

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation
Prayer Breakfast
Shabbat Shuva
Saturday, September 27, 2025
Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

Good morning. It's great to be back with you, my congressional Black Caucus Foundation family. Everybody say Shabbat. Shalom. Everybody say Shabbat, Shuva. This Shabbat, this Sabbath morning, is one of the holiest mornings of the year. It is the Sabbath that falls between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the Days of Awe, the days of repentance, the days of repair and restoration, of all that is broken. When we in the Jewish community humbly submit ourselves before the Holy One, Blessed be the Creator of all things and the judge of all that is right, and all that is just. And we ask to be inscribed for a blessing in the book of life. And we repent and atone for all that is broken. So CBC Family, join me in hearing the call of the *Shofar*, which the ancient rabbis commanded that we blow during these holy days as a wake up call. Everybody say "wake up call". Because as Dr. King said, "We must confront the fact that today we face the fierce urgency of now." That was Dr. King's wake up call, and we're hearing it again, echoed through history, because my friends, you know what I know. Our democracy is under assault. I stand before you as a Jew, as a rabbi. My office, not just a few miles from here, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is the site of the drafting of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 - because the luminaries of the Civil Rights movement knew what I know: That what keeps us safe, keeps all of us safe – and what could be the possibility of ending racism and bigotry and hate - is a multiracial, inclusive democracy. Representative Sewell invoked the sacred ground of Selma, and reminded us that for some of our ancestors, democracy was worth giving their lives for. Goodman, Cheney, and Schwerner gave their lives in Mississippi summer, registering people to vote. Now I need to say what we know. Racism is real. Antisemitism, the bigotry and hatred of Jews is real. But it is also true that some folks are rolling back Democratic norms and institutions like due process, freedom of speech, and academic integrity in the name of keeping Jews safe. That is a sin. *Hatanu lifanacha*, we have sinned before you, O God, because we know that what has kept Jews safe throughout history in this country, and what has helped us to thrive is that multiracial, inclusive democracy, that Goodman, Caney, and Schwerner died for. So CBC Family, we all need each other now more than ever, do we not? My Muslim family, my trans family, my immigrant and refugee family, my black, brown and Asian American family, all of us need one another now more than ever. Can I get an amen? So when you hear the sound of the *Shofar*, will you hear the call? Will you hear the call to justice and democracy? So stand up, stand up. Rise up!