

## AARC High Holidays

*Jonathan Cohn, special to the WJN*

**Y**om Kippur is a day to reflect and to think about *t'shuvah*—repentance or return to the right path. This year, in Ann Arbor, you have a chance to reflect on an issue of critical importance to the entire country: The treatment of prisoners.

Better still, you have a chance to do it with one of Michigan's most interesting and inspiring experts.

The opportunity comes from the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation. As always, the AARC will be holding ticketless services, open to the community, for High Holy Days — from Erev Rosh Hashanah to the waning hours of sunlight on Yom Kippur.

On the afternoon of Yom Kippur, between services, AARC will sponsor a workshop focusing on the modern experience of imprisonment and asking, What kind of conditions—physical and programmatic—create the best chance of *t'shuvah*, in and out of prison?

The session will be led by Ronald Simpson-Bey, who spent 27 years in the Michigan prison system, including two in solitary confinement, and eventually won his release after proving that he was wrongfully convicted. In prison, he established programs for fellow prisoners and since his release, he's been an advocate for prison reform.

"I am looking forward to this event because it will promote further understanding on issues that need it and I believe that it will help promote the heart and mind change necessary to heal our communities," Simpson-Bey said.

Margo Schlanger, one of AARC's co-chairs and a University of Michigan law professor, will co-lead the discussion with Simpson-Bey.

"We need our criminal justice institutions to help people, not harm them," says Schlanger says, who also specializes in prison reform. "On Yom Kippur, when our community gathers to think about how to do better in the coming year, we need our aspirations to include the nation's 2.3 million prisoners, and many millions of former prisoners. I'm grateful Ron Simpson-Bey will join us to have this conversation."

AARC's High Holy Day Services will be at the First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor, at 4001 Ann Arbor-Saline Road. As always, they will be accessible and open to anybody. The congregation requires no ticket, advance reservation, or payment — although it asks non-members to make a donation if they have the means to do so.

Nathan Martin, who is the associate rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel, in Medina, Pennsylvania, will lead the main services. Martin is no stranger to Ann Arbor — he was assistant director of U-M's Hillel from 2006 to 2010.

The congregation will also be sponsoring on-site, hour-long children's services, on both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Clare Kinberg, AARC's Beit Sefer director, and Melanie Rivkin, a second year student in the Jewish Communal Leadership Masters Degree Program at the U-M, will lead those services — which will include plenty of music and movement. (Child-care for the rest of adult services is also available, with advance registration.)

And then there are the Yom Kippur workshops, which will also include a guided meditation by AARC member Barbara Boyk-Rust and a discussion of the Book of Jonah by member Ellen Dannin.

All are welcome for an hour or all day. Information on times, address, etc., is available at [aarecon.org](http://aarecon.org). ■