

Gaza War & Al Nakba Day Memorial Ritual

Source: <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/toolkit/#jewish-rituals>

Jewish mourning tradition can provide us with the language and tools to cope with unfathomable loss. The very same liturgy provides us with the framework to discuss accountability and guilt.

This ritual was first observed at the JVP 2015 National Members Meeting by JVP members across the world. The ritual was a collaboration between JVP's Rabbinical Council and Artist & Cultural Workers Council. The text was written by Rabbi Linda Holtzman and Cantor Michael Davis of the Rabbinical Council, and Susan Eisenberg, Sarah Sills, and Hillary Sametz contributed music and visuals to the ritual from the Artist & Cultural Workers Council.

The Memorial Service was envisioned as a time to give people the opportunity to sit still and take in the enormity of loss that they had experienced during the previous year. It took place at the National Members Meeting that followed the 2014 siege in Gaza, so the loss was great and the sorrow was intense.

We wanted the ritual to be open to a range of people: those who look to Jewish prayer for support and those who do not, but to all who felt the need to have the time and space to experience their sense of loss. Some were in mourning for the loss of life and the devastation in Gaza, and for some, their mourning also included the loss of belief in Israel as a country they could support. The ritual was broad enough to open to a range of people and their feelings.

This ritual can be modified to fit the needs of your chapter by adding to or omitting sections as indicated below.

In this toolkit you will find:

- Facilitator instructions
- Ideas for set up of the space
- Points to consider
- Supply needs
- Powerpoint slides for ritual
- Memorial cards
- Flow of the service
- Poetry
- Liturgical texts

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact JVP's rabbinic intern Ariana at ariana@jvp.org

Facilitator instructions

The memorial ritual needs to be facilitated by a leader or two who are comfortable with expressions of grief in the community. Everyone should be given explicit permission to sit with their own sadness and to express it as they need to do so.

The room needs to reflect the somber ritual: dim lights, soft, mournful music (even if a violist is not available), and visual reminders of the loss experienced (even if a full slideshow is not available.)

Limiting the amount of talking from the ritual leaders is important so the mourning can remain individual and deeply personal for everyone present.

Space guidelines

Consider: will this be a public event, or just for your chapter membership and allies?

Consider: how will you make this event accessible to your audience, based on range of experience and comfort with Jewish ritual?

Consider: what type of space you want, will it be outdoors or indoors?

Points to consider

When running a mourning ritual, consider, what is the purpose of it? Will you look to hold space, or to create visible, public action? How should this ritual shift if it is public mourning? What context might it need?

Supply needs

- Projector, if you plan to project below slides
- Copies of the ritual for each participant
- Memorial cards
- Paper on which to post sticky notes
- Sticky notes
- Markers + pens
- Kleenex boxes
- Optional: music, preferably live
- Optional: yizkor (memorial) candle

Photograph Projections Presentation

Slides to play during the meditative sections of this ritual are [available here](#). While not necessary for this ritual, and potentially impossible depending on space, these slides are another way to communicate loss, tragedy, and set the bounds around mourning for the ritual.

Consider: will the setup of this technology be a distraction during the ritual itself? How can you project images of a sensitive nature and be mindful of participants needs, and the respect these images deserve?

Adaptation: if your chapter chooses to forego some of the liturgy, could you use these slides with poetry or as silent reflection?

Memorial Cards

Created by JVP Artist Council member Sarah Sills, memorial cards for the ritual can be [accessed here](#) for printing. If you have the resources, we recommend printing them on glossy card stock.

Consider: What will you do with these following the ritual? Do you encourage participants to bring them home? Will you recycle them? Use them as a public installation, and post them or lay them somewhere with a lot of foot traffic?

Flow of the Service

The mood was set by a violist who played mournful music as people entered and who continued playing as people sat in silence.

The room was arranged for people to sit in concentric semi-circles. Note cards and pens were under everyone's chairs.

In the back of the room, there was a large blank paper covering much of the wall, designated as the Wailing Wall. On the floor leaning against the wall were pictures and names of those killed in Gaza.

In the front of the room, there was a large screen with the names and pictures of those killed in Gaza were constantly revolving.

During an Introduction, people were given permission to sit in silence with their feelings and to just open to the experience of being together in community with others who were also experiencing a deep sense of loss.

A poem was read.

There was a personal reflection by someone telling of their loss and talking about the sadness that they felt. The person was clear that each person's loss was different and deeply personal.

Instructions for writing on the cards were given along with a brief meditation, asking people to write a message to the people of Gaza whom they are focusing on and place the message on the Wailing Wall. People were told that when they were ready, they could go to the back wall and write their message to place on the Wall. In this way, they could take their private prayers and inner thoughts and express them, express the grief that does not always feel safe to express. The JVP community could hold the grief together.

During the silence and writing, a section of Aicha, Lamentations, was chanted, ended with the singing of Hashivenu when all writing was finished and everyone had returned to their seats.

A poem was read.

El Maleh Rachamim was chanted

The Mourner's Kaddish was recited

The violinist began to play again and everyone left the room in silence.

Music

Music played at the Memorial Circle was a mixture of some improvised, some written out. Some pieces to consider are:

"Elegy" by Igor Stravinsky

"Kaddish" by Maurice Ravel

"Vocalise" by Sergei Rachmaninoff

Music can be played live, or via recordings. Anything that fits the mood is welcome.

Selection of Poems

There are many possible poems to include. Choose those that feel strong to you from among these or choose any poems that feels right to you.

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz + Elliott batTzedek

I think of the women who sailed to Palestine
years before I was born—
halutzot, pioneers
believing in a new life
socialists, anarchists, jeered
as excitable, sharp of tongue
too filled with life
wanting equality in the promised land
carrying the broken promises
of Zionism in their hearts
along with the broken promises
of communism, anarchism—
makers of miracle who expected miracles
as stubbornly as any housewife does
that the life she gives her life to
shall not be cheap
that the life she gives her life to
shall not turn on her
that the life she gives her life to

shall want an end to suffering
Zion by itself is not enough.

Adrienne Rich

let me be strong as history
let me join those who refuse
let there be time
let it be possible
let no faction keep me
from those who suffer
let no faction keep me from those who needed a home
and found one
[let no faction keep me from those who had homes
and lost them: stolen, walled off, razed, occupied]
let no faction keep me from those
who need a home now

Enough for Me
Fadwa Tuqan

Enough for me to die on her earth
be buried in her
to melt and vanish into her soil
then sprout forth as a flower
played with by a child from my country.
Enough for me to remain
in my country's embrace
to be in her close as a handful of dust
a sprig of grass
a flower.

From "In the Deserts of Exile"
Jabra Ibrahim Jabra

O land of ours where our childhood passed
Like dreams in the shade of the orange-grove,
Among the almond-trees in the valleys—
Remember us now wandering
Among the thorns of the desert,
Wandering in rocky mountains;
Remember us now
In the tumult of cities beyond deserts and seas;
Remember us
With our eyes full of dust

That never clears in our ceaseless wandering.
They crushed the flowers on the hills around us,
Destroyed the houses over our heads,
Scattered our torn remains,
Then unfolded the desert before us,
With valleys writhing in hunger
And blue shadows shattered into red thorns
Bent over corpses left as prey for falcon and crow.

Is it from your hills that the angels sang to the shepherds
Of peace on earth and goodwill among men?

We Are Romans, Mourning for the Destruction of the Temple
Jerry Haber, Magnes Zionist Tisha B'Av 5774

We are Romans, mourning for the destruction of the Temple.
We are Romans, born of a great civilization with a noble destiny.
We rain havoc on Jerusalem and its people.
And blame the Zealots for the deaths and displacement .
“Terrorists.” “Suicide-bombers.” “Haters of all things civilized”
“We wish no harm to the people.”
“We willingly grant them autonomy.”
“The destruction of Jerusalem is the work of the Zealots.”
But the churban is the work of our hands.
Our hands have shed this blood.
We are Romans, mourning for the destruction of the Temple.

My god how beautiful it is, it could break open your heart, it broke open my heart, the
ways Jews grieved and mourned for Zion and Jerusalem for two thousand years. We lay down
and wept and wept and wept for thee Zion.

And in those words everything everyone has lost and wept for. We lay down and wept
and wept, remembering thee, Zion.

And yet: happy shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock. Happy
shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock.

As if any grief, however vast, however deep, down to the core of the Earth and up into
the stars, could justify genocide. As if mourning, even thousands of years of mourning,
somehow makes just children's bodies broken, dashed, shattered, scattered.

What have we become that we can pretend our need to feel safe, to be safe, justifies
colonization, occupation, imprisonment, mass murder?

My god how awful it is, how horrible beyond measure, how it breaks your heart open,

that weeping for Zion has been swallowed whole by Zionism.

If we remember thee, Zion, our memory must stretch back and back, to grasp what our ancestors yearned for, to grasp being forced to sing our songs in a strange land while ruled by violent occupiers.

To grasp the Commandment repeated over and over and over that we must be kind and moral and just for we were strangers once.

Only when we dare grasp our full memory can we fully remember Zion, fully remember what we have lost and what we go on losing.

And only when we remember what we are losing can we fully weep.

Liturgical Resources

The use of liturgical text in this ritual can accomplish a variety of your goals for this service. See if there is a member in your chapter who is comfortable doing this!

El Maleh Rachamim

El Maleh Rachamim is traditionally chanted at funerals. You can learn the music online [here](#).

אל מלא רחמים שוכן במרומים המצא מנוחה נכונה תחת כנפי השכינה
במעלות קדושים וטהורים בזהר הרקיע מזהירים לנשמות יקירינו
וקדושינו שהלכו לעולמם: אָנָּה בַּעַל הַרְחָמִים הַסְתִּירָם בְּצֶל כְּנָפֶיךָ
לְעוֹלָמִים וְצָרָר בְּצָרוֹר-הַחַיִּים אֶת נְשָׁמָתָם: יְהוָה הוּא נִחַלְתָּם וַיְנוּחַ
בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבָם וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

*El maley rakhamim shokhen ba-m'romim ha-m'tzei
m'nukhah n'khonah
takhat kanfei ha-sh'khinah b'ma'alot k'doshim u'thorim
k'zohar ha-rakiah maz'hirim l'nishmot yakireinu
u'k'dosheinu she-hal'khu l'olamam.
Ana ba'al ha-rakhamim ha-s'tirem b'tzel k'nafekha
l'olamim
u-tz'ror bitz'ror ha-khayim et nishmatam. Adonay hu
nakhalatam v'yanukhu b'shalom al mish'kabam
v'nomar amen.*

God filled with mercy,
dwelling in the heavens' heights,
bring proper rest
beneath the wings of your Shehinah,
amid the ranks of the holy and the pure,
illuminating like the brilliance of the skies
the souls of our beloved and our blameless
who went to their eternal place of rest.
May you who are the source of mercy
shelter them beneath your wings eternally,
and bind their souls among the living,
that they may rest in peace.

And let us say: Amen.¹

Mourner's Kaddish

Should be spoken, slowly.

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעֻלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתֵיהּ,
וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵיהּ בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית
יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעֻגְלָא וּבְזָמַן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי עֻלְמֵיָא.
וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר
וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא, לְעֻלְמָא מִן כָּל
בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא, דְּאָמְרוּ בְּעֻלְמָא,
וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָא, וְחַיִּים עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל
יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

*Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba.
B'alma di v'ra chirutei,
v'yamlich malchutei,
b'chayeichon uv'yomeichon
uv'chayei d'chol beit Yisrael,
baagala uviz'man kariv. V'im'ru: Amen.
Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach
l'alam ul'almei almaya.
Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpaar
v'yitromam v'yitnasei,
v'yit'hadar v'yitaleh v'yit'halal
sh'mei d'kud'sha b'rich hu,
l'eila min kol birchata v'shirata,
tushb'chata v'nechemata,
daamiran b'alma. V'imru: Amen.
Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya,
v'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael.
V'imru: Amen.*

Exalted and hallowed be God's great name
in the world which God created, according to plan.
May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our
lifetime
and the life of all Israel -- speedily, imminently, to
which we say Amen.
Blessed be God's great name to all eternity.
Blessed, praised, honored, exalted, extolled, glorified,
adored, and lauded
be the name of the Holy Blessed One, beyond all
earthly words and songs of blessing,
praise, and comfort. To which we say Amen.
May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for
us and all Israel,
to which we say Amen.
May the One who creates harmony on high, bring
peace to us and to all Israel.
To which we say Amen.²

¹ Text via Ritualwell.org

² Text via ReformJudaism.com

*Oseh shalom bimromav,
Hu yaaseh shalom aleinu,
v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru: Amen.*