

Ritualizing October 7 Together

HMI RITUAL GUIDE

How To Use this Ritual:

The last year has been a difficult one for both individuals and the collective Jewish people. As we approach the first anniversary of October 7, each one of us may be holding an array of diverse emotions that take different shapes in different moments. It's in times like this where Jewish tradition teaches us to come together in community and find pause in ritual.

Rituals help us to slow time, create space, and draw attention to the experiences in our lives. We've designed this ritual, grounded in Jewish tradition, for you and your HMI family to process and honor your feelings and experiences since October 7, 2023. This ritual was designed around a meal, but can be used on its own. It can also be used in bits and pieces, woven into an existing Shabbat or High Holiday gathering. Feel free to take whichever parts speak to you and incorporate them into your HMI gathering. **Note the bold and italicized facilitation notes** throughout this guide to help you lead the ritual.

Supplies:

- Print out this guide
- [Yahrzeit \(memorial\) candle](#)
- Matches or a lighter
- Notecards and pens
- (Optional) Supplies for candle blessing writing activity
 - See "Raising Up Hope for the Future" below

Framing This Time Together

(Read aloud) Avraham Infeld, Jewish educator, teaches about the power of memory when he writes, "History is knowing what happened in the past; memory is asking yourself what those past events have to do with you today and tomorrow."

Amongst other things, memory allows us to weave together the past, present, and future, to actively shape how we respond to challenging times. This year, as the first anniversary of October 7 falls during the Jewish High Holidays, we come together to remember and reflect, finding comfort and hope as we look forward to a better future.

Remembering the Past

(Read aloud) *Yahrzeit* is a Yiddish word meaning "anniversary of a death." There is a Jewish tradition to light a candle when marking a *yahrzeit*, to symbolize the light the deceased brought into the world and to acknowledge that grief can feel like a flame continuously burning.

Today, we light this candle in memory of the innocent lives taken on October 7 and the incomprehensible loss of life in Israel and Gaza in the months that have followed. In some ways, it may feel strange to mark this as an event of the past because the pain of war still unfolds before us each day. May the flame come to symbolize all that we each bring to this moment.

Light the candle and recite the following blessing:

May the memories of those killed on and since October 7 be a blessing, a source of strength, and a rousing call for peace for all peoples.

Reflecting on Our Present Moment

(Read aloud) Grief, trauma, sadness, and stress are feelings we often experience physically. It manifests in our bodies in different ways, sometimes even without our knowing. Take a pause here to take notice of your body. How are you standing or sitting? What position are you holding your hands? Are your shoulders scrunched up towards your ears?

Take a deep breath, inhaling for three counts and exhaling slowly through your mouth. Roll your shoulders down and back, releasing the tension from your shoulders. Relax your hands, let them fall to your sides or into your lap, fingers open. Silently survey your body as you find a comfortable, relaxed position. With one more deep breath, release the past and center yourself in the present.

As we consider the bridge between the past and the present, we have the opportunity as a community to reflect on how the memories of the past year continue to impact us and our community.

During this time of personal reflection, we invite you to grab a notecard and a pen to write responses to one or both of these questions:

- What is one idea, belief, or question about Israel and/or your relationship with Israel that has shifted for you over the past year?
- Where have you felt strengthened or challenged by your community in the past year?

Give everyone about 5 minutes to write and then invite people to get food. As everyone eats, invite them to share some of the thoughts that came up for them during the personal reflection with those near them.

Bring the group back together as a whole for the final piece of the ritual after dinner.

“A Blessing for Dreamers” by Evonne Marzouk

(Read aloud) Each one of us has brought different beliefs, experiences, and emotions to this moment. Having centered ourselves in the present, we carry our whole selves into dreaming for a future. We acknowledge how messy it can feel to believe in a future of peace when there is active fighting, hostages in captivity, and ongoing suffering for so many individuals. Poet Evonne Marzouk speaks to this in her poem, “A Blessing for Dreamers.”

To the dreamers
with crushed spirits now
in the face of the world’s pain:
I see you.

This world lately
has betrayed your dreams,
banished your vision,
rejected your efforts
even though it needs you
more than ever.

All throughout history
decisions have rarely
been made by the wise.

And the biblical prophets
constantly cautioned
but were rarely heard
in their time.

What to do
with a dream deferred
when the dream
is an enlightened world
and the world tumbles back
into darkness again
and again and again?

It seems
human beings are generally
terrible stewards
of our own redemption.

But your dreams
were not for nothing.
They were for good,
and on the cosmic scorecard
no doubt
your efforts have been noted.

Even this dark world sometimes
takes an evolving leap forward
just as you imagined it could –
even our sorrow and pain
eventually leads to light.

Oh dreamer,
rest your weary head
cry out the sorrow
of a broken world,
as so many dreamers have
before you.

Today is not the end.
Though they stumble again
and again,
over time there is learning.

The moment
for your renewed contribution
no doubt is returning.

Keep faith
with the brightness
of all things good,
with the vision you saw
before its collapsing.
Give your heart again
when you can.
The vision, you saw clearly...
it is just a while
early.

([Source: Ritualwell](#))

Raising Up Hope for the Future

(Read aloud) During Shabbat on HMI trips, we take part in a tradition of blessing one another. This moment allows us to reflect on our relationship with others and express it. In the same way, we have the power to reflect on our relationship with the world around us, and use blessings to express our hopes and desires for the future.

There are two activities for closing this ritual and your time together today. Plan to use one (or both) of the following closing activities.

Option 1: Sharing Blessings and Light

Supplies:

- A pair of Shabbat candles for each couple present
 - **Note:** You can ask each couple to bring a pair of Shabbat candles with them to your gathering, [purchase candles](#) for everyone, or ask your City Director to mail you enough for each couple.
- Ribbon, string, or yarn
- Scissors
- One note card per couple
- Pens

Hand out two Shabbat candles, one note card, and a pen to each couple.

Read Aloud

We invite you to think of a blessing of hope you have for the future. Together, please write your blessing on the paper and tie it around your candles. At the end of the evening, you each will go home with a set of Shabbat candles and a blessing from one of your HMI friends to read next time you light Shabbat candles.

Give everyone time to write their blessing. Then bring the group back together by inviting 2-3 couples to share the blessing they wrote.

Read Aloud

These blessings represent our support for one another, the power of community, and the strength it takes to hope for a brighter future. May the light of these Shabbat candles continue to guide us on the path toward healing and peace.

Once everyone has finished, put all the bundles of candles together in one place. At the end of the event, make sure that each couple takes a pair of candles (that is not theirs) home with them.

Raising Up Hope for the Future

Option 2: 18 Blessings for Peace

Gather around the yahrzeit candle you lit at the beginning of the ritual; if you've gathered for Shabbat, gather around your Shabbat candles. Share the blessings below, either by having one person read the whole thing, or by passing the paper around to have a different person read each blessing.

Read Aloud

We close this ritual and our time together today with these words which make up 18 blessings. The numerical value of the Hebrew word *chai*, meaning "life," is 18 which is why this number is meaningful in Jewish tradition. In the words of the author, Hila Ratzabi, "we can recite these blessings while feeling the warmth of the candlelight near our hands and sending that light to all who need it, including ourselves."

May this light embrace all who are suffering through war.

May this light spread and reach toward the hostages, wrapping them in a protective embrace.

May this light illuminate paths of safety and shelter for the people of Gaza.

May this light shatter barriers separating food and aid from innocent civilians.

May this light open space for the people of Israel and of Palestine to process their grief and anxiety.

May this light break open the barriers in our hearts.

May this light soften anger and fear.

May this light erase thoughts of revenge.

May this light give us strength to stand up against extremists in power.

May this light hold gently the traumas of our past and the traumas of our present.

May all the people who call Israel and Palestine their home come together to grieve and witness each other's pain.

May we transform our grief into solidarity.

May our solidarity pave the way for a shared future.

May we nurture the Divine spark in ourselves.

May that spark shine out to include our families, friends, neighbors, and all who live on earth.

May the Divine light from before Creation inspire us to choose life.

May this light empower us to build the future we want to see.

May this light guide us on the path toward healing and peace.

([Source: Hila Ratzabi](#))