it was a way to like bring it in - it was a meditation on that melody.

Additions and eliminations offer two heuristics to capture ritual design techniques. Perhaps Cantor Glikin's creation here represents, as I noted in the interview, "the work of a DJ." She mixed textures, pieces of communal values, and shared auditory associations while layering other pieces such as guided meditation and shots of sacred objects in the building. I asked Cantor Glikin what she might call this technique, and while she liked the DJ analogy, she added more:

Cantor Vicky Glikin: I actually really like what you called it.

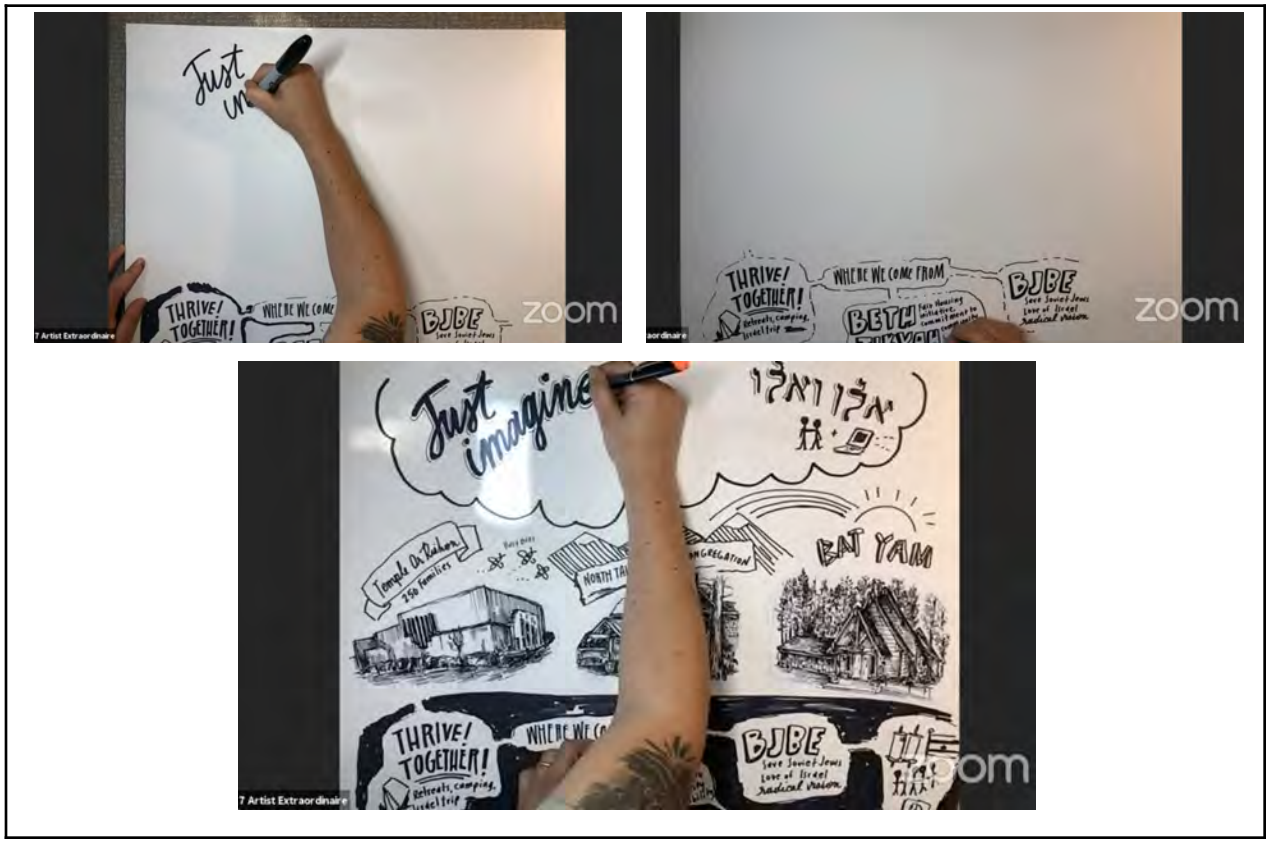
Interviewer: DJ?

Cantor Vicky Glikin: I do. I do. But what would I call it? You know what I would call it? I would call it tapping into communal memory. Because that Vidui — my goodness — I've been at Temple for six years? It predates me. It has a place in the communal memory, in the communal tapestry at Temple Emanu-El. [...] that was one of the things that ended up on the chopping block, but it was something that was special. So then we wondered where we could bring it. We need something, we know that we need something. So why wouldn't we bring that? Why wouldn't we bring that piece of communal memory in?

This example highlights how innovation emerged through the ritualization process and the ritual designer's artistic discretion. The ritual designer weaves many textures, memories, and values together into a ritual arena, where music can evoke silence and physical spaciousness can gesture towards communal presence. The process often results in a novel prayer mode uniquely actualized by ritual transfer to a digital space.

The Sermon:

The High Holy Day sermon, an iconic rite in American Reform Judaism's High Holy Day worship, underwent creative structural and thematic transformations by many respondents. Visual inclusions allowed rabbis like Paul Kipnes to incorporate visual elements in his messages. He filmed his sermon in front of a cave as he shared a story about Rabbi Shimon ben Zakkai. Rabbis Alan Rabishaw and Evon Yakar's two-person sermon gained national attention from the Jewish Federation for its innovative two-person back-and-forth structure. While they represented two sides of a debate, they hired a local artist to create a live illustration that came to shape during the sermon.



Above: Images from Rabbis Alan Rabishaw and Evon Yakar's Yom Kippur sermon in 2020. The illustrator filled in the image as the dialogic sermon progressed.

Their messaging thus aligned with Rabbi Rabishaw's worship goals and technical approach to preparation. Collaboration and a fun embrace of the digital medium ultimately informed their sermonic form and content.

Many respondents did not make significant changes to their sermons, but sermon themes also represented the transformation of process and medium. At Chicago Sinai, the clergy team deliberately chose to make few liturgical and structural changes in their services, with the explicit goal to "orient people at a disorienting time." Their sermon's theme, "orienting oneself at a disorienting time," addressed this worship goal and thus offered a kind of commentary on the ritualization process itself. I asked Rabbi Limmer if they intended to make this structural-thematic integration, and he said:

> Or the thematic messaging influenced what message I wanted to give in my sermon. It was a combination of the two. I knew that part of our job was to orient people at a disorienting time. So I thought I should speak to that even more explicitly than just through structuring the surface.

I think his response bears significance because he demonstrates how the ritualization process itself impacted overt forms of communication in the ritual. Ritualization, a process (or more accurately, a Deleuzian multiplicity), drives ritual's social commentarial function in a manner similar to Rabbi Limmer's process, in which the process ultimately influenced the ritual's written themes and thus its liminal discursive arena for meaning-making.

The Shofar Service:

A typical North American Reform shofar service generally features beloved shofar players in the community. The shofar, like any other wind instrument, presents danger in a pandemic with an air-born virus. In Zoom settings, people can only sound one instrument or voice at a time.

Livestreamed pre-edited productions employ the use of microphones and other digital recording technology that can capture not only the shofar's sound, but the breathy undertones of the ram's horn instrument as well. Both options present limitations and opportunities, and thus congregations innovated around shofar services depending on their medium and service goals.

Temple Or Rishon's Zoom-based services allowed its clergy team to invite congregant participation to an unparalleled degree because Zoom only features one speaker at a time. They sent kazoos to congregants to join along in their "Shofar Extravaganza." They still featured multiple shofar blowers - in fact, they invited five master shofar players from their own community and their two collaborating Tahoe communities so that congregants all had the opportunity to hear the shofar blowers they know and love. However, Zoom allowed them to play with the sounds of the shofar, and in particular, the Tekiah Gedolah, the shofar blast that extends as long as the shofar blower can last. This often creates a moment of suspense in the congregation as they watch to see how long someone can make the Tekiah Gedolah last. At Rabbis Evon Yakar and Alan Rabishaw's services, they asked their ba'alei shofar to play the Tekiah Gedolah as they muted and unmuted each in succession. This created the illusion that the note extended for five minutes, thus embellishing upon the tradition to make the Tekiah Gedolah last as long as the shofar blower's lung capacity permits. Thus their engagement with Zoom's technical infrastructure allowed them to create a kind of liturgical non-verbal exaggeration with symbolic power.

Congregation Or Ami used a similar technique with their Tekiah Gedolahs and filmed shofar blowers in various locations in California nature. Digital technology enabled them to add more texture to the shofar service so that the natural imagery emulated the natural settings where an ancient shofar's calls brought Israelites together in the wilderness. A digital medium allowed

for congregations to play with space and location to make nonverbal commentaries on the ritual's story and its place in the contemporary context.

Unplanned Liturgical Innovations

Many examples referenced in this study demonstrate a critical and unexpected outcome in my interviews - the ritualization process resulted in new prayer modalities and experiences that shifted how congregants pray and connect to prayer. Sometimes, as in Cantor Glikin's aforementioned case, prayer innovation arises out of the ritual designer's artistry. However, in some poignant examples, the ritualization process took on a life of its own and generated something completely novel and unanticipated by the community and its prayer leaders.

Rabbi Denise Eger offered a powerful example in which the ritualization process promoted unplanned and powerful prayer discoveries. As mentioned earlier, she and Rabbi Max Chaiken at Congregation Kol Ami struggled to fill in the air time and create a means for congregants to enter into the digital space through an opening montage or preshow. Meanwhile, social distancing made live music dangerous with musicians in such physical proximity to one another, and any musical collaboration required expertise in digital recording as well as audio and video recording. As a result, many musicians struggled for their livelihood and lost their jobs in the early months of the pandemic. Rabbi Eger employs a phenomenal pianist, Lisa, who plays for major classical music institutions in Los Angeles. Rabbi Eger sought out opportunities to incorporate her into the digital worship in order to support her livelihood as a beloved member of Kol Ami's community and part of the sounds of its collective life.

Rabbi Eger found her opportunity as she initiated the ritual transfer process, which creates internal changes in the ritual's dynamics. As mentioned earlier, digital worship requires some kind of opening act or filler at the beginning to allow people time to log in and deal with technical

difficulties and for transition moments during the service. Rabbi Eger used this time to feature Lisa as an "opening act" which featured Jewish art music on the piano. She and her congregants felt such a sense of connection to their community when she played that Rabbi Eger called it a "new modality of worship through Jewish art music." The congregation continues to incorporate Lisa's playing in their services. The specific COVID-driven context not only drove Rabbi Eger to make ritual adjustments but also led her to discover new ways in which her congregants could meaningfully pray. In this example, a ritual author responded to context-driven changes to foster ritual innovation and uncover new modalities of worship. This case demonstrates in detail how specific external pressures met with technological limitations and pastoral concerns to become a new avenue of ritual experience.

Countless examples already mentioned in this study offer ways in which novelty emerged in the ritualization process. The interaction of internal and external factors in ritual transfer promoted completely original modes of engagement and prayer. Chicago Sinai's community featured congregant reflections in place of honors and solicited deeper and more intentional reflection and engagement from congregants. At Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, intergenerational dialogue and representation blossomed after they replaced the traditional rabbinic framing devices with meaningful interviewers between generations.

The ritualization process also allowed rabbis to make changes in their communal life and worship patterns that they could not introduce in normal conditions. Rabbi Mara Nathan's community, for example, switched machzorim from *Gates of Repentance* to *Mishkan HaNefesh.* Though in the past, they struggled to introduce what they considered a monumental change, in the context of COVID, these changes seemed negligible and thus easily accepted by the community. Rabbi Nathan's example demonstrates how the pandemic itself suspended a sense of normalcy

and created a globally shared liminal space that certainly impacted the ritual presentations on their own but also impacted their ritual outcomes. New prayer texts, modalities, and engagement styles all emerged as unplanned products of ritualization.

Both Rabbis Paul Kipnes and Karen Kedar demonstrated how shifts in context and media also created opportunities to draw from Jewish tradition and articulate once-muted aspects of prayer or religious meanings. The Or Ami clergy team incorporated the Barechu in their preshow rather than as part of the liturgical units in the performed ritual. Considering the original purpose of the Barechu as a call to worship that invites both participants and God into prayerful dialogue, this relocation brings out aspects of the liturgy and its history that typically get swallowed by other liturgical units or require spoken explanation to become evident. In response to the 2021 hybrid environment, Rabbi Kedar offered a shofar service that highlighted the traditional rules around mitzvot and the shofar by drawing from the split environment:

> In the second year, we taught that the obligation is not blowing the shofar but hearing the shofar. If you happen to be walking by a synagogue and you hear the shofar blow, you're yotzei - you've taken the obligation. So we taught that and had our shofar blowers stand at the entrance of the doors - we had like three doors to the sanctuary - and blow out to the outdoors. And the cameras, they were mic'd, and three cameras caught that. So we said, Those of you who aren't here - we're blowing the shofar to you.

In this example, much like the prior Tekiah Gedolah example, Rabbi Kedar brings the shofar blowing rite, Jewish halakhic teachings, congregants (both present and at home), and streamed audiovisual communication to create a ritual expression that is both deeply resonant with tradition and completely novel. This ritual states, without words, that Jewish life can organically and comfortably thrive online and in a pandemic. Jewish tradition can bring together the present and

the absent, cut through the pandemic's isolation, and create a kind of unity that overcomes the dangers of social proximity. This example, in particular, highlights these rituals' power to transform the very context that initiated their transformation.

These innovative outcomes naturally point to the question of the digital ritual transfer during the pandemic and its impact on future prayer forms. Many rabbis articulated that they would keep changes made to their prayer outlines, such as eliminations. Rabbi Eger preserved her art music openings and thus recognizes this portion of the service as an important prayerful modality opened up to the community. Rabbis such as Paul Kipnes, Michael Shefrin, and Jonathan Aaron reported that they would keep many of the changes in future years, whereas Rabbi Karyn Kedar called the service "not replicable at all" but rather an "artistic moment that met the moment." Framed in terms of ritualization theory, no ritual designer could replicate one of these services since they truly represented an infusion of technology and commentary on the social moment. Without doubt, however, this process influenced my respondents' attitudes toward service production and widened their sense of possibility in future service design. Furthermore, they made so many infrastructural changes between 2020 and 2021, from new cameras and streaming technologies to new machzorim, that the impact of this process will continue to reverberate in future rituals.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic turned life upside down in 2020 and 2021. The global crisis demanded Reform Jewish leaders radically rethink their approach to worship, and specifically how to render High Holy Day worship to online formats. Amidst a social context laden with confusion, fear, chaos, and grief, service leaders adapted Jewish rituals on the High Holy Days - the ten days of radical introspection, personal and collective reckoning, and ultimately redemption. They led a process of ritualization that, for my respondents, sought to foster connection and deliver an impactful experience with ritual language. They played with visual and spoken communication, communal memories, digital compositions and artistic tools, and Jewish tradition as some of the many materials and instruments that could communicate the many textures, resonances, and ends of Jewish worship. They created digital communities during the greatest period of isolation ever experienced in civilized society, thus affirming Jewish communal identity. The process beckoned both clergy and laypeople into a virtual *and real* space where they could refocus the pandemic's existential uncertainty, fear, and grief into the language of the Yamim Noraim.

I framed this study using insights by Catherine Bell, Bruce Kapferer, and Nadja Miczek on ritualization, virtualities, and ritual transfer. This data portrays the process of ritualization that Bell describes - one in which experienced ritual designers navigate possibilities and contexts to shape the material life of a ritual. The notion of ritualization points to the process by which rituals retain their relevance, poignance, and familiarity amidst changing contexts. A ritual designer's own discrimination, aims, possibilities, and limitations impact how a ritual will materially move from an in-person encounter to a digital event. Miczek's heuristics - innovations, eliminations, and transformations - help delineate the kinds of choices that ritual designers can make in order to

create what Kapferer deemed a ‘virtuality.’ This aspect of the ritual helps ritual designers make sense of chaos and lay the generative ground for participants to make meanings where paradoxes predominate. In this process of ritualization, ritual designers created ritual virtualities that created a choreography of digital worship expression with movements that enabled introspection and dialogue amongst participants.

In this study, my respondents' stories demonstrated how they created virtualities in their ritual design and how these virtualities helped integrate the media, ritual wisdom, and personal and social meaning. They shaped digital spaces and encounters that gave participants a moment away from isolation through Jewish community — a liminal ritual within the much broader liminal social moment that surrounded them. Through the careful arrangement of content, original incorporation of media forms, and inspiration from Jewish traditional forms and rites, ritual designers created a virtuality that affirmed the coexistence of Jewish communal identity amidst drastic social changes.

Radically new modalities of prayer and connection emerged from the process of ritualization. This liminal space and time corralled Reform Jewish service leaders into the intensively creative work of moving rituals to digital spaces. They did so under unprecedented conditions with countless unknown variables and as a principal source of collective pastoral care during COVID. As such, I see the process of ritual preparation, execution, and reproduction as a ritualizing response to a traumatic collective experience. Digital platforms brought forward new concerns for these ritual designers, who articulated the desire to forge connections and foster connective, moving, or even transformative experiences for their congregants. Ultimately, they discovered new, textured ways to reach God during the HHDs.

My respondents reported to me unilaterally that they received almost exclusively positive feedback after the ritual events in 2020. I think their response reflects the outcome of the ritualization process in 2020 based on the stories in this study and my own experience throughout the pandemic. Virtual services moved their participants. They gave people a chance to connect and make sense out of the absurdity that surrounded us during 2020 and 2021.

Dr. Steven Windmueller anticipates a structural change in Judaism in which Zoom will be a significant platform for Jewish engagement and worship along with other digital modalities. Windmueller comments on trends that existed before the pandemic and will continue to exist after the pandemic. 2020 and 2021 digital ritualization suggests that Judaism's digitization may produce ways to connect to Judaism that are simultaneously novel, resonant with tradition, and reflective of Jewish communal identity on personal and collective scales. Moreover, the process of digital transfer may offer individual communities novel ways to express and reconstitute their local Jewish communal identities in a way that fosters new kinds of connections across demographics. These possibilities all reflect how clergy or any ritual designer approaches the task of worship. To some extent, the structures that shape the face of Judaism's future reflect the rise of digital communications, but individual and small communal creative expressions ultimately determine how to play with the building blocks that form Jewish life. Finally, one can anticipate novel outcomes to emerge in our Jewish expressions. Just as Chorban gave rise to the creation of Torah as a physical object of worship, so too might Judaism's move to cyberspace promote structural new, but no less sacred expressions of Jewish identity and prayer.

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