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FALL NATIONAL DAYS OF JEWISH SERVICE 2026

Neighbors in Times of Crisis

Commemorating 9/11

Jewish Service Learning Facilitation Resource

September 10 – October 10, 2026

Every year on September 11, we pause to remember the lives that were lost and the countless people who responded with extraordinary courage, compassion, and sacrifice. In the face of tragedy, first responders, neighbors, and strangers alike stepped toward one another, reminding us that service often begins not with having all the answers, but with choosing to show up. As we mark this anniversary, service offers an opportunity to honor that legacy by carrying forward the values it revealed: courage, community, and care for one another. Remembrance and service remind us that how we respond to one another, especially in times of crisis, helps shape the kind of communities we build every day.

Jewish Learning on Remembrance and Action

Yom HaZikaron: A Rosh Hashanah Sermon on 9/11, Rabbi Jonathan Lubliner

Yom HaZikaron, meaning "Day of Remembrance," is one of the alternative names for Rosh Hashanah, this specific sermon was given in 2018. Rabbi Lubliner received his MA from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he was also ordained and pursued post-graduate studies in Jewish history. Rabbi Lubliner served congregations in Connecticut and New Jersey before becoming the Jack F. Shorstein Senior Rabbi of the Jacksonville Jewish Center in 2004, where he remains today.

Every so often, history makes an indelible mark on our memories. The morning of that terrorist attack is seared into our brains as the day when our collective sense of invulnerability as a nation was shattered. As the tragedy of that early September morning unfolded, we heard the anguished cries of families fearfully awaiting news of loved ones. We saw the pictures that plastered the walls of construction sites and subway stations, the photos and descriptions of the missing. We mourned those who left for work one morning, never to return.

September 11, 2001, was a moment in time, one that will be remembered as a day of infamy. Time will continue to run its course, and as the years go by, the power of September 11th to inform our behavior will continue to diminish. Such is human nature. It is perhaps a curse, but more likely a blessing, since the passage of time can heal us as well. We could scarcely continue to exist if we always lived in the presence of intense emotion or unbearable pain.

Rosh Hashanah, however, is timeless. It comes out of nowhere—unconnected to any particular date or event in history—to remind us that *teshuvah* is not the business of grand gestures and sweeping changes made in the heat of the moment, but is at the heart of making the mundane better as we bear in mind the stories that warn and teach us of life's fragility. Said Rabbi Eliezer in Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Sages: שׁוּב יוֹם אֶחָד לִפְנֵי מִיתָתֶךָ — Repent one day before your death" (Avot 2:10). The Talmud objects, "But how does one know when will that be?" "Exactly the reason to start today," is the answer (BT, Shabbat 153a).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 Rabbi Lubliner says that *teshuvah* is about improving everyday life, not just responding to extraordinary moments. How can service be part of your everyday life, not just something you do after a crisis?

02 What are some small, consistent ways you can live out your values in your community or with the people around you?

03 Remembering those we have lost is one way we honor them. How can our memories of people, communities, and moments in history inspire the way we show up for others?

In the Torah, we find two different words for how to mark Shabbat: shamor (observe/guard) and zachor (remember). In the text below, the rabbis ask why these two words appear and what it means to hold them together.

Rabbeinu Bahya, Shemot 20:1:6

Bachya ben Asher ibn Halawa (Rabbenu Bachya) was a Spanish rabbi, scholar, and biblical commentator. He built his Torah commentary on the four principles denoted by the letters PaRDeS, "Peshat, Remez, Drush, Sod," or 1. the plain text; 2. a deeper, more philosophical approach to the text; 3. a homiletical approach to the text; and 4. a mystical kabbalistic interpretation of the text.

> This is also the mystical aspect of our sages' saying (Shevuot 20), "the words '*zachor*' and 'shamor' were said as one," for "*zachor*" is the attribute of compassion, and "shamor" the attribute of justice, and so the voice with "*zachor*" and "shamor" is the attribute of compassion within the attribute of justice. This was also why there were two tablets, five against five, one tablet corresponding to the attribute of compassion and the second tablet, on which there also five statements, with five negative statements and beginning with "do not murder," corresponding to the attribute of justice, and for this reason, they were two, and not all of the statements were on a single tablet.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 Rabbeinu Bahya teaches that *zachor* (remember) represents compassion and shamor (guard/observe) represents justice. Why do you think Judaism needs both remembrance and responsibility?

02 What might be missing if we only remembered but did not act? What might be missing if we only acted but did not remember?

03 What does today's service ask you to do: act, listen, remember, or accompany? What does each one ask of you?

VALUES TENSION

Repair and Brokenness

Service-learning invites us to hold the tension between repair and brokenness. Jewish tradition calls us to respond to suffering, care for our neighbors, and help repair the world. Brokenness is often a call to action, inviting us to show up with compassion and purpose. At the same time, not every challenge has a solution, and not every wound can be healed by our efforts alone. Some realities cannot be changed quickly, and some may never be fully resolved. In those moments, our work may be less about fixing and more about witnessing, listening, learning, and standing alongside others with humility and care.

Service-learning asks us to discern what each moment requires. Are we being called to act, or to accompany? To solve a problem, or to deepen our understanding? Judaism teaches that both are sacred expressions of service, and that wisdom often lies in knowing the difference.

01 How do you know whether a situation calls for taking action or simply being present?

02 What does it mean to help repair the world when you know you can't solve every problem?

Service Project Ideas

The immediate aftermath of 9/11 demonstrated the importance of neighbors, volunteers, nonprofits, and first responders working together in moments of crisis. Remembering 9/11 invites us to strengthen our communities through service, connection, and collective action. Assemble emergency preparedness kits for vulnerable community members.

PROJECTS

- Volunteer with organizations like the American Red Cross or local Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)
- Write thank-you cards or care packages for firefighters, EMTs, healthcare workers, or emergency dispatchers
- Organize a community blood drive or donor registration event
- Participate in disaster preparedness education or community resilience training

Reflection

In Pirkei Avot, which was written in 200 BCE and is a compilation of Jewish ethical teachings, Rabbi Tarfon says: "It is not our duty to complete the work, but we are also not free to desist from doing our part." Surely, we all knew we would not complete the work during our time today. Before we conclude, we want to spend a few moments thinking about the work that is left to be done and then making commitments about how we might take the next step related to our work moving forward.

Share one action that you are committing to moving forward to address the issue you served within today.