

A NEW YEAR, A CHANGED WORLD:

A High Holidays Guide for After October 7



ONETABLE



A NEW YEAR, A CHANGED WORLD.

This year's High Holiday season may feel different. The events of October 7 were both shocking and horrific, leaving many of us in deep grief, perhaps anger, and in a state of identity turmoil.

It's been a challenging year, one that has led some of us to reassess our worldview and grapple with unfamiliar emotions — fear, betrayal, and a profound sense of uncertainty.

The Days of Awe, Shabbat Shuvah (the Shabbat between Rosh Hashana + Yom Kippur), Yom Kippur, and Sukkot are some of the most important times on the Jewish calendar, taking place during three weeks this October. They are rich with symbols, rituals, and traditions. Each of these times + holidays offer opportunities to reflect on the past year, process emotions, engage in discussion, and share experiences that may bring clarity, comfort, or a sense of relief.

This guide is designed to help you draw inspiration from the High Holiday traditions to honor the horrific events of October 7, 2023 and the year that has passed since. Use this guide to incorporate rituals, discussions, or moments of self-reflection so that you may ease the burden by sharing it with others or gain deeper understanding.

TIPS FOR USING THIS GUIDE:

1

Trust Yourself

The suggestions in this guide are just that – suggestions. You know your needs + context best. Feel free to tweak, change, and adapt the content or methods to suit what works for you.

2

Mix + Match

While each activity in this guide is linked to one of the three holidays, feel free to use any of the ideas for a different holiday or any Shabbat dinner.

3

You Know Enough

These suggestions are inspired by traditional High Holiday rituals + texts, but you don't need to be familiar with the original elements to appreciate their richness and depth. You have everything you need!

4

Group or Solo

These ideas are designed to help you create meaningful moments to reflect on the year since October 7. Most of these suggestions can also be used solo or in a small group. Give yourself the opportunity for clarity + relief.

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Do

*Simple Rituals Inspired by High Holiday
Traditions to Help Us Process
Where We Are Since October 7*



Shabbat Shuvah

Inspired by the ancient Rosh Hashana ritual of Tashlich (which means “to cast off”), this short ritual can help release burdens and promote healing.

Traditionally during the *Tashlich* ceremony, we symbolically cast off the sins of the previous year by tossing pebbles or bread crumbs into flowing water. You can create a similar experience by placing a bowl of fresh water at the center of your table. Invite your guests to reflect quietly for a few moments and narrow on one issue that is weighing on them—something that has become an emotional burden over the past year. This could be feelings of pain, regret, confusion, guilt, sadness, or any other emotion they wish to acknowledge and symbolically release.

It's important to note that everyone experiences negative or unpleasant feelings, and this ritual is all about unearthing them.

After a few moments, invite your guests to consider when that feeling or issue began to trouble them and how they can compassionately elevate an inner voice that reassures them they have what it takes to heal and that they have the support around them to embark on a healing path.

Then, invite your guests to symbolically cast off their burden into the fresh water. In Jewish tradition, water holds the power of healing, readiness, and acceptance. Allow your guests a few more moments of quiet reflection, encouraging them to notice if they can get to a feeling of relief. You might invite your guests to share their experiences. However, in many cases, it might be better to keep the experience private, allowing each person to treasure their moment of healing in their own personal way.



Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur's traditional liturgy includes a special memorial ceremony called Yizkor (which means "remember"). Here's a simple suggestion for a moment before sitting down to dinner before Yom Kippur begins.

Before dinner, light a memorial candle (also known as a *Yahrzeit* candle or *Ner Neshama*, which burns for 24 hours) – or any candle you have on hand. Invite your guests to take a moment to reflect on who or what they want to remember today. This light can be in honor of someone who lost their life during the past year in the violent conflict in Gaza and Israel, or someone dear to them who passed away under unrelated circumstances. It can also be in honor of a value you wish to affirm – one that you believe the world needs more of – with the intention that this value will help make the world better and more just.

Invite one guest to light the candle, followed by a moment of quiet reflection. Then, proceed to sit down for dinner.



Sukkot

On Sukkot, we gather four types of plants that customarily grow in the land of Israel representing the harvest, each carrying its own symbolic meaning. We bundle them together and then shake them during the holiday as a way to transition to the rainy season. Here's a simple way to connect with the roots of this ritual.

As Sukkot is about honoring where we are physically and the bounty of what's around you, go outside (you can do this either before dinner or as a group during your dinner) and take your time to walk around. Observe the plants growing in your area and gather four types of local, seasonal plants that hold personal meaning for you. To draw inspiration from the traditional *lulav*, look to collect four plants that represent:

Eyes: Representing our outlook

The Spine: Signifying our actions

The Heart: Representing our feelings

Lips: Expressing our speech

An optional fifth addition would be to find a **flower** to represent October 7. As the Nova Festival field has become synonymous with poppies, include a flower to honor this tragic event and day in Jewish history.



Options for Small Additions to Any Dinner

This year, following October 7, many of us feel a sense of dissonance when celebrating holidays or enjoying meals with others. Finding joy amidst so much pain + loss can be challenging. Here are a few simple additions that can help acknowledge this sorrow, allowing you and your guests to be present for one another with both openness + joy.

Light an Extra Candle: Consider adding an extra candle as a symbol of remembrance and solidarity. This candle can honor those who are no longer with us, those currently experiencing loss and pain, and serve as a beacon of hope amidst the darkness.

Add an Empty Chair: Place an empty chair at the table to honor the hostages still held in Gaza that were captured a year ago on October 7. This gesture acknowledges their absences and invites reflection on their memories or their safe return.

Set Out an Empty Cup: Position an empty cup at the table as a symbol of the unfulfilled and the lost. This can serve as a reminder to pause and reflect on the voids we carry and the resilience we seek to cultivate.

These additions (and similar ones) can create a space for meaningful connection and help balance the joy of the occasion with an honest acknowledgment of the sorrow that fills the world right now.

Share

*Conversational Prompts Related to
the Holidays that can Help Share +
Process the Past Challenging Year*



Shabbat Shuvah

Reflecting on the Year

How is the world different now compared to last Rosh Hashana? How are you different, in light of the events of October 7 and everything that followed?

New Year, New Challenges

During the last year, it felt like something new + confusing emerged every day. How do you stay informed and connected to what's happening in the world while also protecting your mental health?

Yom Kippur

Broken Promises

Kol Nidrei, the famous opening prayer of Yom Kippur, annuls any personal or religious oaths made between oneself and God over the past year (and, according to some, for the coming year as well). Use this opportunity to reflect on whether any promises made to us — or to our generations — were broken this year. In light of this reflection, consider: **What promises would you like to make, or wish you could make, to the next generation?**

Who Is Paying the Price?

Kaparot, a symbolic tradition practiced before Yom Kippur, involves waving money (or in some communities a chicken) over a person's head and then donating it to charity, symbolizing the atonement of their sins. While this ritual may seem antiquated, it invites us to consider why bad things happen in the world + who ultimately bears the cost of someone else's mistakes. **Does this idea resonate with you? In what ways?**

Sukkot

Home

A Sukkah is a temporary home, reminding us to appreciate the safety and shelter we have and to extend a hand to those who do not. In the past year, countless people in Israel + Gaza have lost their homes. **What does home mean to you? How can we support those who have lost theirs?**

Welcoming

The holiday of Sukkot emphasizes the value of welcoming — a core value of OneTable. **How can we create space within ourselves for those who are different from us? How can we hold space for someone else's pain? Where do you feel at home, and with whom do you feel comfortable grappling with difficult questions?**

Who Inspires You?

A unique Sukkot tradition involves inviting *Ushpizin* ("guests" in Aramaic), symbolically welcoming prominent + inspiring figures from Jewish history into the Sukkah. As you gather around the table, **invite each participant to reflect, share, and symbolically welcome individuals who have inspired or impressed them over the past year — those who have demonstrated leadership, courage, authenticity, or innovative thinking.**



Reflect

*Suggestions for Meditation or Journaling
Prompts: Reflecting on the High Holidays
and Our Personal State Post-October 7*





RECOMMENDED STEPS FOR AN IMPACTFUL MEDITATION PRACTICE

These prompts are designed to inspire reflection and clarity, whether used individually or in a group setting.

Find a Comfortable Position

Choose a seated or lying-down position that feels both relaxed + alert. Make sure your spine is straight and your body is well-supported. Whether you sit on a chair, a cushion, or directly on the floor, choose whatever allows you to be comfortable and at ease.

Remove Potential Distractions

Turn off any devices, notifications, or other distractions that could interrupt your practice. Create a quiet, calming environment where you can fully focus on the present moment.

Begin with Deep Breaths

Gently close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath. Take a deep breath in, filling your lungs completely, and then slowly exhale. Repeat this a few times, allowing yourself to settle into a calm + centered state.

Reflect on the Prompt

Take as much time as you need to reflect on the meditation or journaling prompt. Allow your thoughts to flow naturally, without trying to force any particular outcome. Let the process be organic + gentle.

Take Your Time Coming Out of Meditation

When you're ready to end your meditation, do so gradually. Slowly bring your awareness back to your surroundings. Gently wiggle your fingers + toes, and gradually open your eyes. Take a moment to notice and acknowledge any new realizations, clarity, or simply the sense of calm you've cultivated.

Shabbat Shuvah

Hear The Call of the Shofar

One of the central traditions of Rosh Hashanah is the blowing of the *shofar*, a ram's horn. In your meditation, imagine the sound of the *shofar* being blown, resonating deeply within you. As you hear it echo multiple times, ask yourself: **What is the *shofar* calling me to do? What actions do I feel compelled to take in response to our current troubling reality?**



Yom Kippur

Is Forgiveness Possible?

In Jewish tradition, the act of forgiveness is held in high regard: “Who is forgiven? One who forgives others” (Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashana). Over the past year, amidst the shifts, turmoil, and confusion we’ve all experienced, **have you felt hurt or betrayed by someone? Can you find space within yourself to forgive? How might forgiveness help you heal and move forward?**

Holding Our Pain

A central part of the traditional Yom Kippur liturgy is the *Viduy* – the confession. Traditionally, people may strike their heart with a fist for each sin mentioned in the prayer. Instead of striking your heart, try holding it. **Place your hand gently on your heart and listen to the pain.**

Reflect

What have you lost this year? What has changed? Acknowledge your pain. Hold it tenderly. Sit with it in quiet contemplation. Don’t try to undo the pain or solve anything. Simply let your body be present with it. Then ask yourself: **Does this feel like the beginning of a healing path? What might be the next step?**




Sukkot

Welcoming Our Authentic Selves

A central value associated with the holiday of Sukkot is welcoming. In your reflection, invite your authentic self into the Sukkah or the space where you are. Ask yourself: **Over the past year, have there been times when I felt the need to hide my true self in certain social contexts or situations? What prompted me to not be authentic in those moments? If that space were safe and felt like home, how might I have behaved differently? In what ways?** Reflect on where you feel you can be your true self – without masks, pretense, or the need to conform. **Where can you express your genuine opinions and feelings freely?**





Learn

*Invitation to Short Text Studies
with Guiding Questions*

Days of Awe

Holidays of Remembrance vs. Holidays Facing the Future

The Jewish holidays are primarily times of remembrance, when individuals, families, and communities are called to recall and reenact significant historical events through ritual. Each holiday prompts us to reflect, engage with the next generation, and ask ourselves: Where did I come from? What does my biography include? On Passover, Sukkot, and Shavuot, we ask: When and where was I born? In Egypt as a slave, and then I embarked on a journey from slavery to freedom. I was present at Mount Sinai, I wandered in the desert toward the Promised Land, and I settled and worked its land.

In contrast, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur do not have a history – no memory, no past. There is no story. Thus, neither time, birth, nor identity determine their content. It is not about what happened in the past but what's possible in the future. Our hearts and faces are directed forward. These holidays invite us to reflect on the direction of our lives: How do we choose to live them? What are our dreams and aspirations? What is our vision for a just and humane society? What is the state of our community, our home, and our family? If you desire to create a different reality – a better and more just one – it depends entirely on you: on your aspiration for change, on your commitment to redeem yourself and society. It hinges on your vow right now, in the present, but with your gaze set firmly on the future. These two holidays are fundamentally humane and optimistic, focusing on human potential and the promise of what we can become.

-ARYEH BEN-GURION

Aryeh Ben-Gurion (1916 - 1998) was a prominent education + cultural figure and one of the founders of Kibbutz Beit Hashita in Israel. He was the nephew of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister.

- ***Do you agree with the distinction made between the High Holidays and other Jewish holidays?***
- ***What might that difference mean to you?***
- ***When thinking about Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur as holidays focused on the future rather than the past, how can these days inspire us to take action in creating a better world?***

The Birthday of the World

MARGE PIERCY, 2006

*On the birthday of the world
I begin to contemplate
what I have done and left
undone, but this year
not so much rebuilding*

*of my perennially damaged
psyche, shoring up eroding
friendships, digging out
stumps of old resentments
that refuse to rot on their own.*

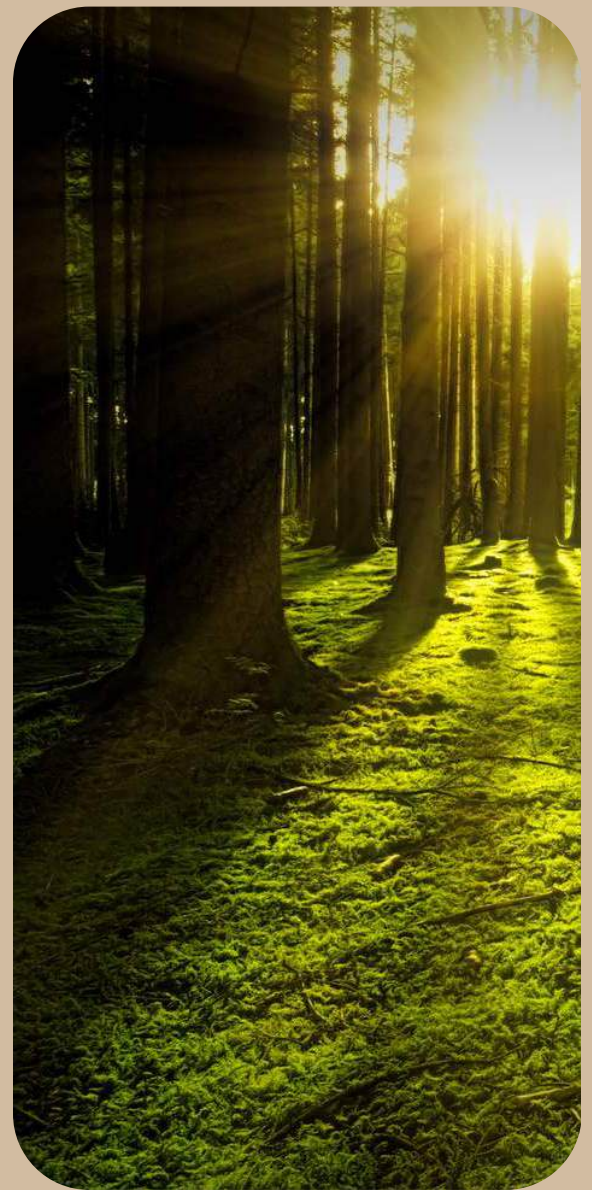
*No, this year I want to call
myself to task for what
I have done and not done
for peace. How much have
I dared in opposition?*

*How much have I put
on the line for freedom?
For mine and others?
As these freedoms are pared,
sliced and diced, where*

*have I spoken out? Who
have I tried to move? In
this holy season, I stand
self-convicted of sloth
in a time when lies choke*

*the mind and rhetoric
bends reason to slithering
choking pythons. Here
I stand before the gates
opening, the fire dazzling*

*my eyes, and as I approach
what judges me, I judge
myself. Give me weapons
of minute destruction. Let
my words turn into sparks.*



Marge Piercy (born 1936) is an American novelist, poet, and social activist. Her work, deeply rooted in her Jewish heritage, often explores feminist themes, social justice, and environmental causes.

Sukkot

Sukkot: A Time for Embracing Equality and Reflecting on Less Fortunate Times

The last holiday of the year [in the Biblical holiday cycle], known as Sukkot, occurs at a time when day and night are equal in length (the fall equinox). From this, we learn two things: The first is that we must respect equality + reject inequality. Equality is the beginning and origin of justice, and inequality is the root of injustice. The first is like sunlight; the second, darkness.

The second thing we learn is that after all the fruits have ripened perfectly, we are commanded during the holiday to dwell in booths. Perhaps the purpose of this is to remind us of the wanderings of our ancestors in the depths of the desert, when they spent many years living in tents at each stop. Indeed, It is good for a person to remember their poverty in the days of their wealth, their lowliness in the days of their glory, their life as a simple person even after they have risen to greatness, the dangers of war in times of peace, the storms at sea while on land, and the desert while in the city. But beyond the pleasure, you will find great benefit here for the cultivation of good traits and deeds because whoever remembers both the good and the bad will surely be filled with feelings of gratitude.

-PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, ON SPECIAL LAWS

Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE - 50 CE) was a Jewish philosopher and theologian who lived in Alexandria, in the Roman province of Egypt.

- ***Philo's perspective on Sukkot emphasizes social justice. Do you agree with his views on equality? What additional values do you believe are necessary to promote justice?***
- ***Beyond the feelings of gratitude mentioned in the text, what other effects might arise from recalling less privileged times while experiencing well-being?***
- ***Is it necessary to personally endure challenging life circumstances to empathize with the less privileged and take action to improve their reality?***

