

## Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner's High Holy Days Message for 5781

As I prepare to leave my current role as Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism after nine years, it is certainly with a tinge of sadness that I consider my last of these messages for the High Holy Days. Serving our communities, working with the tremendous team at Reform Judaism and supporting my rabbinic and cantorial colleagues across the country - this job has been such a blessing.



What it has allowed me to see is the incredible diversity and energy which together makes up Reform Judaism. Over the last nine years I have been privileged to be able to visit our communities around the UK and I have learnt something new from every one. Being given the opportunity to see our communities as a whole has allowed me to appreciate the incredible tapestry of Reform Judaism that they make together. Each is wonderful in its own right, but together they make something which is also distinctly beautiful. We raise each other to a higher level by working together and amplify our voices by speaking together.

Nothing has more highlighted the importance of reducing the distance between our communities than the ongoing pandemic. As physical synagogue doors closed, the hearts of our communities have remained 100% open. The speed with which we have innovated and reimaged our entire Jewish communal life has been an unbelievable feat. The connections between our communities and the Reform Judaism team have enabled lessons learnt by one community to be shared rapidly and help to improve the experience of all our synagogue members.

We have innovated and we have been resilient. Our congregations have done all they can to support members in need, including those suffering loss of income, those having to isolate or those shielding for extended periods of time. Being a resilient community, able to deal with anything, means being able to support our members most in need no matter what. We have also been brave; there have been decisions which were not easy, but were necessary for the protection of life. Stopping attendance at funerals and remaining together virtually for these High Holy Days were two such decisions - but both have and will certainly protect lives and realise the most fundamental Jewish value of *pikuach nefesh* saving lives.

We come to Rosh Hashanah, known alternatively as *Yom Ha'Zikaron* in our liturgy - the day of remembrance. Over nine years of being Senior Rabbi, there is a lot for me to remember fondly. So many great moments of celebration and joy, interspersed with times of reflection and mourning, have been enhanced by the community we have built. This time is not one for nostalgia, though. Rosh Hashanah and this whole season of repentance teaches us that remembering alone is not enough - it is about applying that memory to improving our future.

I know that the future for Reform Judaism is a bright one.

Every year I have been to RSY-Netzer's *Mega Chalutz* - the gathering of the leaders of our Youth Movement before they disperse to make summer camp happen. What I have seen there is complete proof that we have a generation of talented and inspirational young people who are passionate about our Movement. These are not our future leaders - they are our leaders now. When you see how our Youth Movement and community youth programmes shape and develop these young adults, you cannot help but be optimistic about what lies ahead. Working together with the experienced leadership we already have across our community, I have no doubt the combination will be unstoppable.

It is a future I still hope to be part of, albeit in a different capacity, as I go to start my PhD in Digital Theology. It has been an honour to play my part in helping the Reform voice be heard more loudly within our communal discourse. Like the Shofar which will ring out into each of our homes during this High Holy Day period, we must all do our parts to enable Reform Judaism to continue to make waves which can be felt across the country.