Repair the World

FALL NATIONAL DAYS OF JEWISH SERVICE 2026

Zachor

Jewish Memory, Resilience, and Collective Responsibility after October 7th

Jewish Service Learning Facilitation Resource

September 10 – October 10, 2026

As we approach the third anniversary of the October 7th attacks on Israel and the events that followed, *zachor*, "remember," one of Judaism's most enduring invitations, feels more urgent than ever. To remember is not simply to recall what happened, but to carry memory forward in ways that shape who we become. Jewish memory binds us to one another across generations and reminds us that grief, resilience, and hope are all part of our shared story. For many Jews, October 7th and its aftermath have brought profound grief and fear as we've experienced ongoing war and rising antisemitism. In this time of uncertainty for the Jewish people, we believe service can be a powerful way to live our Jewish values, showing up both to be in community with each other and to embody our deep wish for ease and comfort for the Jewish people and our neighbors around the world. We hold space for loss while affirming the enduring strength of Jewish community. Service cannot erase tragedy, nor is it a substitute for mourning. Instead, it can be one way of expressing our commitment to one another and to the values that sustain Jewish life: showing up with compassion, strengthening community, and choosing connection even in moments of heartbreak.

Jewish Learning on Remembrance and Action

Keeping the Faith: Resilience in the Jewish Tradition, Rabbi Deborah Waxman

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D., is president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College & Jewish Reconstructionist Communities. She is the first woman, and the first lesbian, to lead a Jewish congregational union, and the first lesbian to lead a Jewish seminary. She also serves on Repair the World's Board of Directors.

Judaism, writ large, is about resilience. Across the span of Jewish history, Jews have experienced extensive trauma, even catastrophe, and we have survived–as a people and as a civilization. We have repeatedly breathed new life into the Jewish people and the Jewish civilization and we have found pathways toward repair. We have found ways to cultivate resilience, both individually and collectively.

In Judaism, separating the collective from the individual is always difficult, since the two are so often interdependent. This much is clear: Judaism has sustained the Jewish people because it sustains individuals.

Our cultural capacity for renewal is built on a foundation of individual practices that encourage and even command it. "Every day creation is renewed," the Jewish morning liturgy teaches. If we open ourselves to this teaching, we can see that every day, we have an opportunity to recommit ourselves to living out our values. The Talmud teaches that we should say 100 blessings a day. We could see it as an invitation to engage in ongoing gratitude practice, to raise up the interconnectivity and abundance that undergird our daily lives even when our days are filled with challenge and loss.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 What have you noticed about how people and communities around the world have responded to October 7th? What does that reveal about how communities cultivate resilience?

02 How do individual acts of care contribute to the resilience of an entire community?

03 As you serve today, how can your individual actions contribute to the resilience of the community around you?

There is Hope for a Tree, Rabbi Shai Held

Rabbi Shai Held, philosopher, theologian, and Bible scholar, is President and Dean at the Hadar Institute. He received the prestigious Covenant Award for Excellence in Jewish Education, and has been named multiple times by Newsweek as one of the fifty most influential rabbis in America and by the Jewish Daily Forward as one of the fifty most prominent Jews in the world

I find myself thinking: Sometimes hope is little more than a very slender thread, but that thread is everything, almost literally separating life from death.

A verse in Job reflects on the hope suggested by a tree: There is hope (tikvah) for a tree; If it is cut down it will renew itself; Its shoots will not cease.

A chopped-down tree may look dead but under the surface there is the possibility of more life. Perhaps this is our task: to affirm (to insist) that even if much of what we most value and treasure is cut down, growth and change, and renewal can (will?) yet come.

I am not optimistic, but I am hopeful — at least some of the time. We should not confuse hope with optimism. If anything, the literary critic Terry Eagleton writes, "hope and temperamental optimism are at daggers drawn." The point Eagleton is making is profound and essential. Optimism, he says, is "a form of psychological disavowal… a moral evasion"; it "does not take despair seriously enough." Perhaps counterintuitively, optimism is thus "the enemy of hope, which is necessary precisely because one is able to confess how grave a situation is." So what is hope? It is, in the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's wonderful phrase, "a passion for the possible"; it is, Eagleton explains, "a movement toward the good, not simply a craving for it."

In other words, hope involves commitment. (Wanting things to change without committing to help making them change is wishing, not hoping.) So as we enter these days of reflection, let us examine both our lives and the world in which we live them, and let us grasp for hope, however slender and vulnerable it may be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 In this piece, Rabbi Held reflects on how his relationship to Jewish texts has changed since October 7th. What Jewish texts, ideas, or traditions have taken on new meaning for you in light of October 7th and its aftermath?

02 Rabbi Held writes that wanting change without helping create it is wishing, not hoping. What do you think is the difference? What transforms hope from a feeling into a practice?

03 What does it look like to practice hope through consistent acts of care?

04 What commitment are you willing to make that moves hope from an idea into action?

VALUES TENSION

Universal & Particular

Service-learning invites us to hold the tension between caring for our own community (particularism) and caring for the broader world (universalism). For many Jews, Israel is an important expression of this particularism: a place where Jewish history, peoplehood, culture, and contemporary Jewish life intersect. October 7th and its aftermath have prompted many Jews to think more deeply about what it means to feel connected to, care for, and feel responsible for Jews and broader communities around the world.

Jewish tradition also reminds us that every person is created in the image of God and that we share a responsibility for one another; our tradition is grounded in our shared human experience. Service-learning brings these commitments together. Our Jewish values shape why we serve, while service invites us to build relationships and respond to the needs of people from many different backgrounds. Rather than choosing between particular care for our own communities and universal concern for the broader world, Judaism encourages us to embrace both.

01 How can a strong sense of identity or community help you build meaningful relationships with people who have different experiences from your own?

02 How does your own background, values, or community influence the way you show up in service?

Service Project Ideas

Since October 7th, the Jewish service movement has found ways to show up through hands-on service, including rebuilding homes and farms, supporting communities affected by loss, and caring for one another in moments of profound need.

- Connect with Repair the World's strategic partner in Israel, Yahel, to bring young adults and community members together to create postcards with messages of hope, friendship, and support to send to a community center in Israel.
- Pack meals or supply kits for a local partner (food bank, shelter), using "in memory of" framing
- Community garden or park cleanup dedicated as a living memorial
- Connect with a local Israeli or Israel-focused community organization to learn about current needs and opportunities for meaningful service

Reflection

The Hadran (Aramaic for "we will return") is traditionally recited upon completing the study of a tractate of Talmud, expressing a commitment to return to learning.

AN ADAPTATION OF THE HADRAN BY RABBI JESSY DRESSIN

"We will not forget the importance of our service, just as the service and the broader social issue within which the service is situated will continue to depend on people like us to return to it and to show up–not once–but in ways that are sustained. And as we serve, we will learn. And as we learn, thus may we be further motivated to serve."

01 What word or idea from this blessing calls out to you, and how might today's Jewish service learning stay with you when you return to your daily life?

02 What is one action you will take to keep addressing an issue we focused on today, and what is something you want to learn more about?

03 What is one way you might choose to stay connected to Jewish communities, including communities in Israel, through continued learning, relationship, or service?