

Hear Our Pleas

Facilitator Guide

What prayer traditions and customs do we have to pray on behalf of the hostages? What are the various new forms of prayer we can create in order to plead for a brighter future?

Info For Facilitator



Target Audience:

All ages



Length Of Program:

10-60 minutes,
depending on which parts you choose



Materials & Prep:

- Prepare the Prayer Collection Cards- depending on the prayers you'd like to use.
- Devices for screening the videos if you choose to incorporate them
- Paper and pens for written prayer exercise
- Paper and markers for visual prayer exercise

Additional Resources:

- Siddurim, Books of Tehillim / Psalms

LET'S EXPLORE

The Power of Prayer

Rachel Goldberg, who's son Hersh Goldberg Polin was taken captive on the morning of October 7th, shares that she has a daily ritual of prayer:

"Praying every morning, which I do religiously, it takes about a half an hour, is very important, especially during this time when you feel so un-moored in so many ways. My faith helps anchor me throughout the day. I am constantly saying different psalms, which I find very helpful. I've said that I feel like Psalms is a self-help book because you can pick out the one that speaks to you in that moment. And of course, there are psalms of praise, but there are also psalms of saying, 'Where are you? Don't hide your face from me, God, I'm suffering. I'm in the darkness and I need you. Where are you?' And so that's very validating.

"Nothing is impossible for the Lord. So, you know, anything that He wants to do to save these hostages... We pray that God reaches out and saves these hostages. I think I pray often for the insight and wisdom of our leaders and for them... I pray for them to find the courage and the grace to stop this today. And I pray for Hersh to stay strong and to survive, and to come home alive, today, along with all the other beloved hostages"

"I believe in the power of prayer. I know it works. I feel it working. And I really believe that Hersh will come home."

Rachel also appreciates and believes in the power of the prayer of others on behalf of the hostages and notes that this does not include only Jewish prayers. She feels the Christian community has been absolutely beautiful, supportive, loving and has completely 'shown up' for them, including praying and recitation of Psalms on behalf of the hostages.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Unfortunately, the concept of Jews being held captive by their enemies, for ransom or other reasons is not a new one. Throughout Jewish history, we have had to deal with this reality and, in addition to the practical and moral questions about redeeming captives, our tradition has developed prayers to beseech God on their behalf. In this session, we offer a few ways of engaging in prayer on behalf of the hostages.



Note to Facilitator:

In this session, we explore the meaning and words of a variety of different prayers and offer ways of praying on behalf of the hostages.

In the accompanying Prayer Collection Cards file, we give a few examples of different types of prayers that could be used. Choose the ones that fit best for your students in terms of their ages, setting, familiarity with Hebrew and aptitude for prayer. Additional prayers, not included in our collection, can be found here.

Acheinu: This short prayer is specifically about our brothers and sisters who are held in captivity and the prayer is over 1,000 years old! It is traditionally recited every Monday and Thursday morning, but has taken on extra special meaning now with 120 people being held hostage in Gaza. It has been put to music and many renditions of it have been recorded over the past months since October 7th.

Here are three renditions of various different Jewish groups singing this prayer:

[The Tamari Project: Alumni of the Bikkurim Youth Village in the Gaza Envelope](#)



[Students of 11 Jewish American Day Schools Sing Together](#)



[Motti Steinmetz and the Freilich Choir](#)



- You can explore this prayer with your students- teaching them the words and the meaning, as well as how to sing it.

Psalms: Jewish tradition has always turned to the book of Psalms in times of need- whether praying on behalf of someone sick, at war or in other danger. The book of Psalms--the only book of the Bible which is a compilation of the words of people towards God--has many chapters which deal with the human conditions of fear, despair and anguish, and incorporates requests of God for help and salvation. There are customs to recite at least one chapter of Psalms every day, either adding them to regular prayers or as stand alone petitions.

- In the prayer cards, we've included one chapter of Psalms, chapter 130. You can choose to incorporate a daily recitation of this or other chapters of Psalms with your students as a ritual, or you could divide up the entire book of Psalms and have each student or group of students learn and recite a different chapter. There are also Tehillim/ Psalms groups you could create or join, where a group of people together recite different chapters, trying to jointly recite the entire book every day.

Mi Sheberach: Our liturgy includes a number of more modern prayers which are usually recited in a communal setting, on behalf of those in need. Frequently, these prayers begin with the words: *Mi Sheberach*- "May the One"... who blessed our forefathers and mothers, bless the sick or the community or the soldiers...

There are a few versions of this blessing for hostages- some more traditional and some have been updated with language specific to the current situation. We have included two versions of the *Mi Sheberach* in the Prayer Collection Cards- choose the one that fits best for your community.

- You can learn the words with your students and incorporate the recitation of the prayer into your existing prayer rituals and / or add it at significant moments of communal gathering.
- Some communities recite the Hebrew names of the hostages as part of this *Mi Sheberach* prayer- either the entire list recited out loud, or by giving out the names to different people in the community, so cumulatively, as a community, the name of every individual hostage is mentioned. A list with the Hebrew names of the hostages in Gaza can be found [here](#).

Creative Prayers:

We have also included two other types of prayers, that are, perhaps less traditional, but may be more relevant or accessible for your learners or setting.

Contemporary liturgist Alden Solovy writes contemporary prayer-poems that are frequently responses to current events¹. In his prayers, he grapples with and blends together both the need for human action, as well as requests for divine intervention. His prayer: Hallel for the Hostages was written after Shavuot, when we most recently recited the Hallel prayer.

You may choose to learn this prayer with your students and discuss:

- How does one say Hallel, a prayer of gratitude and thanks, in these times?
- What is it we are praising?
- Asking for? Demanding?

He defines his prayer-poem *Posters, Necklaces & Graffiti* as “a prayer poem for the hostages held in Gaza, abducted by Hamas on October 7. We pray for their health, safety, and immediate return to Israel and the arms of their families.” In this one, he lists the various actions we take to keep the issue of the hostages on our hearts and minds.

Some discussion questions for your learners might include:

- What acts or actions have we, as individuals or communities taken upon ourselves to show that we have not forgotten?
- Are they enough?
- What might the element of prayer add to the list of acts and rituals included in the prayer-poem?
- What is the message of the prayer-poem to the hostages themselves?

Artist Shoshke (Zeev) Engelmayer, may not define his artwork as prayers, but he definitely sees the value in expressing visually the hopes and dreams we wish will become a reality. Since early on after October 7th, illustrator Engelmayer has drawn a “Daily Postcard”- a daily drawing which reflects what’s on his mind- this may be a reflection of a news item or a reality, but frequently it is also an expression of a hope. He posts his quick daily drawings on his social media channels and they have become quite popular. Families who have lost loved ones turn to him and ask him to draw something that represents the person they miss. And families and friends of the hostages have turned to him, tell him personal stories about their loved ones in captivity and ask him to draw them. Frequently, he will then meet with the family members and deliver the drawing to them personally.

In more than one case, Engelmayer drew a hopeful image of one of the hostages returning and a few days later, that specific person was released or rescued. We’ve included some of those examples in our Prayer Collection.

Explore these images with your learners:

- What did the artist learn about the person he was drawing? Why did he choose to portray them in this way?
- How does he use his imagination to envision both the captivity but also the release and return?
- How might you express visually the hope and prayer of return of one of the hostages you know the story of?

¹ For more info and additional prayers, see: www.tobendlight.com

TAKE ACTION!

Develop a Prayer Ritual

There are a number of ways you could incorporate a prayer ritual for the hostages into your existing prayers, or design it from scratch. Using the Prayer Collection, explore with your learners the best way for you to incorporate prayer for the hostages into your practice.

Here are some suggestions:

- Gather together to sing and pray as a community- this has the added benefit of bringing a sense of belonging and solidarity to your learners.
- Daily or weekly recitation of Psalms (individual or group)
- Group recitation of the *Mi Sheberach* prayer- daily or at special gatherings.
- Joint singing of *Acheinu* prayer (or a prayer written or composed by your community)- which could also be filmed and turned into a video to share through social media.

Create Your Own Prayers

Give your students the opportunity to express their personal prayers on behalf of the hostages, via writing, drawing or music.

Here are some suggestions:

- Inspired by Alden Solovy's prayer-poems, have participants write their own prayer-poems, which they can either include in their personal prayer rituals (for example as part of the silent *amida*) or they can share on social media to raise awareness. If you are concerned your students might be intimidated by writing the "perfect poem", you could share with them Solovy's poem: [Perfect Home](#).
- Inspired by Engelmayer's colorful drawings, invite your learners to learn the story of a particular hostage and to imagine and then draw their hopes and dreams of their return. These too, could be shared on social media, or could be shared as a gallery or exhibition within your learning space or community.

CLOSING INTENTION

To close the session, discuss with your students:

- What has been a powerful prayer experience for you?
- Which format of prayer resonates most with you?
- Does it matter who you are praying to?
- Do you see yourself praying as an individual? In community?
- Do you generally struggle with prayer? Is that the case now? What might be different about this situation?