

Summer camp has always been a place which encourages innovation in worship but I'm not sure anything can beat the scene at Greene Family Camp while I was there on Faculty in July. The week I was there was a week of extreme heat even for Texas. Traditionally, Friday night services at camp are in a beautiful, outdoor synagogue with a view over the camp's lake. Praying there on Friday night is a truly special experience. But this year, anticipating temperatures of 110F, it was decided that this usual set up simply would not work. But we still wanted to have services outside. The solution? Shabbat ShaPOOL! We were all instructed to go to the pool in our swimming clothes at the time of services and were greeted by a cantor in a dingy in the center of the pool singing Jewish songs as we all sat by the side of the pool. The service continued as we immersed ourselves in the pool, physically immersing ourselves in prayer as we would spiritually and feeling the soothing coolness of the water as we might otherwise have experienced the soothing of community and prayer.

This was an amazing experience which could only really have happened at camp (although we do have the JCC pool, so who knows!) But thinking about the experience there are some important lessons to learn. As Reform and Conservative Jews we are especially keen on innovation and creativity in our religious life. We are committed to tradition but we continue to adapt to new realities and new spiritual needs and new approaches to Jewish prayer and practice. We understand that the world changes and new situations require new approaches. Sometimes that means adding a piano or guitar to services and sometimes it means having services in a pool when it's 110F!

But there is a larger lesson that is important to the upcoming High Holidays. Life changes and so must our responses. The world throws new and different situations at us all the time – some good and some bad – and we must adapt and change to deal with them. Every year at this time, as we enter the Hebrew month of Elul, we are called to look at our lives and how they have changed over the past year. We are given the opportunity to see how we dealt with the inevitable changes that life throws at us. Sometimes life will allow us to continue on as we have always done but often it will expect us to be like the cantor in a dingy – being creative and innovative in dealing with situations we could never have expected. When faced with those challenges, as we will inevitably be, we hope that we will find ways to stay true to who we are while also adapting to new realities and being flexible and creative and in how we deal with the challenges of the present and our hopes for the future.

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