

T'ruah Resource Guide for YOM HAZIKARON AND

YOM HAATZMA'UT 2024 *(and beyond)*



In the best of times, Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzma'ut can be complicated for progressive American Jews. How do we do something that feels meaningful and appropriate, and not just throw a falafel party? This year — with hostages still held in Gaza, more than 33,000 Palestinians dead and famine imminent, the war ongoing, and the threat of escalation — the emotional and political complexity reaches new heights. This resource offers guidance for educators on where to start and some factors to consider. It is not a program in a box but rather an approach to planning whatever program your community needs.

1. Get clarity on where you are emotionally and spiritually.

Do some journaling. Practice [hitbodedut](#) (a Chasidic practice of speaking aloud to God whatever comes to mind). Go for a walk with a friend. Talk to your therapist. When you are clear on what you are bringing to the table, then you can choose to either set it aside or bring it along for the ride. This increased self-awareness can be helpful in overcoming any unintended obstacles or pitfalls.

2. Decide what story you want to tell your community and what values you want them to explore or connect to, as you observe these holidays.¹

This fundamental of pedagogy bears repeating: Before deciding **what to do**, decide **what you want people to take away**.

One way to think about this is by selecting one, or a small number, of values that your program explores or helps people move through. What journey or conversation is your community in the midst of, and what waypoint or punctuation mark do you want these days to serve as? M² Vice President of Programs Mollie Andron offered one sample narrative arc: from **grief to gratitude to growth**. Here are some other values we can imagine being useful in different T'ruah communities:

Diversity, Community, Peoplehood: For a congregation with a wide spectrum of perspectives, perhaps the core message for this Yom HaAtzma'ut is that we remain together — and connected to what happens in Israel and Palestine — even when we disagree with each other.

Human Dignity or Justice: A community ready to take a more specific ideological stance might want to frame the story around human dignity and/or justice for both Israelis and Palestinians.

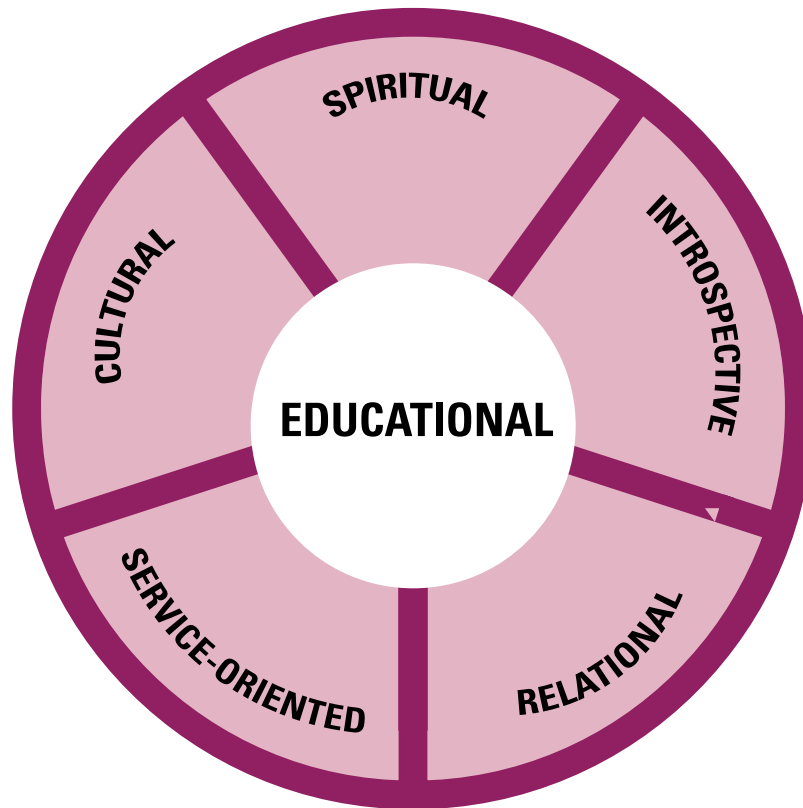
Compassion: Another congregation might want similar messaging but with more of a heart-centered focus, drawing out compassion for both Palestinians and Israelis and hoping to awaken their compassion for each other.

Tenacity or Steadfastness: In a place that might not feel ready to make Yom HaAtzma'ut about Palestinians too, perhaps uplifting the tenacity of the Jewish people — even when the situation seems so desperate — offers a way in.

¹With gratitude to M2's Yamim Project for offering this framing: <https://ieje.org/events/the-yamim-project/>

3. How is the Jewish experience you are going to create different from what your community is getting from the news?

Having picked one or more values, or a basic narrative you want to tell, the next challenge is how to get into it. We offer these six frames as different ways to approach these holidays:



Spiritual: We observe these holidays on their Jewish date, not their secular date, which cues us to connect to Jewish tradition and to the Divine. (Note that Nakba Day² is observed on the secular date, May 15, which in itself opens an interesting way to think about how we might relate to the two days differently.) Text study offers a way to grapple with complex moral questions in a way that reinforces our belonging. Liturgy can be a way to express multiple, even contradictory, feelings, or to experience an emotional arc. Leaning into the aspirational can free us from conventions and allow us to dream.

- Sample text studies on [occupation](#), governing a [Jewish state](#), and [yovel/jubilee](#) (freedom after 50 years).
- Explore [different prayers](#) for the State of Israel.

Introspective: A more internal, personal experience with these holidays can be achieved through meditation, journaling, art-making, poetry-writing, and the like. The goal might be to help individuals make sense of this day for themselves, without potentially clashing with others who have strong, different feelings.

- [“I am from”](#) poem format
- Jewish Studio Project’s [framework](#) for exploring feelings using art

² To learn more about Nakba Day, here is one source to start with: an [article](#) from the Social History Workshop, a blog founded by historians and scholars of the Middle East in order to make cutting edge scholarship on the region and the world accessible to a broad audience. (Published on haaretz.com, behind a paywall.)

Relational: The goal might be to shore up relationships that have been strained by the war or to help people tell personal stories and find connection irrespective of their political beliefs. This can be done through story slams or facilitated conversations across differences.

Service-oriented: In a moment of feeling helpless, some form of action or service for others can be uplifting. Raise money for an Israeli or Palestinian NGO. Volunteer with an organization that serves the needs of refugees in this country. Write activist letters to your representatives in Congress or the White House, or simply encouraging letters to Israeli human rights NGOs. There is no comprehensive list, but one place to start is with New Israel Fund grantees.

Cultural: Use poetry, art, dance, food, or other related cultural activities to explore Israeli and Palestinian culture, explore complex feelings, connect on a basic human level, and (maybe even) have fun. While there is a risk here of oversimplifying/caricaturing or appropriating, we offer some resources that can help you avoid those pitfalls.

- [Anthony Bourdain Parts Unknown: Jerusalem](#): An exploration of the story of Jerusalem by way of food
- Cookbooks: *Jerusalem: A Cookbook* by Sami Tamimi and Yotam Ottolenghi; *Palestine on a Plate* by Joudie Kalla; *The Gaza Kitchen* by Laila El-Haddad and Maggie Schmitt
- [M²'s workshop workbook](#): Starting on p. 13, they have collected a myriad of resources (songs, poems, artwork, prompts) you may find useful

Educational: We place this at the center because whatever frame you choose you are educating your community that this is one way to observe these holidays. But in addition, this can be the time to screen a documentary, invite a speaker, etc. As you brainstorm, return to the question of why your community should come to your event and what you are offering that they can't get at home on their own.

4. Remember this year's observance is a work in progress.

Yes, pressure feels high to get it right the first time this year. But if it doesn't go exactly as you want, or even if it flops completely, it's ok. This program is one stop along the journey your community is taking together, and everything that happens in it is a learning opportunity for all involved – participants and leadership alike. You may even want to explicitly share that framing with your community.