

Putting the High Back into the High Holidays at P'nai Or

This fall, in Summit Church's Fellowship Hall, a High Holiday gathering unlike anything you may have ever experienced will unfold again, as P'nai Or – the Mt. Airy Jewish Renewal congregation whose name means "Faces of Light" – offers High Holiday services of a different stripe to seekers of all backgrounds.

"The High Holidays at P'nai Or are Jewish renewal at its best," said Rabbi Marcia Prager who has been co-leading these festive gatherings along with many talented P'nai Or members, for thirteen years. "We blend traditional liturgy with uplifting heart-opening poetic translations so that Hebrew and English prayers flow intertwined with each other. The music is profound – deep, high and sweet in a way that caresses your soul. And of course, everyone is included. There is passionate prayer, quiet meditation, opportunities to reflect and do some pretty deep inner work, and also time to share, to be creative and even make some new friends."

P'nai Or High Holidays are a great introduction to the themes of this season in the Jewish year, and to different styles and approaches to these themes that can make them even more powerful and personally relevant. "If you have grown past thinking of God as a judgmental King on a throne, and are ready for some of the more potent imagery that grows out of the Jewish mystical tradition, P'nai Or will be a refreshing change for you too," said Abby Michaleski who came to P'nai Or three years ago after trying many different congregations. "I needed a more dynamic, more integrated way of understanding the creative life-force that I experience in the world and in my life. P'nai Or High Holidays takes the traditional liturgy and imagery and makes it soar in a way that is resonant with my experience. Boy was this a wow."

"I wanted an informal, really friendly environment where I could have a spiritual experience, and also bring my kids" said Sam Steinig and his wife Rodi, who come with their young daughter and baby girl. "The P'nai Or Children's Program runs through the holiday, offering a blend of childcare and High Holiday activities and projects for children. We can bring our kids into the service to be with us, and also let them be with other kids and have educational fun."

The themes of celebrating life and re-aligning with the Power that promotes goodness are strong currents at these gatherings. The High Holidays invite us to work together for forgiveness, compassion, and shalom – which means wholeness, fulfillment and perfection, as well as peace. All the songs, all the prayers and all the inner work we do helps us heal our inner hurts and rededicate ourselves to be the best we can be, internally, in our relationships, and in the world.

Would you like to come? We would love to meet you! Because the sustainability of the P'nai Or community is dependent on dues and contributions, there is a suggested donation for attending. However, if this is your first experience with P'nai Or we invite you to make the donation that feels right to you. No one is ever turned away from a P'nai Or gathering for financial reasons.

What They're Saying

"Instead of being in a fixed seat, reciting fixed prayers, the P'nai Or experience was up-close and personal."
— Gloria Hoffman

"P'nai Or is the only place I want to be on Yom Kippur. I never realized how deep and personal a yizkor service could be until I experienced Yizkor at P'nai Or. It was transformative."
— Sharon Pearl

"I heard, felt and recognized a presence of Holiness the minute I walked into P'nai Or. In fact, I can happily say that my Jewish DNA has been ignited ever since. Thank you Marcia, Melvin and Community. "
— Pecki Witonsky

"Beyond sensitive and thoughtful, this is worship that really touches the heart and sparks the imagination.

Rabbi Marcia Prager is a gem; a brilliant teacher and a gifted leader. The community is diverse, warm and welcoming. From unlettered beginners to seasoned scholars, there a range of experiences is offered from which all can draw: from the solitary to the communal, from the intellectual to the emotional, from the spiritual to the physical. A world-class treasure right here in West Mount Airy."

— Daniel S. Sapon, Poet, Musician, Educator

"The High Holidays have been transformed for me since I discovered services at PnaiOr. I look forward to services! I want to be there at the beginning and stay to the end. There is such a variety of types of activities, and all of me -- body, mind, emotions, spirit -- is engaged. No more merely reciting prayers and wishing it would end soon. And always from the High Holiday services I have some new insight about my life during the past year. There are moments of joy and I leave with a sense of connection to so many people there. Well worth the hour drive in each direction that it takes me to get to Pnai Or."

— Sheella Mierson

"The High Holydays services at P'nai Or are an energizing portal to the new year. They are a journey, ridden on melodies and the shared intention of the community. The melodies stay with me. Each year I am impressed with the wisdom within the process, and my experience of renewal."

— Maxine

"Walking into the room with its high ceiling and dimmed light was like entering into magical time. I sat down somewhere in the middle row. It had been four years since I had been to a Rosh Hashanah service. These were a turbulent four years spanning the entire globe, visiting ashrams and churches, Friends Meeting-house and Sufi retreat centers, years of dreaming about The Beloved and waking up with cold sweat."

"The song was just one line: Shanah Tovah tikateyvu -May you be written for a good year, written and sealed. Reb. Marcia sat there singing like... well I don't know what to say. All metaphors will be partial and reflecting a theology and tradition in need of an upgrade. The tears were coming down. I knew as I knew before this is the next station of the journey. I had arrived."

— Nachshon David Mahanyami

"Davvening with Reb Marcia on the high holidays is like flowing in a river of light"

— Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael

"I remember being excited about P'nai Or before I even got there. I was excited about seeing the people I knew, and looked forward to meeting many more new faces. At P'nai Or, I found ruach or spirit, warmth, and cozy, genuine folks who were trying to integrate spirituality into everyday life. It's amazing to me that this resource which I longed for while living on the west coast is now right here in our backyard."

— Aviva Perlo