The cover features four sprigs of rosemary, one in each corner, framing the central text. The sprigs are rendered in a detailed, sketch-like style with fine lines representing the needles.

*INTRODUCTION
TO TRAUMA,
HEALING &
RESILIENCE*

*for rabbis, Jewish educators
and organizers*

RABBI JESSICA ROSENBERG

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**RECONSTRUCTING
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Introduction

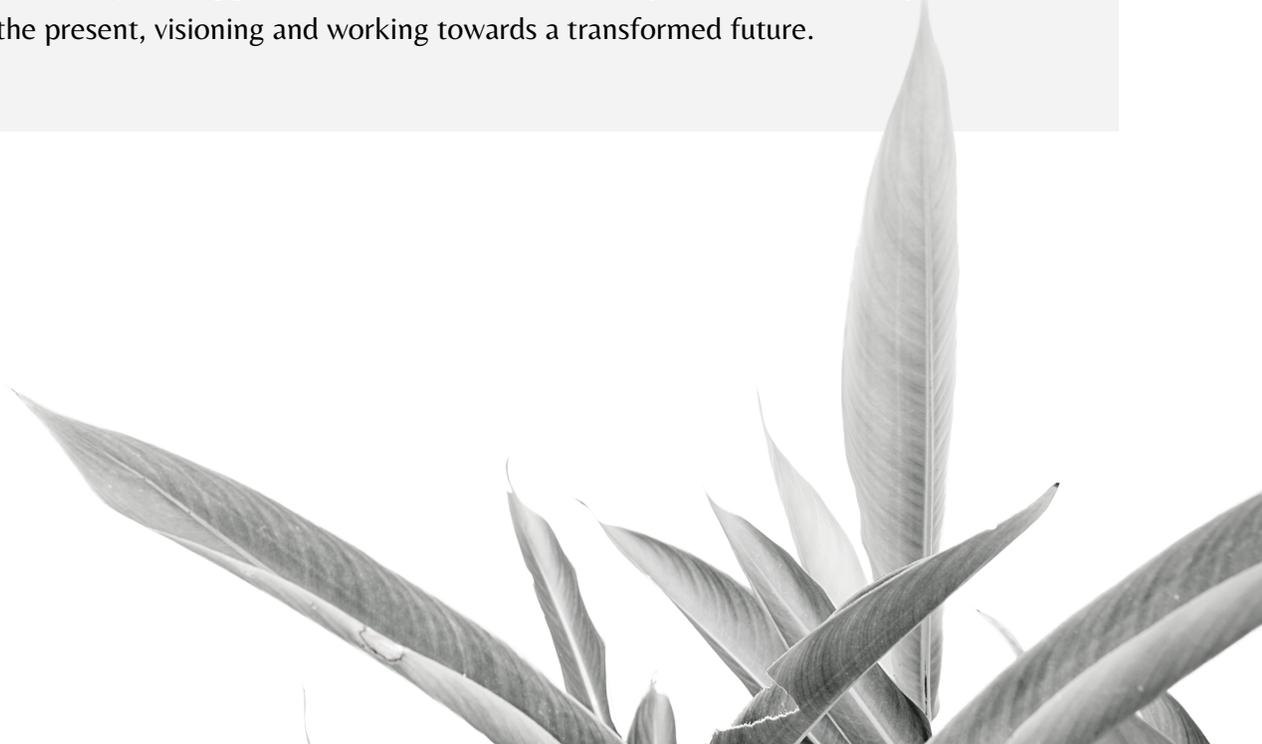
In these pages, you will find an introduction to trauma, healing and resilience created for rabbis, Jewish educators and organizers. The goal of this guide is to synthesize the wide and deep fields of trauma studies, trauma healing, trauma-sensitive education and resilience, and to present this material in ways that are clear, accessible, relevant and applicable to Jewish life, education, organizing and spirituality, in order to create a more just and compassionate world.

As a young rabbi, eager student of trauma studies and aspiring organizer of movements for healing justice, I'm beyond humbled and honored to be offering this guide. My teacher, Rabbi Vivie Mayer, in one moment of instruction on the Amidah, explained the Avodah prayer by saying, "All of this is an offering." This is the blessing I say before beginning this work every morning: "All of what I do is an offering; to the Divine, to my people, to my ancestors, to the earth. May it be acceptable in Your eyes."

I pursued rabbinical school in 2012, in large part fueled by a concern for the ways in which centuries of traumatic experiences and systemic oppression had been internalized in Jewish life and was shaping Jewish self-perception, culture and politics. I've been studying trauma in earnest since 2015. While a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, I began reading, studying and writing about trauma; exploring the different lenses through which people understand trauma and healing; and trying to understand the intersections of individual and collective trauma, and formulate what a trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive rabbinate means and looks

like in practice. I was blessed to be supported by many incredible teachers at RRC who were bringing frameworks from trauma studies to their classrooms. I was encouraged by the leadership of RRC and Reconstructing Judaism — educators who were weaving understandings of trauma, healing and resilience into conversations about rabbinic formation and organizing Jewish life. In 2018, we received funding from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation to develop curriculum and materials, and offer educational programming. This guide is one outcome of that funding and project. It is an attempt to concretize and disseminate some of our learning, thinking and the tools created in these years.

This work is one corner of a powerful and growing field of both study and practice. I am grateful to be part of a Jewish intellectual tradition in which nothing is ever the last word. I hope to be in dialogue about the content, theories and ideas in this guide; to learn, grow and change; to try new practices, and to become more clear and concrete about what healing and resilience feels, looks and sounds like. Most of all, I hope we have many more experiences of Jewish communities that are living experiments in collective healing and resilience — communities making space to honor all that our ancestors have experienced, conscious of the violence and oppression of our time, and willing to experience grief and loss fully without being overwhelmed or governed by it. I look forward to finding new ways of embodying the healing and resilience that we know is possible and already exists, and to keep learning, teaching, writing, praying and organizing from that place. As Jews, every week we welcome Shabbat — a taste of the world to come — so that we know what we're working for, so that we know Her when She arrives. May this work give us a similar taste: joyful, vibrant, fully feeling Jewish life and communities. May we awaken to our past while living in the present, visioning and working towards a transformed future.



This guide is an attempt to synthesize core concepts of the complex work that is trauma studies and healing, explain its background, and offer practical tools and frameworks to apply these concepts to Jewish life, specifically addressing the communal work of rabbis, Jewish educators and organizers.

This is not a comprehensive primer on trauma. More importantly, **this guide will not prepare you to work with people in acute crisis, or to provide therapy, counseling or treatment to traumatic impacts in individuals or groups.** At the core of this work is a grounding in one's own knowledge and abilities, not attempting to practice what one has not been sufficiently trained in. However, many of the core concepts of trauma, healing and resilience can be safely and fruitfully applied to teaching, organizing, and ritual and prayer spaces.

The purpose of this guide is to provide tools for Jewish leaders and organizations to be trauma-sensitive. Its content will hopefully serve as an introduction for people who are already experienced rabbis, educators, ritual leaders and organizers, and who can incorporate an awareness of trauma, healing and resilience into their work. And it will also hopefully serve as a foundation on which other learning can be layered with more ease and clarity.

The tools of trauma, healing and resilience are just that: tools. Like any other implements, they can be used for a wide range of goals: to build, bolster, alter, tear down, transform. Reconstructing Judaism's vision is of "a more just and compassionate world where creative Jewish living and learning guide us toward lives of holiness, meaning and purpose."¹ Thus, we have sought to integrate anti-oppression principles into our work on trauma, healing and resilience. We understand that trauma is deeply shaped by systems of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, antisemitism and Islamophobia, and more. The tools and frameworks you'll find in this guide do not only seek to build healing and resilience in the aftermath of trauma, but also work to name and challenge the systemic injustices that are so often the root causes of trauma. We believe Jewish tradition and spirituality have amazing offerings that create healing and build resilience. This guide seeks to apply Jewish wisdom to creating tools for healing and resilience, and apply frameworks of healing and resilience to Jewish life for the sake of building a more just and compassionate world.

1. <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/mission-vision-and-values>

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Rabbi Jessica Rosenberg
1st Adar, 5780





Trauma, Healing, and Resilience Terms and Concepts

Trauma:

Trauma refers to an embodied reaction to an experience or experiences that is usually violent or violating in some way. When experiences are traumatic, a person’s typical capacity to cope is significantly hindered, leading to a common set of somatic responses, neurological symptoms and frozen thought patterns. Trauma is hurt that leaves a mark. While the terms “trauma” and “traumatic” are used colloquially to refer to a wide range of experiences — from uncomfortable to frightening to overwhelming — not all experiences of harm will leave traumatic impacts. Different people will have different responses to the same experience, and traumatic impacts will shift over time.

The root of the word “trauma” comes from the Greek for “wound,” and its first application was to individuals in medical contexts. It was later applied to psychology and psychic wounding. Today, trauma studies is an active, multidisciplinary and dynamic field, and practitioners in different disciplines continue to uncover and define different types of trauma, as well as nuances within how we understand traumatic impacts.

Psychologists now differentiate between developmental trauma, acute trauma, chronic trauma, complex trauma and more. “Developmental trauma” refers to trauma that happens early in a person’s childhood and life, and impacts their mental, emotional, physical and spiritual growth and formation. “Acute trauma” are single events with traumatic impacts, while “chronic trauma” refers to experiences of harm that are ongoing, repeated and prolonged. “Complex trauma” refers to multiple, layered traumatic experience; complex trauma experiences often include developmental and/or chronic trauma.

Social conditions, power, privilege and systems of oppression like racism, patriarchy, antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia and more can be sources of ongoing trauma. These systems deeply shape how developmental and single-event trauma is experienced. The ways in which witnesses and communities respond to experiences of hurt influences trauma impacts and possibilities for healing.

“Trauma” refers to impacts on an individual person in their lifetime. Today, we understand how events can impact groups of people across time and space. The terms collective, intergenerational, historical and ancestral trauma are often used interchangeably. Distinguishing between these concepts reveals more layers of traumatic experiences and gives us more specific tools to work with. These distinctions are relatively recent innovations in trauma studies. As more diverse peoples’ experiences and histories are heard and taken into account, more knowledge and new approaches will continue to be developed.

Intergenerational Trauma:

Rachel Lev-Wiesel defines intergenerational trauma as: “Impacts of a trauma in behavior patterns, symptoms and values that, usually as a result of lack of closure in the previous generation, impact the next generation, who did not live through or directly experience the trauma, whether survivors talk about it or are silent.”²

Intergenerational trauma refers to traumatic impacts that are passed down through family systems and

2. Lev-Wiesel R. (2007). Intergenerational transmission of trauma across three generations: a preliminary study. *Qualitative Social Work*, 6 (1), 75-94.

proximate relationships. There may be common themes within communities, religious or racial groups or peoples. However, intergenerational trauma can differ from family to family because every family has its own history and experience. Intergenerational trauma is also one set of mechanisms through which historical and ancestral traumas get passed down. Intergenerational trauma can be transmitted through behavior, systems, values, stories and bodies. Epigenetics is the study of how embodied trauma responses are passed down in genetic coding.

Collective Trauma:

Large-scale, devastating event(s) that have a widespread impact on a collective or community beyond those directly impacted in the moment — often threatening the survival of a community or culture — are referred to as collective trauma. Collective trauma can be caused by natural, accidental or intentional events. Collective trauma's impacts on group formation and self-understanding are transmitted through networks of relationships; storytelling in art, media and culture; changes in infrastructure and more. A collective trauma can be integrated and resolved in the lifetime of the impacted group or, when unresolved, can be passed on and become historical trauma.

Historical Trauma and Ancestral Trauma:

Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart defines historical trauma as “the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.”³ Historical trauma happens when the impacts of collective traumas, unresolved in one generation, are passed down to future generations of the community.

Much like familial intergenerational trauma, historical trauma can be passed down through behavior patterns and values. Much like the collective traumas from which they emerge, historical trauma can also be passed down through culture, including story, art, ritual, law, theology and more. Most people live at the intersections of and embody multiple legacies of ancestral trauma.

3. Brave Heart, Maria Y.H. (1998). The return to the sacred path: Healing the historical trauma response among the Lakota. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 68(3), 287-305.

Secondary Trauma, Vicarious Trauma:

The mental, emotional, physical and spiritual impacts of hearing about, witnessing and supporting people through processing traumatic events is considered Secondary or Vicarious Trauma.

Recently, the concept of **Moral Injury** is gaining attention as a way to describe the psychological, spiritual and emotional impacts of perpetrating, witnessing or failing to take action to prevent violence, harm or acts that violate one's sense of right and wrong.

Healing:

Sousan Abadian and Tamar Miller write that healing is “the ability to think and act outside of trauma reactions, to live in the present moment, to discern between real and imagined fears, to appreciate life's blessings and joys.”⁴

Traumatic experiences are not erased or negated by healing processes. Instead, working towards healing refers to processing traumatic experiences so that we are not unconsciously driven by trauma responses. This is often referred to as integrating traumatic experiences. Healing is non-linear, layered, lifelong journeying.

For many years, most mainstream psychologists operated on the assumption that trauma, as a psychic wound, required only mental and emotional engagement to cultivate healing. Today, we know that because trauma impacts our minds, bodies, spirits and entire integrated selves, healing must engage all of these layers. **Somatics** is the study and practices of working with bodies, embodiment, and our people's perceptions and experiences of being in their bodies. Healing methods are increasingly focusing on and engaging somatic practices.

4. Sousan Abadian & Tamar Miller, (2008). “Taming the Beast: Trauma in Jewish Religious and Political Life. *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 83(2/3), (2008) 236-237.

If trauma can be individual and collective, intergenerational and historical, can healing be individual and collective, intergenerational and historical? What does it mean to heal collective, intergenerational and historical trauma?

Today, we have a deeper understanding of different layers of trauma. Yet much of our understanding of and practices of healing focus at the level of the individual, even when the causes of trauma are collective, intergenerational and historical. Exciting work is happening that envisions collective healing. New approaches, often drawing on traditional and ancient practices, are being rediscovered and developed to work with groups, communities and collectives.

Resilience:

David Treleaven writes that “resilience increases our capacity to stay present with life as it is.”⁵ The concept of resilience emerges from science and engineering, where it first referred to a material’s ability to return to its original shape. Applied to our emotional, somatic and spiritual well-being, resilience isn’t static or about returning to some ideal form. Neither does it mean to silently adapt to, or stoically bear, oppression and harm. Resilience involves noticing our reactions and distress; building our emotional, somatic and spiritual capacities to experience uncomfortable sensations; and cultivating our abilities to make choices about how to respond. Our “**window of tolerance**” or “**zone of resilience**” can expand with practice and inevitably fluctuates over our lives.

Disability Justice:

Patty Berne of Sins Invalid writes: “All bodies are unique and essential. All bodies are whole. All bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. We are powerful not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them. We move together, with no body left behind. This is disability justice.”⁶

While we work to better understand trauma and cultivate healing, the frameworks of disability justice can help us cultivate power and community, and cherish rather than pathologize our bodies.

5. David A. Treleaven, *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2018), 126.

6. Nomy Lamm, “This Is Disability Justice,” <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/this-is-disability-justice/>

Trauma-Specific Treatment, Trauma-Informed Care, Trauma-Sensitive Principles:

Trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive approaches provide a strength-based framework⁷ rooted in understandings of the prevalence, layers and impacts of trauma. The aims are to develop services, organizations, cultures, care, organizing, education, ritual, etc., in ways that:

- (1) work to create physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual safety; and
- (2) try not to actively re-traumatize people.

Some organizations distinguish between trauma-specific treatment, trauma-informed care (both of which emerged out of and live in mental and behavioral health-care fields of psychology and social work) and trauma-sensitive principles:

- **"Trauma-Specific Treatment ...**[refers to] evidence-based and best practice treatment models that have been proven to facilitate recovery from trauma. Trauma-specific treatments and interventions directly address the impact of trauma on an individual's life and facilitate trauma recovery; in other words, they are designed to treat the actual consequences of trauma.
- **Trauma-Informed Care** takes into account knowledge about trauma in all aspects of service delivery; however, it is not specifically designed to treat symptoms or syndromes related to trauma."⁸
- **Trauma-Sensitive Principles** apply understandings of trauma to education and other settings. The Trauma Learning and Policy Initiative uses "trauma-sensitive" instead of "trauma-informed" to:

recognize the different roles of schools and behavioral health providers. The term "trauma-sensitive" helps emphasize that educators are not expected to take on the role of therapists. It also helps emphasize that, while behavioral health services will be an important part of the effort, helping traumatized children learn at school requires more — it also requires a school-wide culture that helps children feel safe and supported in all parts of the school."

While the terms "trauma-informed" and "trauma-sensitive" are used interchangeably in many settings, these distinctions between mental-health-care provider, teacher and clergy are important to name, remember and guide our work.

7. "Strength-based" refers to emphasizing people's power and resilience. It was developed in social work and psychology fields in contrast to frameworks and theories that perceive people who have been impacted by trauma and oppression as inherently or forever weak and broken.

8. Trauma Informed Care vs. Trauma Specific Treatment

Trauma-Sensitive Principles for Rabbis, Jewish Educators, Organizers and Leaders

Trauma is hurt that leaves a mark. Trauma refers to the impacts that both hurt and harm can leave on people, communities and the earth over time. While there are similarities in how trauma is experienced and expressed, trauma impacts different people and communities in different times and places in different ways. The impacts of trauma can shift over time. Healing also means different things and looks differently to different people. Possible ways to think about healing include the integration of traumatic memories and experiences into an individual, family or group's narrative; developing or regaining a sense of self and agency; and processing the imprints of trauma on the body, mind and spirit.

For rabbis, Jewish educators and organizers, learning about trauma and healing — and humbly bringing a baseline understanding of trauma to our teaching, service and ritual leading, and organizing — makes it possible for people to join us, in body and in spirit. Thinking about trauma and healing can make the spaces we create more life-affirming, values-aligned, purposeful and joyful. How can we safely and discerningly apply our understanding of trauma to our work? What do Jewish educators, rabbis, organizers and leaders uniquely have to offer?

In the *Ve'ahavta*, central to every Jewish daily service, we are instructed to take the words of *mitzvot* to heart. It is not enough to know mitzvot. We must teach them to our children, speak of them in our houses, on the road, when we lie down and when we rise up, bind them on our hands, make them visible in front of our eyes, and inscribe them on the doorposts of our houses and gates. Trauma-sensitive principles say the same thing: It is not enough to simply know about trauma. We must apply our understanding to how we make and hold spaces; we must incorporate it into the very structure of the ways in which we work, in subtle but influential ways, all day long.

Spirituality and Trauma Healing

Spiritual health and wellness can be deeply impacted by trauma, and one aspect of rabbinic work is often to attend to the spiritual health and wellness of individuals and collectives. This is a distinct, but parallel process to attending to trauma-sensitive principles in education and organizing. Within a trauma-sensitive environment, rabbis may offer spiritual and ritual tools for healing trauma; this requires different knowledge, training and programming.



Creating Trauma-Sensitive Learning and Organizing Environments

There is no one single, foolproof checklist to make something “trauma-proof.” Every individual and group carries with them the harm they’ve experienced. Our experiences shape us in many different ways, including but not limited to: building resilience and strength; deepening empathy and insight; causing fear, anxiety and uncertainty; and motivating us to work for justice and healing. Most people will experience some or all of these responses at different times. All people deserve to be treated with dignity and caring. All people deserve learning environments and community organizations that minimize the potential for harm, and create containers that can help people be present and respond compassionately when trauma responses inevitably emerge.

In addition to being made up of individual survivors of harm, Jewish communities are also shaped by the diverse and nuanced histories of collective and historical traumas. For Jews, as for all marginalized people, these diverse experiences are part of the social and cultural fabric of communities in nuanced ways. Creating trauma-sensitive spaces involves remaining attentive and curious about the ways in which these experiences play out, and not reinforcing one narrative or experience of “Jewish trauma.” Instead, we can make space for people to reflect on and give voice to their diverse lived experiences.

To this end, we’ve taken the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Six Key Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach,⁹ and applied them to Jewish education settings and rabbinic teaching and organizing, providing an explanation of each principle, questions for leaders to ask themselves and some examples of how the principle can be applied. We look forward to changing and adding to this list as more and more communities take on and embody trauma-sensitive principles.

9. “SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach,” prepared by SAMHSA’s Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, July 2014. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Concept-of-Trauma-and-Guidance-for-a-Trauma-Informed-Approach/SMA14-4884> accessed 3/24/20

1. Safety

SAMHSA writes: “Throughout the organization, staff and the people they serve, whether children or adults, feel physically and psychologically safe; the physical setting is safe and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety.”¹⁰ While creating safety is a core goal of trauma-informed care and trauma-sensitive environments, there is, challengingly, no set of things to do that can guarantee safety or a feeling of safety for every participant. As SAMHSA’s guidelines explain: “Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority.”

Organizations can provide space and time for communities to reflect on what creates a sense of safety for individuals and the collective. Organizations can take time to explore whether they engage in particular practices that prioritize the safety of some people over others. Organizations can reflect on whether their practices and

orientations around safety are rooted in culturally hegemonic systems, such as white supremacy. For example, while police presence may provide a sense of security for white individuals, it may cause harm or unearth trauma for individuals whose communities are violently targeted by the police, such as people of color or transgender folks.

Organization leadership can create safety plans, hiring practices and accountability processes that are held across the structure of the organization, for teachers and facilitators to communicate and reinforce in their specific settings.

Even in communities working to integrate trauma-awareness into our education and organizing, conflict and harm will still happen. Part of creating safety is resourcing communication and conflict resolution training, accountability practices and processes, and normalizing *tochecha* and *teshuvah*.

10. Ibid.

Questions:

- How does the congregation, group or class define safety?
- What experiences of being unsafe does the group or individuals in the group carry with them?
- What is the group already doing in order to create safety?
- Who are these practices working for, and who do they leave out?
- What group norms, guidelines and boundaries can be established to reduce the possibility of harm?
- What practices and processes are in place to respond when harm happens?
- What past experiences might the subject matter bring up for participants?
- How might we slow down and anchor ourselves in what is happening here and now?
- What spaces and tools do we have to discern what harm is happening here and now, and what impacts of past harm are continuing to play out in the present?
- Have I thought about how the topic, setting or constituency of the group may be challenging or feel unsafe to me or to group members?
- Do I have the support I need from supervisors, mentors or the organization to do my job safely and get support as a Jewish leader?
- Who might not be in the room/in our communities because our practices around safety indicate to them that their well-being is not valued?

Practices:

- At the beginning of any course, the leader can help the group set guidelines for their work together. The teacher should name power dynamics and model that racist, misogynist and oppressive language won't be tolerated.
- If the class or meeting will discuss harm and violence, name that and encourage people to participate or take breaks as needed. If it is an ongoing class or committee that is investing in trust and relationship building, the teacher or facilitator can ask participants to reflect on what experiences are impacting their understanding of safety and their learning or participation.

- Make sure classroom or meeting space has enough room for everyone, and space for people to sit, stand and move around.
- Make sure that students know where they can go to find a quiet space if they need to take a break during a difficult conversation.
- Build in breaks, and enough time for challenging topics. Create opening and closing rituals or activities.
- Provide an agenda for the session at the start, so that participants can know in advance when to expect certain potentially difficult topics and when breaks will happen.
- Think about and design activities that are appropriate for the topic, setting and stage of group formation and that can foster safe connections between group members.
- Be ready to stop and adjust your original agenda when harm occurs. Make space for the emotions that emerge, and engage in cooperative decision making in moving forward to provide students and participants with a sense of agency.



2. Trustworthiness and Transparency:

SAMHSA writes: “Organizational operations and decisions are conducted with transparency with the goal of building and maintaining trust with clients and family members, among staff, and others involved in the organization.”¹¹

Transparency does not mean full disclosure on the part of teachers, facilitators or clergy at all times. Transparency is in service of trustworthiness. Even when content details cannot be shared, decision-making and organizing processes should always be clear and transparent to impacted people. Transparency is about

communicating what processes are happening, when, how and who had input and decision-making power.

Many people have had negative experiences of clergy power, institutional hierarchy and religious authority that they bring with them to Jewish education and community settings. Efforts towards transparency in Jewish education and organization settings can go a long way to healing people's relationships with Jewish tradition and authority. Discussion of harm, violence and trauma should be titrated to the levels of trust with the facilitator and among the group.

Questions:

- Am I clearly articulating decision-making?
- Am I sharing my process in a way that moves the group forward?
- Is there something I know that I haven't told the group that would be helpful for them to know?
- Is this a one-off class or workshop, or an ongoing course?
- How much does this group know and trust me?
- How much trust do members of the group have with each other?
- What mechanisms have I built in for me to receive feedback and be held accountable to the same norms I expect of my students?

11. Ibid.

Practices:

- Attempt to ensure transparent facilitation about group process by explaining why things are happening the way they are.
- Facilitate consistent communication about challenges and what's being done to address them.
- Be clear about where and when input is invited, what will happen with feedback that is collected and who the decision-makers are.
- Educators share their own background and stake in the topic, as appropriate.
- Explain assessment rubrics and be transparent in grading.
- Acknowledge limitations of space and time, and the decision-making process.
- Employ clear and multiple modalities for feedback.
- Be comfortable with saying that you don't know the answer to something, and that your lack of knowledge may be due to a larger equity problem in the organization.



3. Peer support

In the clinical setting, SAMHSA writes: “Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing their stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing.”¹²

In Jewish education settings, peer support has a long tradition and history of doing the same things. In using trauma-sensitive principles,

one-to-one peer support should be offered as an invitation, while giving people choices about how much to share, with whom and when. One-on-one and small-group peer support should not be used as a tool to avoid whole group conflict and disagreement; rather, it can be a way to move towards hard conversations, as a space for slowing down and deepening reflection, and as a building block to build trust for larger-group hard conversations.

Questions:

- What are challenging moments in learning together when people might feel activated and have a lot to say?
- Are there certain conversations that might be more effective or offer more safety if held in identity-specific affinity groups?
- What people in the class or congregation have experiences that would benefit new students or members to hear?

12. Ibid.

Practices:

- Offer the option of *chevruta* learning and partner homework assignments.
- Set up cohorts that go through multiple classes together.
- Provide opportunities for peer mentorship (e.g., incoming students, new member buddies, *chesed* committee), and allow students to express if there are certain identities or characteristics that are important to them in a mentor.
- Structure classes so there is less lecturing from the front of the room, and more time to hear others in the class.
- Organize activities that build thickness of relationships, networks of interaction and support.
- Encourage engagement and collaboration between peers outside of the classroom. Work to not feel intimidated when this happens through the self-organizing of students and participants; self-initiated peer support can lead to positive change.



4. Collaboration and mutuality

SAMHSA writes: “Importance is placed on partnering and the leveling of power differences between staff and clients and among organizational staff from clerical and housekeeping personnel, to professional staff to administrators, demonstrating that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The organization recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach.”¹³

In Jewish education and congregational settings, even while the rabbi has a unique responsibility to hold and guide a congregation or classroom, they can do it in such a way that brings more people into the process, empowering people and developing leadership in the process

of learning and organizing together. Rabbis and teachers can work to understand their own trauma experiences, plan for how it could be impacted by this class or meeting, and ask for appropriate support from peers and colleagues.

Rabbis and Jewish educators can track existing opportunities for participation, ask participants how they want to contribute, and proactively create and offer opportunities that enable participants to add to the design or organization of a class or classroom. Collaboration and mutuality is usually a slower process than one person doing something on their own; we need to build more time into our organizing and teaching to make space for more participation.

13. Ibid.

Questions:

- What is my role as rabbi in this setting? What are people expecting from me?
- Who else could be a part of this decision?
- What are the multiple roles I'm holding, and could someone else hold something?
- What gifts are other staff and participants bringing? What do they want to bring?
- What would the goal of collaboration be in this class?
- How am I creating opportunities for my staff or participants to share their strengths and unique wisdom with others?

Practices:

- Recognize the gifts and talents that students, participants and coworkers have outside of their prescribed roles.
- Provide professional development and training on trauma, healing and resilience for all students, congregants, staff and board.
- Recognize out loud the knowledge that's already in the room.
- Rotate facilitation, student-teaching days and regular opportunities for feedback.



5. Empowerment, voice and choice

SAMHSA writes that empowerment, voice and choice are manifest when “individuals’ strengths and experiences are recognized and built upon. The organization fosters a belief in the primacy of the people served, in resilience, and in the ability of individuals, organizations, and communities to heal and promote recovery from trauma. The organization understands that the experience of trauma may be a unifying aspect in the lives of those who run the organization, who provide the services, and/or who come to the organization for assistance and support.”¹⁴

One impact of trauma is to take away people’s agency and choice; trauma-sensitive frameworks highlight the importance of supporting individual and collective agency. Empowerment, voice and choice highlights the ways in which trauma-sensitive frameworks are strengths-based: Even as people have been shaped by experiences of harm, we are all capable of reflecting on what we need and want, giving voice to that, and making decisions for our own sustainability and wellness.

Questions:

- How much choice do students, members and participants have about what happens during a class or meeting?
- When are moments that people could have concrete choices between clearly defined options that play to different skills or learning styles?
- How am I creating opportunities for my students, congregants and colleagues to demonstrate their own resilience and share their own knowledge, wisdom and practices for healing and growth with the community?

14. Ibid.

Practices:

- Use invitational language (e.g., I invite you to notice your breath); give options and opportunities for how to shape learning (e.g., turn to a *chevruta* or journal on your own).
- Create space for students and participants to reflect on the current moment, and what would help them feel agency in this moment.
- Integrate spiritual practices (meditation, chanting, singing, dance, movement, etc.) that let people physically experience their voice in this moment.
- Know about trauma-informed services and trauma-specific treatment options in your area, and be ready to support congregants and students to access multiple modalities of support and care.



6. Culture, Race, History and Gender:

SAMHSA writes: “The organization actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases; offers access to gender responsive services; leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections; incorporates policies, protocols, and processes that are responsive to the racial, ethnic and cultural needs of individuals served; and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.”¹⁵

Working to create safety must include an analysis of the ways in which racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism and other forms of structural oppression continue to perpetrate harm and violence on people’s daily lives in profound ways. Trauma-sensitive organizations must work to root out white supremacy and other forms of structural oppression within the organization.¹⁶ Trauma-sensitive education prioritizes listening to people impacted by these forms of violence, trusting their experiences,

and working to shift harmful patterns and actions that inevitably exist in our organizations.

Trauma-sensitive Jewish education takes into consideration and actively works to include the diversity of Jewish experiences. This starts with not referring to “Jewish trauma” as one singular experience, or assuming all Jews have the same relationship to Jewish history and trauma. We can refer to Jewish histories, traumas, communities and cultures in the plural to make visible the diversity of Jewish experiences that has always existed. We can make space for congregants and students to choose to share about their specific Jewish identities as they relate to their culture, ethnicity or race — both in relation to trauma and their broader experiences. In doing this, we must be careful not to expect that a student with a particular underrepresented identity wants to share, or that when they do share, they speak for their entire identity group.

15. Ibid.

16. Understanding and working to unlearn white-supremacy culture is its own large and important body of work. Check out “White Supremacy Culture” from by Tema Okun: [white supremacy culture](#).

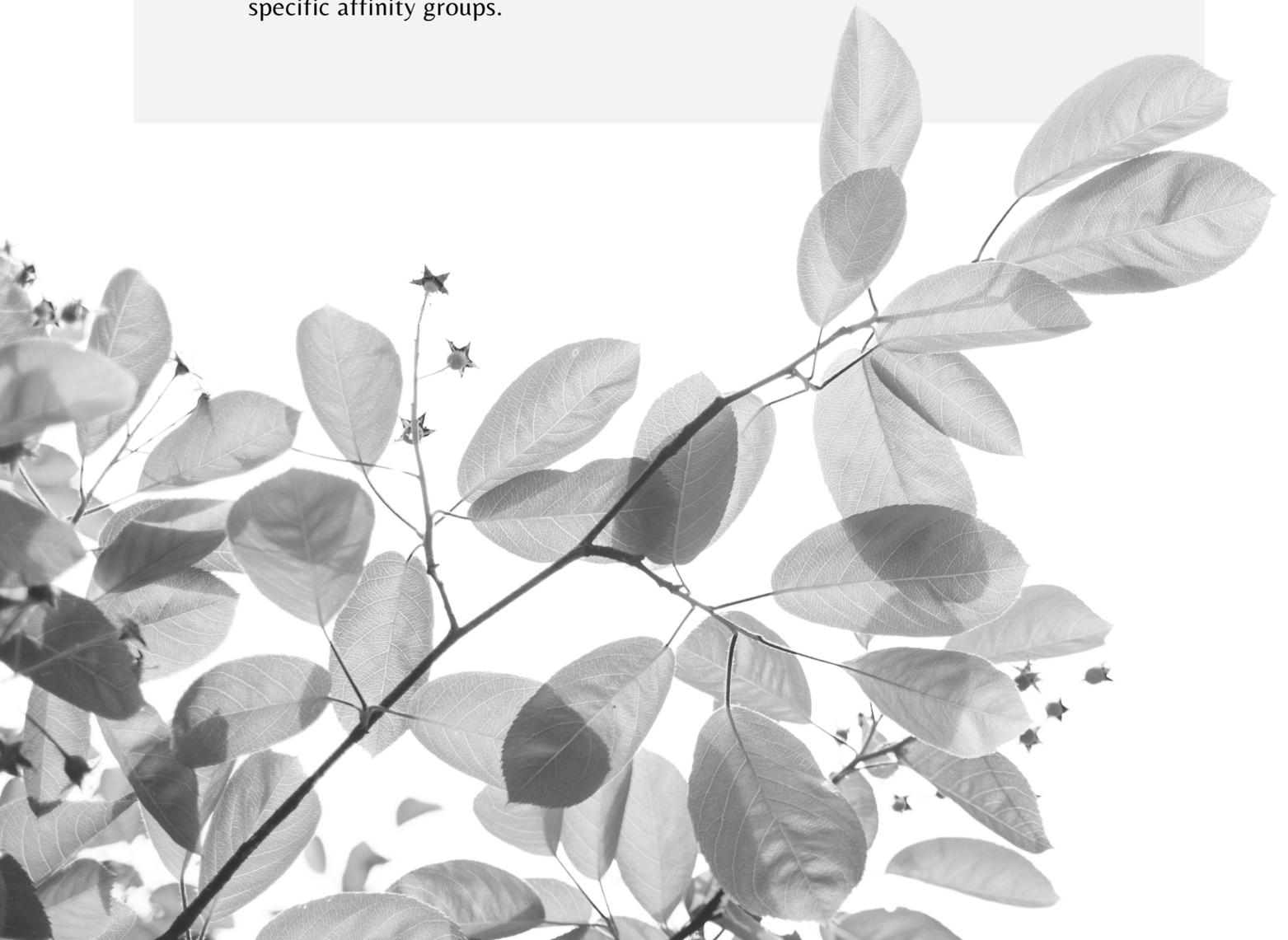
A strength-based model of trauma-sensitive education and organizing honors the resilience, beauty, creativity and brilliance of people and communities, and doesn't make assumptions about people's relationships to their histories, identities or communities as trauma experiences. While a group or community might be collectively impacted by structural oppression, that doesn't mean that an individual will necessarily understand their primary experience as one of traumatization. That is to say, though Jews have collectively been the targets of anti-Jewish oppression and violence, individual Jewish people might not experience their Jewish identity as one shaped or characterized by trauma. Many people identify first and foremost with the power and strength of their ancestors and communities.

Questions:

- How does the material we're discussing or learning impact people in different communities or from different backgrounds?
- What are moments in the class or discussion to dig into how women, queer and trans people, people of color, Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews, people with disabilities and others not traditionally centered in Jewish text and life are impacted by what we're learning about?
- What are moments to share traditions or experiences of Jews of Color, Sephardi or Mizrahi Jews? How can I do this without assuming that the white, Ashkenazi experience is the normative one and the others exotic?
- What assumptions do I hold about normative Jewish experiences, and how might those enter their way into my teaching, facilitation or mentoring?
- What kinds of privileges have my own identities afforded me in my Jewish community that might not be extended to others?
- What kinds of trauma have I experienced because of my identities and how have those experiences affected my ability to connect and work with various individuals, communities or authority figures?
- What kind of supervision, mentoring or professional peer group is available to support me as a Jewish leader, either inside or beyond the organization where I work? Am I accessing those resources?

Practices:

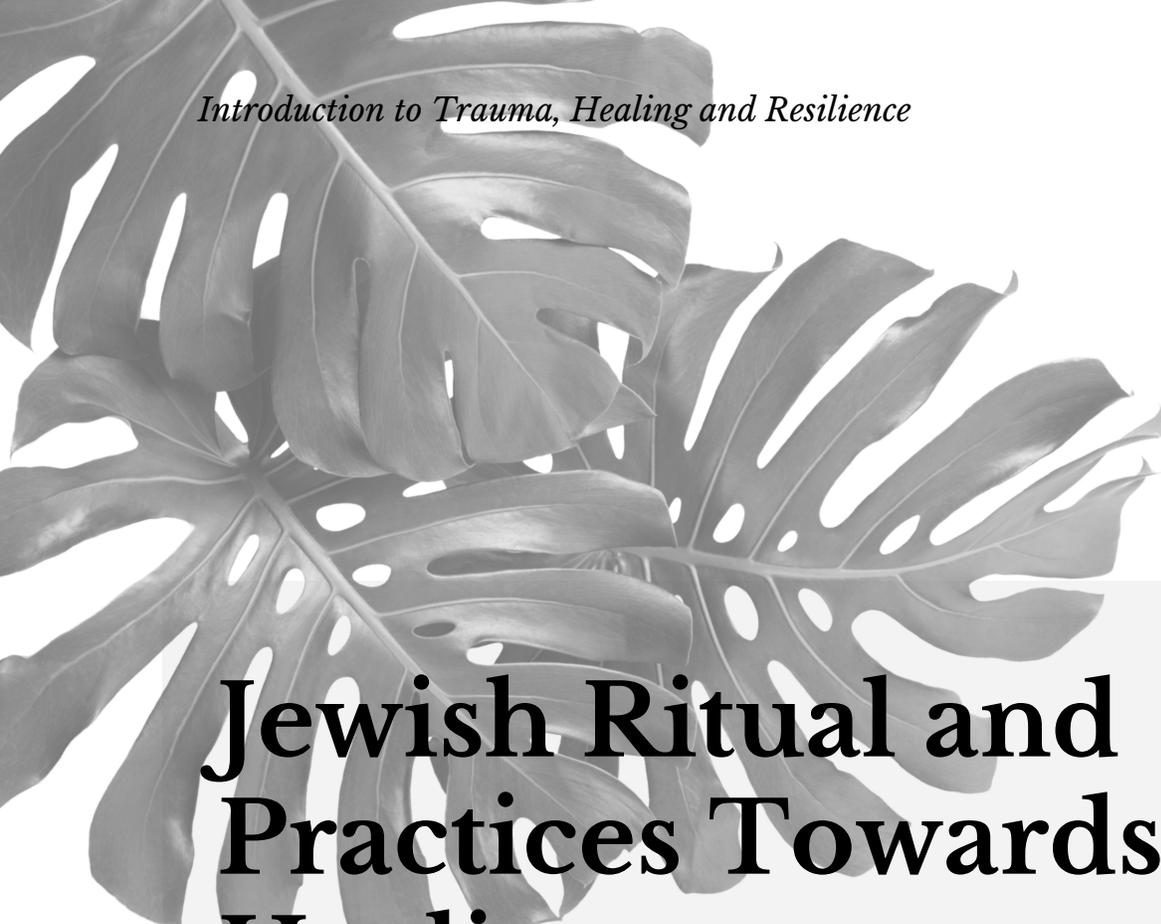
- Acknowledge your own background and biases, and the impacts of systemic oppression on what's being studied or discussed.
- Make room for people most impacted by systemic oppression and the issues being discussed to share their experiences if they want, without pressuring people to disclose this information or serve as educators if that's not the role they are coming to do.
- Intentionally bring in texts, traditions and rituals from diverse Jewish cultures and histories. When bringing things from Jewish traditions that are not our own, name that and take time to prepare, making every effort not to tokenize or exoticize non-Ashkenazi Jewish traditions, histories and cultures.
- Name and acknowledge when something is missing and what is being done to address that gap.
- Identify moments when students may prefer to discuss a topic in identity-specific affinity groups.



Some ways to use these principles:

- Create standing group agreements that incorporate trauma-sensitive principles and read them at the beginning of a class or meeting.
- Present these six principles, and let groups define and explore together what embodying them looks like in the specific context of the group.
- Build in moments for individual and group reflection about how you and students are doing in adhering to these principles.
- Take one principle and explore it together over multiple meetings and classes, providing reading and discussion in each area.
- Take each principle and apply it to different specific parts of an organization.

Understanding trauma and incorporating trauma-sensitive principles is ongoing, non-linear work. We will learn from living into these principles, and learn from each other and from our students. As Jews, we have practice with cyclical learning, reading the Torah every year and letting new understandings emerge. Our tradition teaches us to make space for unfolding and deeper understanding. In *Pirkei Avot* we read: “[Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.” There is holiness in immersing ourselves in ongoing work. Let’s go forth and learn together.



Jewish Ritual and Practices Towards Healing

Ritual, prayer and spiritual practices are arguably one of the oldest sets of tools humans have for building resilience and healing trauma. Our Jewish traditions include millennia of wisdom that speak to commemorating and moving through grief and loss; transforming hurt and harm; cultivating gratitude, joy and connection; marking liminal moments and transitions; being present in the current moment; connecting to the seasons, the earth and our ancestors; asking for help and more.

While embodied practices are relatively new to the field of psychology and mental-health care as ways to address trauma healing, such practices have been an inherent dimension of ancient ritual for millennia. Making ritual is taking a story, goal, hope, value or vision and making it into a series of actions, embodied and enacted. Ritual provides a container and spiritual context in which people can express and embody big feelings, and have transformative healing experiences through movement, dance, song and breathing practices, without necessarily understanding logically how the healing occurred. In this way, ritual has the power to transform our internal experience of the world, shift our stories, and change our moods and emotional responses, both in the present moment and over time.

Ritual, prayer and spiritual practices exist alongside other healing modalities; there are strengths and benefits, weaknesses and challenges of using these tools compared to other healing modalities. While there is some and growing research on the efficacy of spirituality in trauma healing, it was not developed as a clinically based healing method, with peer-reviewed scholarship. This is part of its strength; there is old and ineffable wisdom in our traditions, and people who would never engage in or have access to other healing practices can have deep and robust prayer and ritual practices. It is also part of the challenge; ritual and spiritual practice can open up personal, vulnerable, and unwieldy experiences and memories.

As rabbis, Jewish educators and organizers who want to bring Jewish ritual and practice to support individual and collective resilience and healing, we need to be mindful of and attentive to the emotionally charged material we are opening up, as well as where and with whom we are doing it. We can think of the frame of “putting a fence around the Torah”: In Jewish practice, this is the concept of having extra layers of protection from transgression. In ritual and spiritual healing work, we can think of extra layers of protection from the impacts of harm, only slowly and with gentleness approaching the most difficult material. Just like educational spaces, ritual, prayer and spiritual spaces can and should be thoughtfully built to be trauma-informed. [See the section on Trauma-Sensitive Ritual and the Introduction to Trauma-Sensitive Principles in this guide.]

One aspect of bringing trauma-sensitivity to our ritual and spiritual practices is being mindful of the times and places in which they were created, and the dominant values of those people and places. Some of our ritual and spiritual inheritance express oppressive values, and call to us for recreation and reconstruction, while some of those rituals and traditions are spacious enough to serve our values and visions today. The felt experience of these traditions will be different for different people at different times; a practice that feels life-giving in one season to one person can feel constricted and harmful to others or to that same person in a different season. Part of our work as ritual leaders is to be open, curious, flexible and attentive to what is creating blocks, and what is serving people well, letting those things be dynamic in different times and places, and having a wealth of different tools and practices in our toolbox.

Below is an introduction to using different paths and layers of Jewish ritual and spiritual practice as healing modalities.

Lifecycle:

Liminal moments and life transitions can be times of extreme and deeply felt possibility, vulnerability, fear and excitement. Because of the emotional, spiritual and energetic highs and lows that so often accompany lifecycle events, the rituals that mark these moments need to be trauma-sensitive in how they are designed and facilitated. As opportunities to reflect, celebrate and mourn, lifecycle rituals can be healing spaces and containers to experience big feelings. They can be witnessed by family, friends and community; they are moments of wrestling with or making meaning of our lives.

Intergenerational trauma refers to traumatic impacts that are passed down through family systems and proximate relationships. There may be common themes within communities, religious or racial groups or peoples. However, intergenerational trauma can differ from family to family because every family has its own history and experience. Intergenerational trauma is also one set of mechanisms through which historical and ancestral traumas get passed down. Intergenerational trauma can be transmitted through behavior, systems, values, stories and bodies. Epigenetics is the study of how embodied trauma responses are passed down in genetic coding.

Jewish tradition offers ritual practices that are supported by many centuries of wisdom for marking these moments. Some of that wisdom still resonates today. Rituals that have been passed down for generations can provide medicines of connection with ancestors and traditions that are deeply meaningful. Some of the lifecycle rituals and traditions that have been passed down, however, are embedded within the oppressive systems in which our ancestors lived, in particular misogyny, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia and ableism. As feminists and others have emphasized, which lifecycle moments and events are recognized and get marked, and which have gone unnoticed, is indicative of the male-dominated systems within Jewish tradition.

This is only one potential layer of experience that people are holding when they come to rabbis and Jewish spiritual leaders for support in marking lifecycle rituals. When we are creating trauma-sensitive and healing lifecycle rituals, it is essential to be open and curious, and center real people and their lived experiences and relationships to Jewish culture and tradition.

Trauma-Sensitive Reflection Questions for Lifecycle Rituals

Tradition:

How have our ancestors marked this lifecycle moment? What did it mean to them? What values guided their decisions? How has this marking looked distinct in different parts of the world? Is there a difference in practice between Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions, or regional differences within those traditions? What history, stories and experiences of harm might have shaped how ritual was created for this moment?

Impacts:

Who has traditionally been able to lead or participate in this ritual? Who has been left out? How has this ritual been used to uplift and heal? How has it been used to harm? What mending is needed in order to engage in this practice?

Person-Centered Ritual:

Who is this ritual for today, and what is their relationship to Jewishness? What other identities and experiences might shape how they engage with the ritual? To this lifecycle moment? To this ritual?



Yearcycle:

The layers of the Jewish yearcycle offer multiple paths into healing practices. We are moving through the earth's time with holidays that connect us to the changing seasons (in the Northern Hemisphere, for example: Sukkot in the fall, Hanukkah in winter, Pesach in the spring). Each holiday offers opportunities to strengthen our connection with the earth, which is an essential aspect of resilience and healing in a time of climate change and environmental impacts.

Our ancestors layered personal growth and development within and throughout our holidays (which is especially potent during the Omer, and from Tisha B'Av through the New Year and Sukkot). Each holiday offers invitations to self-reflection and moving through specific trauma impacts.

Each holiday has a layer of telling some part of our collective story (for example, the Maccabean revolt at Hanukkah and Esther's triumph at Purim). Those earliest stories have then been enriched and shaped by centuries of Jews adding their own stories, lived experiences, and related customs and traditions (Tisha B'Av, for instance, was originally about marking the destruction of the Temple, and now includes mourning of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the Holocaust.)

Each holiday offers an opportunity to be intentional about what story we are telling about Jewish history, how we frame what happened to us and what meaning we make of it. Each holiday offers an opportunity to interrupt the calcified stories that historical trauma retells and offer life-giving, generative, values-aligned and creative stories of our resilience, survival and ability to thrive.

Reflection Questions for Shifting Historical Trauma Through Jewish Holiday Celebrations

Holiday:

What is the medicine and healing power that our ancestors found in this holiday? What medicine is resonating with me? What does this ritual offer our bodies? What excites me about this holiday? What makes me angry, sad, alienated, shut down? What gives me life? What stories do I want to tell? What stories need to be re-interpreted and changed?

Tradition:

How have our ancestors marked this holiday? What did it mean to them? What experiences guided their decisions? How has this marking looked distinct in different parts of the world? Is there a difference in practice between Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions, or regional differences within those traditions? What history, stories and experiences of harm might have shaped how this holiday was marked?

Physical space:

Who is this for? What do they need? What are the divisions within the community? Within people's selves?

Time:

What's happening in the world? How is that impacting the participants? What are they paying attention to, and what might they be ignoring?

Relationship to Jewishness:

What stories do the participants hold about their ancestors and the places they came from? What are the ranges of relationships to Judaism and Jewishness? Ritual? God? History?

My vision:

Where do I see hurt in my/this community? What is the shape and impact of trauma in this community? What's my vision of the future? The Jewish future?

Personal and Daily Practices:

Healing and resilience unfold, and are cultivated and strengthened over time. Much of the work of healing is in learning to survive and thrive every day in the excruciating in-between times. For example, how do we anchor ourselves in our days? Make space for grief and sadness, and bring our attention to joy, possibility, gratitude and blessing? Jewish tradition provides a deep wealth of offerings that can be utilized as healing modalities and as resilience building daily practices. Within the framework of kavannah, we have a deeply Jewish way to turn any traditional prayer or practice moment into a supportive practice. Though we don't often think of it this way, much of halakhah is embodied practice, in that it contains practices that bring our attention to our physical experience and a felt sense of the world.

As Jewish teachers, we can experiment with, model and invite others into practice that supports healing, resilience, wellness and sustainability. Below are a few examples of ways in which Jewish practices can be offered as healing tools:

Shacharit, Mincha, Ma'ariv: One aspect of healing is understanding the ways in which we are safe and powerful in the present moment. Jewish prayer structures offer us three times a day to pause; we can use these moments for traditional prayer, chanting, meditation, embodiment practice or anything that slows us down and helps anchor us in time.

Blessings for food: When practiced with awareness, saying the blessings before and after eating can be a moment to notice where our food comes from, deepening our connections to the earth and to the chain of production that makes our eating possible.

Kippah, tallit, tefillin: Putting on, wearing and practicing prayer, ritual, meditation or other spiritual and embodiment practices in these physical Jewish ritual tools can be infused with the kavannot of protection and Divine connection.

Mezuzah: Touching a mezuzah as we go in and out of a room can be a moment to remind us of our sacred purpose, our connection to community and something greater than ourselves. A mezuzah can mark a place of home and safety, spaces of healthy boundaries and intentional welcoming.

Rituals for Healing:

Jewish tradition provides ritual tools that are specifically for or can be adapted directly to address, trauma and healing. Along with mental-health care, bodywork and other forms of spiritual care, ritual can create sacred space. By using ritual, people can name or make space for traumatic impacts; be witnessed by supportive community; call forth and experience loving Divine presence; take on embodied practices to move the lived experiences of loss, sadness and fear; and move towards integrating traumatic impacts. Healing rituals can be multiple-part ceremonies or simple daily practices. Ritual and spiritual practice is not the same as other forms of processing trauma, and ritual leaders who are crafting or facilitating practices for others need to be engaged and observant of what is arising, be honest about their unique skills, and limitations, and practice tools for staying grounded and within their own window of tolerance.¹⁷

There is powerful work happening to make Jewish prayer tools available to people of all genders and bodies. See:

All Genders Wrap

Tefillin-wrapping instruction by trans and genderqueer people and women.

Netzivot

Tallit Katan for assigned-female bodies

Rising Tide Open Waters Mikveh Network

Network of inclusive and accessible *mikvaot*

Jewish Blessings and Rituals for Healing

Misheberach: The traditional prayer for healing from sickness, it is often said when the Torah is out of the Ark or during Torah study.

Birkat Hagomel: This is the blessing traditionally recited upon surviving a dangerous situation or returning safely from a journey.

Mikvah: The traditional water immersion is used for changing ritual status. For some, mikvah is too loaded with the ways in which concepts of purity and impurity have been weaponized through forced mikvah, or is not accessible because of traditional binaries around gender. For others, the enactment of cleansing and changing ritual status can be a source of great power and comfort.

17. For more on Window of Tolerance, see: <https://www.nicabm.com/trauma-how-to-help-your-clients-understand-their-window-of-tolerance/>

Elements for Creating Jewish Healing Rituals

Kavannah first: What is the intention of this ritual? The person creating and facilitating the ritual should be able to state the intention of the ritual clearly and succinctly, with right-sized expectations for what's possible in ritual.

Creating a container: perceptible beginnings and endings of rituals will create a sense of safety and containment for what can be overwhelming emotional experiences. Rituals can open and close with a repeating song, text, prayer, poetry, moment of silence, and the opening and closing of a physical space.

Jewish tradition and wisdom: incorporating Jewish elements into rituals for healing can provide meaningful connection to community and ancestry. In addition to traditional Jewish healing rituals (see above), most meaningful Jewish ritual can be creatively incorporated into or used to frame healing rituals. For example:

Havdalah: The ceremony for separating Shabbat from the weekdays can be adapted for many different types of separation and transitions, such as relationships, jobs, surgery and health-status changes, and other periods of life.

Tashlich: This High Holiday ritual can be repurposed to help release feelings, mindsets, experiences and beliefs that are no longer serving us.

Braiding challah, tying *tzitzit*: These practices can help create integration, weave disparate strands of ourselves and move towards wholeness.

Body, heart, spirit: One of the offerings of ritual is the opportunity to move and engage our bodies, feel things and give voice to feelings, and connect with Holiness. Embodied ritual practices should echo and amplify the *kavannah* of the ritual, by being offered in invitational language, with attention to physical accessibility and giving people options of how to engage.

Trauma-Sensitive Ritual:

As we've noted, ritual can open up space for incredible transformation and vulnerability. The same tools, used without care, can do more harm than good, and there is a devastating history of ritual and spiritual practices being used in manipulative and harmful ways. Even when we are working with the intent to be nurturing, caring, supportive and healing, we can have unintentionally harmful impacts.

A harm-reduction approach to ritual acknowledges that harm happens, despite our best intentions, and works to reduce the potential of it. Central to offering responsible ritual facilitation is being accountable when confronted with the impact of our actions. If someone communicates to us, during or after a ritual, that something we offered had a hurtful or uncomfortable impact, then we must be mindful of our reactions, and work to remain open and curious. When this happens, it is an important time for ritual leaders to get supervision and support.

While being aware of the risks, we can bring practices of trauma-sensitivity to our rituals and prayer-leading. See the Introduction to Trauma-Sensitive Principles in this guide for a more comprehensive overview and principles to apply.



Beginning Practices for Trauma-Sensitive Ritual and Prayer:

Invitational language: Invitation language is the practice of offering options and framing activities as invitations, rather than as commands. This can be offered in a blanket opening statement (i.e., “Everything I’m offering is an invitation; feel free to engage however feels right to you in the moment”) or for specific elements of a ritual (i.e., “You’re invited to rise in body or spirit”).

Touch and consent: As a rule, do not touch people in ritual or prayer spaces without their consent. This applies even to people with whom, at other times, you might have an established relationship that includes hugging and casual touching. During ritual and prayer space, people are in their bodies in different ways and might not want the same kind of touch that at other times would feel appropriate. While touch can be a healing part of ritual, it’s important to ask for permission and not assume that consent will transfer over time. While it can feel awkward if you’re not used to it, introducing consent checks, such as “Can I place my hands on your shoulders and offer a blessing?” will become a seamless part of prayer and ritual leadership.

Size, space, makeup of the group: Be mindful of who is in the room, how many people are in the room, and how much trust and safety they have with each other. Any publicly open ritual or prayer space will inevitably include people who have had some conflict with each other, are in some struggle with each other or have experienced harm. The larger the group, the more important it is to offer options of doing ritual activities silently and solo, or with a known partner, and not compel people to share private and vulnerable information. With smaller groups, or groups where more trust has been built and made explicit, more vulnerable activities can be offered. Be aware if the majority of the group shares a common identity (i.e., Ashkenazi background) that allows them to connect more deeply to a certain ritual, while the minority (i.e., Sephardi or Mizrahi background) feel unfamiliar, disconnected or overlooked.

Body options: As we know, traumatic impacts live in our bodies, and ritual can create space to engage those impacts in potentially shifting ways. But it is high risk to work directly with the embodied impacts of trauma in ritual space, especially in large groups. Song, movement, prayer, chanting, meditation and ritual are inevitably engaging peoples' bodies in a myriad of ways. But instructions such as "Pay attention to your body" and "Notice what's coming up for you in your body" will likely bring up more and stronger embodied responses. **As clergy and ritual leaders, if we do not have additional training in embodiment, somatics, physiology and traumatic impacts, we are not qualified to work directly with the embodied impacts of trauma. We must be mindful and very careful when directing people to bring their attention to their bodies.** We can offer practices that engage our bodies, making sure to offer options and using invitational language, and letting people self-regulate how much attention they pay to their embodied reactions. We can offer our attention, time and make referrals as necessary to be resources for people to explore and process the impacts of ritual and prayer.





Tools for Creating Trauma-Sensitive Jewish Spaces

Building trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive spaces and culture involves the ongoing integration of practices that support people's presence and wellness. Below you will find a handful of practices that are tools for individual and collective care in organizing, education and ritual spaces. This list is by no means definitive, and a lot of this will seem familiar; many of the practices for trauma-sensitivity are also anti-oppression practices, tools for healthy group process, or pedagogy for social and emotional learning.

There are many practices within and from Jewish tradition that can center and focus a group, defuse individual and collective anxiety and tension, foster a sense of connection and community, and do so much of what we are aiming for when we work to create trauma-sensitive spaces. Using tools and practices that are inspired by, grounded in or call on Jewish wisdom and tradition not only is attending to individual trauma, but has the added bonus of speaking to collective, intergenerational and historical traumas. Of course, every group is different: For some people, using Jewish text, ritual, song and practice could be comforting, inspiring, empowering and healing. For others, certain practices at certain times might be alienating or frustrating. These offerings, as with this entire guide, are meant as an invitation — a scaffolding within which to discover what works for your context in different times and places.

One part of caring for ourselves and others in trauma-sensitive teaching, organizing and leading is making sure we are grounded and confident in our ability to facilitate a practice we are offering. As with any new skill, it's helpful to have been on the receiving end of someone else's offering, having participated in the activity before teaching or leading it. When that's not possible, we can take time to write out why we are offering the practice, how we will frame it, what we will say, how we will close or transition out of the activity, and practice with a small group or partner and get feedback on our leadership. It is important that we remain grounded in our unique skills, knowledge and background, and offer rituals that feel authentic in our own bodies, rather than offering what we believe is expected of us.

Rabbinic tradition teaches the importance of giving credit to our sources. We teach things *b'shem omro*, "in the name of the one who said it." This is a traditionally Jewish method that can serve as a guardrail against cultural appropriation. This kind of attribution is particularly important when we are leading a practice or ritual originating from a racial or ethnic community whose histories and traditions are often disappeared or misused in our dominant culture of white supremacy. What is our relationship to the source of the practice? AORTA offers this handout of [Guiding Questions to Ask on Cultural Appropriation](#) that is a great resource before offering a new practice.



Opening, Closings and Breaks:

How we open, close and space breaks in meetings and classes can go a long way to creating trauma-sensitive environments. As facilitators and teachers, we can often feel so excited or under pressure to get to the content that we skip any sort of opening or arrival moment, don't schedule breaks and run late or over the allotted time. Everyone has experienced being on both sides of this dynamic, and we know both how tempting and how counterproductive it is. Overstuffed agendas usually undermine the important work and learning we are so eager to do.

Opening practices can support people to arrive, focus, transition from one activity to the next, settle our nervous systems and be present for the activity at hand. Taking breaks allows people to process and integrate information and decompress, which is especially important with challenging or potentially overwhelming content. Closing practices can give people the chance to notice what has arisen for them or solidify important takeaways. They can give the group an opportunity to remember what their common purpose or connection is. All of these can be moments, especially in heady or intellectual conversations and spaces, to access spiritual, emotional and embodied wisdom.



Jewish and Spiritual Tools for Opening and Closing Practices:

Invite participants to call to mind an ancestor and, if time allows, share their name and story. Ancestors can be specific people we know the names of or even people we've never met, people real or imagined. We can call to mind ancestors who offer us support, guidance and loving care, or ancestors who we struggle with who we want to send our loving care towards. It is important to specify that this ancestor can be Jewish or not as a way of ensuring inclusivity of those not coming from Jewish ancestry.

Dedicating and sealing our learning: For centuries, Jews have engaged in the practice of dedicating our learning before beginning study, and saying a special prayer to close and mark the end of a period of study.

- Opening our learning: We can dedicate our learning to: ancestors we want to send healing to or honor; people doing organizing for justice whose work we want to lift up and honor; people who are in need of healing; people in mourning.
- Closing our learning: Hadran is a short prayer recited upon the completion of study of a tractate of the Talmud or a Seder of Mishnah. It is also the name of the scholarly discourse delivered at a siyum masechet, the ceremony celebrating the completion of study of a Talmudic tractate.

At the close of a class or workshop, invite people to name what:

I've learned today...

I want to return to or learn more about...

I hope to remember...

Offer the traditional hadran blessing:

הדרן עלך והדרך עלן	Hadran alakh ve-hadrakh alan
דעתן עלך ודעתך עלן	Da'atan alakh ve-da'atekh alan
לא נתנשי מינך ולא תתנשי מינן	lo nitnashi minekhve-lo titnashi minan
לא בעלמא הדין ולא בעלמא דאתי	lo be-alma ha-din ve-lo be-alma deati

We will return to you, and you will return to us; our mind is on you,
and your mind is on us; we will not forget you, and you will not forget us;
not in this world and not in the world to come

Say a blessing. Offer the Shehekheyanu, the blessing for doing new things and making it to this moment. Make up your own blessing, specific for the activity you're about to do.

Traditional and contemporary Jewish blessings that fit before a class or meeting:

Traditional Blessing for Torah Study

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה	Barukh atah adonay eloheynu meleh ha'olam, asher kideshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu la'asok bedivrey torah.
--	--

Blessed are you, Divine Source, the spirit of all worlds, who made us holy with your mitzvot, and commanded us to occupy ourselves with words of Torah.

Blessing for Queer Torah Study, from Siddur Sha'ar Zahav

Our stories, women's stories and queer stories, were left out of Your sacred book — yet down through the generations, we never stopped reading it. And now, in this time and place, we gather together to study Torah again, to find ourselves there, to read ourselves back into Your holy text, our personal midrashim another part of all the unwritten stories told at Sinai.

Blessed are You, Divine One our God, Creator of the universe, who sanctified us with Your mitzvot, and instructed us to occupy ourselves with the study of Torah.

Blessings for Community Work from RitualWell.org

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּצָרְכֵי צְבוּר	Barukh atah adonay eloheynu meleh ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok betzorkhei tzibur.
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How full of blessing you are, Eternal One, our God, majesty of the Universe, who has consecrated us with Your commands, and commanded us to occupy ourselves with the needs of the community.

Offer a *kavannah* (intention) *Kavannah* traditionally refers to concentrating our minds on the *mitzvot* at hand and connecting our attention to the act we are about to engage in. When beginning a particularly difficult conversation, meeting or class where people will be covering emotionally charged topics, a *kavannah* is a Jewish tool to frame the conversation and bring participants attention to the task, while offering a spiritual grounding or bigger view purpose.

Offer Words of Torah specifically from the *parsha ha'shavua* (weekly Torah portion). Many meetings of Jewish organizations open with words of Torah; in working to build trauma-sensitive spaces, this is an opportunity to connect with ancestors, with sacred purpose and Divine source, to anchor us in Jewish time and feel part of a story that is bigger and older than us.

Offering a brief reflection on the Torah portion or a *kavannah* is a great opportunity for people with less experience to build their confidence in leading Jewish ritual and practice. You can make time to teach people how to give a *kavannah* or offer words of Torah, and model that words of Torah do not need to be long, complicated or cite obscure commentaries in order to be meaningful.

Chant, sing, pray, share a poem: More resources on this below.



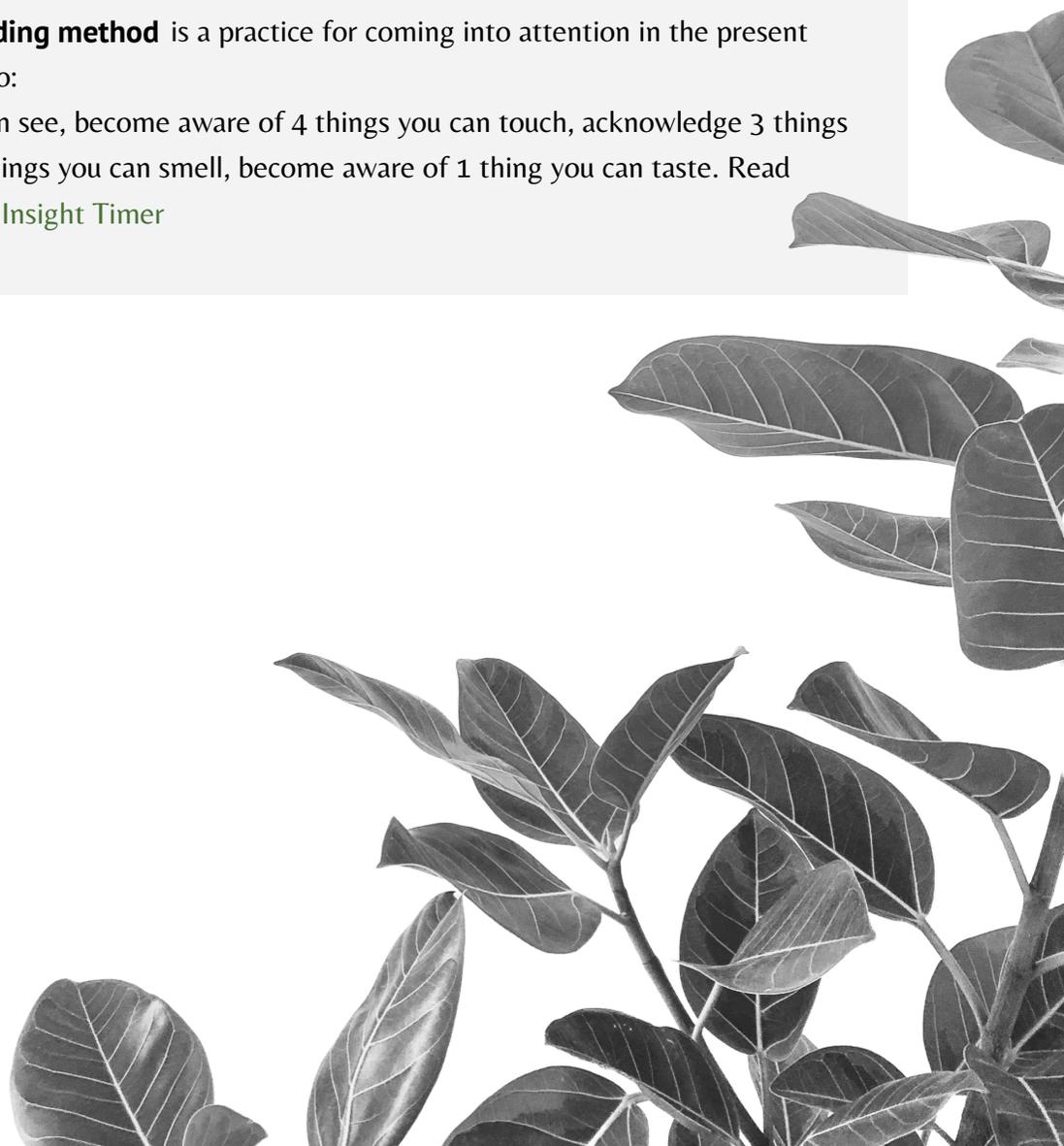
Open, Closing and Break Practices to Settle and Ground:

Invite people to hold a moment of silence, or set a timer and hold up to five minutes of silence. Especially when people are transitioning between multiple intellectual and cognitive activities, silence can offer spaciousness for people's nervous systems to settle. For some, sitting in silence for long periods of time will be difficult. Start with a 30 seconds and grow as people in the group feel comfortable with the practice.

Offer the group time to **stretch and move** as they are comfortable. Never assume a group or individual's mobility, and always use invitational language. For a group new to or uncomfortable with movement, you can suggest neck, shoulder, wrist and ankle rolls, or squeezing and giving light massages to your own hands and wrists, thighs and knees, cheeks and jaw.

The **5, 4, 3, 2, 1 grounding method** is a practice for coming into attention in the present moment. Invite people to:

Look for 5 things you can see, become aware of 4 things you can touch, acknowledge 3 things you can hear, notice 2 things you can smell, become aware of 1 thing you can taste. Read about this practice here: [Insight Timer](#)



Setting Up and Tending to Trauma-Sensitive Spaces:

As we know, there is no one set of practices to guarantee safety for all people at all times. Instead, creating trauma-sensitive groups and learning environments involves ongoing, reflective tending to group dynamics.

Creating group guidelines

Creating group guidelines can be a powerful tool for creating group safety and working towards trauma-sensitive spaces. It can also be a rote or formulaic — a way to check the box of caring for a shared space without really digging into what the group expects of each other. How can we make the process and use of group guidelines a meaningful tool for creating supportive learning environments and safer spaces?

It's important to be clear about the goal of creating group guidelines and realistic about the facilitator or group's ability to tend to and uphold the guidelines. Often times, group guidelines are framed as rules, as do's and don'ts, though it is unrealistic that they will or could be enforced. This can wear down trust between facilitators and participants. Instead, group guidelines can be framed as a set of aspirations: This is how we will try to be together. Training for Change offers the framework of Maximizing and Minimizing Learning. In this facilitated conversation, "the point of this exercise is empowerment. How can you maximize the value of a learning experience?"

In a one-time class, a facilitator can offer suggested group guidelines as a way to communicate their values for shared space. With a standing committee or an ongoing class, the group can take more time to co-create guidelines together, and the facilitator can make space to check back in to reflect on the group dynamics. Particularly in ongoing group spaces, it's important to create opportunities for reflection on how individuals and the group as a whole are doing in upholding the established guidelines. This kind of assessment will allow for interventions to be implemented when guidelines are not being met.

One Example of Group Guidelines:

from AORTA, the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance

Find your growing edge and stay there

Red/yellow/green.¹⁹ Push yourself, but know your boundaries and take care of yourself as well.

Share the air

Be mindful of how much you're speaking in relation to others. If you're a person who tends towards the quieter/observer side, challenge yourself to bring your voice to the space. If you're a person who naturally speaks up a lot in groups, challenge yourself to listen deeply.

Remain as present as you are able

Please take care of your bodies and hearts: DO leave anytime to use the bathroom, take an urgent call, give yourself a breather if it will help you stay present, move and stretch your body. DON'T get distracted by your phone, text unless it's crucial, or wander in and out unnecessarily. Hold the balance between taking care of your needs and preserving the container we're creating with this space.

Be human and let your colleagues be human, too

None of us can be articulate all of the time. It's OK to think out loud, to stumble, to make mistakes. It's also OK to name when something someone else says hurts or lands badly. We want to create a brave space for learning, which includes brave and resilient giving/receiving of feedback, without the conversation shutting down.

Acknowledge intent, attend to impact

What do we mean by intent versus impact? Our interactions don't take place in vacuum; there is broader context (what we're here to discuss), and we can say and do hurtful things even with the best intentions. Acknowledging the difference can help us be resilient when impact is named; we don't have to get caught up in explaining our good intentions. Both things can be true.

Expect and accept a lack of closure

Know that over the next period of time, we will surface problems that we will not solve. Cans of worms may be opened. Some discussions may leave you feeling emotionally raw. We hope that you will also find this to be a generative and momentum-building experience. The workshop is a launchpad — a space for relationship-building and brainstorming, and opportunity to build shared framework and learn new tools. The long-term work of organizational and personal transformation is ongoing.

19. Zones of Regulation is a color code to describe the way we feel and our states of alertness. Red zone describes a heightened state of alertness and intense emotions. The yellow zone describes elevated emotions, with more control. Green zone describes calm, focused alertness. Blue zone describes low alertness and feelings such as sadness or boredom. Adapted from <https://www.zonesofregulation.com/>



In addition to group guidelines, there are likely other core values or grounding assumptions that a facilitator or teacher brings into a teaching space. Transparency is one of the values of trauma-sensitive education, and teachers sharing the frameworks, visions and values that are guiding their thinking and pedagogy can be a powerful tool for both education and trust-building with a group. In particular, it is powerful and important for a facilitator to name and acknowledge power, privilege and oppression in both general and specific ways that it might play out in a space depending on the topic at hand. A facilitator can briefly share with the group ways in which their own identities and background affect their relationship to the group or material. It is important to not do this in a way that asks the group to take care of this dynamic, but instead models the facilitators' self-awareness and openness to talking about how power and privilege dynamics are inevitably playing out in the group.

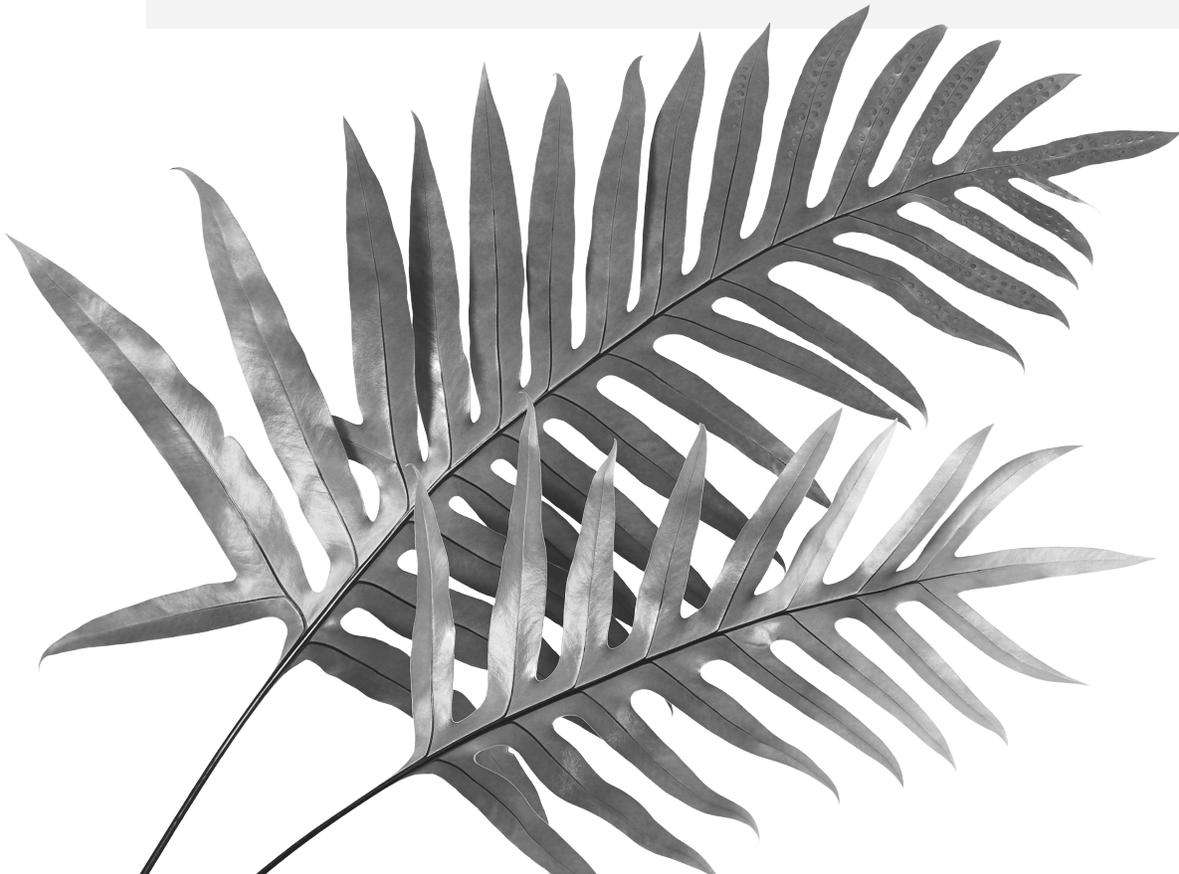
A facilitator can also acknowledge trauma, harm and violence as it will likely show up in a space or class, and offer their values for how that will be held, and suggestions for group and self-care. More on this will be covered in the next section.

Working With Difficult Texts and Topics:

Alongside and interspersed with so much beauty, creativity, and joy, Jewish life, texts and histories include stories of extreme violence and harm. Jewish education spaces should be spaces where these histories and texts can be explored. We want to be able to face and sit with the violence in our stories — both because we want to immerse ourselves in the full nuanced breadth and depth of our tradition, and because creating loving, resilience spaces to encounter harm creates opportunities for healing.

In recent years, trigger warnings or content warnings have become a way to try to attend to the trauma present in every learning space and room. Though originally intended to be a tool of caring for people living with the impacts of trauma, it has come under investigation and critique as to its efficacy: trigger warnings usually label violent content that many people find upsetting, but trauma-triggers are often unrelated to the specific content of a traumatic event.

Trigger warnings are one attempt at creating safety in a culture relatively new at grappling with the prevalence of trauma. We can learn about what has been effective and ineffective about trigger warnings in order to develop new practices with the understanding that all of these practices will require ongoing reflection and refinement.



Techniques for Addressing Difficult Content

Clear Labeling: Though very specific content warnings cannot prevent all trauma responses, it is still good practice to clearly label when a class or meeting will include violent content or topics. This helps people self-select where they want to be and set up tools for self-care before, during and after.

It is also important to acknowledge and label the structure of a given setting, what is more or less possible in the format you're operating in. A class or education space, no matter how trauma-sensitive, is not a therapy group. While it is possible to create peer-facilitated healing spaces, it is important to be clear with participants about the purpose and goal of the group, and to structure activities that support that goal.

Trauma education: Take time to acknowledge that trauma and traumatic impacts are present in every room, and affirm that people might feel a range of responses to the content, including anger, sadness, grief, fear, anxiety, annoyance, numbness or checking out/shutting down. Offer a definition of secondary and vicarious trauma, that it is normal and healthy to feel trauma responses when facing violence that is happening to other people.

Caring for self: When naming trauma and its impacts, invite people to do practices to take care of themselves, during and after the class. Give people time to reflect on what they will do immediately following a difficult conversation and suggest that they take time later that day or week to journal, meditate, reflect on or talk with someone about what arose for them.

Personal reflection and sharing: When inviting people to reflect on the material, always offer multiple options: journaling, drawing or sitting quietly. If inviting people to reflect in pairs or small groups, name the option of reflecting individually or reflecting specifically with people who have shared lived experiences around the topic being explored. Be mindful of how much trust is built or possible in a group given its size, relationship and time together, and ask questions that match the level of trust you assess is present.

Intentional generalities: In large, new and non-therapeutic processing groups, invite people to stay general in how they are talking about violence, as well as to refrain from detailing graphic stories of violence and harm. People can use terms like violence, harm, oppression, dominance, sexual violence, race-based violence and genocide. This is both for the sake of the collective and potential listeners, and for the sake of the experience of the potential sharer: to support people to not share past their abilities to stay present and engaged in the room, with a group that's not prepared to respond supportively.

If you are creating a space where people will be sharing abuse stories, make sure that all participants know that will be happening, and have more than one facilitator present who can step out and support people individually. Offer multiple options and use invitational language, so that people have choice about how to engage: "I invite you to turn to a partner or get out paper to journal."

This framework is not meant to, and should not be used as a way to, silence trauma survivors or shut down people and communities who have been systematically violated and oppressed from sharing their experiences. Hearing about the details of ongoing violence against people of color, Indigenous people, women, queer and trans people, poor people, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups will make people with relative privilege uncomfortable and agitated. This is a key part of facing collective and historical trauma, and moving towards healing. We need more spaces where there is the explicit purpose of learning histories of violence, and where there is the time, space and care set up for stories to be told, listened to, held and responded to with accountability and care. When people share experiences of harm and violence, facilitators and teachers should put care for people over content and agenda, and attend to what is arising in the room.

Timing and spaciousness: Assume that opening discussions of oppression, harm and violence will bring up thoughts, feelings and memories that will impact how people are able to participate. Schedule breaks, try not to go from discussing abuse to other challenging topics, and leave ample time for what emerges. Open and close intentionally, with a mediation, prayer, poem or moment of silence to focus and invite people into the room and the content, and transition to the rest of their day.

Chants, Songs, Prayers:

Jewish tradition has offered our ancestors centuries of support for how to live, fight, struggle, survive, resist, grieve and go on living. Our pockets are filled with the gifts our ancestors are offering us: wisdom, dreams, Torah, traditions, prayers and songs. Bringing in Jewish practices can create a sense of community; get participants out of our heads and into our bodies, and engaging our spirits; and connect us to our tradition of survival and healing. Below you will find a selection of just a few verses of Torah, Psalms and liturgy that can be read or chanted. You are encouraged to explore melodies for songs from different Jewish traditions, while remembering to provide context for the origins of different tunes. You can plan songs and prayers to be part of opening, taking breaks and closing spaces that are encountering challenging topics or difficult conversations. And we can grow our ability to attune with and give supportive offerings to what is arising. Rabbi Vivie Mayer describes her process of discovering what chant is called for in a given moment, saying:

"I go to the parsha and use that as a field, or use the time of year. Often a chant will come to my mind and, rather than choosing it, I will vet it — agree that it will work and follow the inspiration, or decide that it will not work, for whatever reason, and continue to wait for the right one." ²⁰

20. Personal correspondence, December 2019



Many verses of Torah and Prophets contain beautiful poetry and caring wisdom towards healing. Some favorites:

Genesis 15:1

אֶל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם אֲנֹכִי מִגֵּן לָךְ Al tira, Avram, ki anochi magen lach
Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you.

Genesis 21:22

אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה Elohim imcha b'chol asher atah oseh
God is with you in everything you do.

Genesis 28: 17

מַה־נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה Mah norah ha'makom ha'zeh
How awesome is this place.

Numbers 12:13

אֵל נָא רַפֵּא נָא לָהּ El na rafa-na lah
O God, pray heal her!

Isaiah 41:10

אֶל־תִּירָא כִּי עִמָּךְ־אֲנִי אֶל־תִּשְׁתַּע כִּי־אֲנִי Fear not, for I am with you, Be not
אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲמַצְתִּיךָ אֶרְעִזְתִּיךָ אֶרְתַּמְכְּתִיךָ frightened, for I am your God; I strengthen
בְּיַמִּין צְדָקָי: you and I help you, I uphold you with My
victorious right hand.

Isaiah 43:2

כִּי־תַעֲבֹר בַּמַּיִם אֲתָרֶ־אֲנִי וּבַנְּהָרוֹת לֹא When you pass through water, I will be with
יִשְׁטַפּוּךָ כִּי־תֵלֵךְ בַּמַּוֵּ־אֵשׁ לֹא תִכָּוֶה וְלַהֲבָה you; Through streams, They shall not
לֹא תִבְעַר־בָּךְ: overwhelm you. When you walk through
fire, You shall not be scorched; Through
flame, It shall not burn you.

Many Psalms include imagery of supportive, Divine help. For example:

Psalm 23

<p>(א) מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר: בְּנֵאֲוֹת דְּשָׂא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל־מִי מִנְחֹת יִנְהַלְנִי: נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי־צֶדֶק לִמְעַן שְׁמוֹ: גַּם כִּי־אֶלֶךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הִמָּה יִנְחֵמְנִי: תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלַחַן נֶגֶד צִרְרֵי דִשְׁנֹת בִּשְׁמֹן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רוּיָה: אֶךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:</p>	<p>A psalm of David: Adonai is my shepherd, I shall not want. God makes me lie down in green pastures, leads me beside still waters, and restores my soul. You lead me in right paths for the sake of Your name. Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil. For You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You have set a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all of the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the House of God forever.</p>
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Psalm 121: 1-2

<p>אֶשָּׂא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יִבֵּא עֲזָרִי: עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה שְׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:</p>	<p>I turn my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come? My help comes from the Adonai, maker of heaven and earth.</p>
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Much of our liturgy invokes imagery of protection, healing and sacred care:

A *misheberach*, the traditional prayer for healing from sickness, it is often said when the Torah is out of the Ark or during Torah study.

Hashkivenu

וּפְרוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִכַּת שְׁלוֹמָךְ Ufros aleinu sukkat shlomecha

Spread over us your canopy of peace.

B'Shem Ha'Shem

בְּשֵׁם הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִיְמִינִי מִיְכָאֵל, B'sheim Hashem elohei yisrael, mimini
וּמִשְׁמָאלֵי גַבְרִיאֵל, וּמִלְפָּנֵי אֱוִרִיאֵל, וּמֵאַחֲרָי Michael umismoli Gavriel, Umilfanai Uriel
רַפָּאֵל, וְעַל רֹאשִׁי וְעַל רֹאשֵׁי שְׂכִינַת אֱ-ל. umeachorai Rafael, v'al roshi shechinat el

In the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, may Michael be at my right hand; Gabriel at my left; before me, Uriel; behind me, Raphael; and above my head the Divine presence of God.

Ana Bekoach

אָנָּה בְּכַח גְּדֻלַּת יְמִינְךָ תִּתִּיר צָרוֹרָה. קִבֵּל Ana b'choach gedulat yemincha tatir
רִנַּת עַמְךָ, שְׂגַבְנוּ טַהֲרֵנוּ נוֹרָה ts'rurakhabel rinat am'cha, sagvenu,
taharenu, norah

O Lord, with the greatness of thy powerful right hand, we pray to thee to loosen those that are bound in captivity. Accept the cry of thy people; exalt and purify us, O thou who art tremendous!



For songs and incredible Jewish song leaders, check out:

Rabbi Shefa Gold's incredibly generous library of Hebrew chants
Let My People Sing on Soundcloud, especially these playlists: [Songs of Jewish Resilience](#)
and [Songs of Hope, Grief and Comfort](#)

More resources for practices to tend to spaces:

[The Work That Reconnects: Practices to Connect Our Lives, Our World](#) by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, on Gratitude, Honoring Our Pain for the World, Seeing With New Eyes/Ancient Eyes, Deep Time, Going Forth, Meditations

[Tools from Training for Change](#) including De-escalation and Peacekeeping, Meeting Facilitation, Energizers and Games, and Team Building

[Centering and Grounding in Online Work](#) by Claudia Horwitz

[Leading Groups Online](#) by Jeanne Rewa and Daniel Hunter



Author's Statement: Values and Visions to Ground and Guide

I have been deeply shaped by the Reconstructionist concept of Values-Based Decision Making. I was raised and educated with the understanding that in order to live according to our values, we first have to articulate them. In order to stay consistent, we have to keep coming back to them. These practices of expressing, returning to and refining my values have steadied and inspired me in doing work on trauma, healing and resilience. I often wrestle with how to live them; and I reconsider and rewrite them when new insight and clarity emerges. Similar to the way in which we return to the same Torah portion year after year and find new insight, I return, year after year, to the same basic formulations of trauma — how it impacts our bodies, brains, communities and lives — and learn new things. My goal is to become clearer on and more consistent about how I want to live, work, organize and pray; articulating my values is one practice that helps me to do that.

This is the current articulation of the values and vision that guide my work. I offer it not as definitive for the work or for me, but for the sake of transparency and dialogue with others. As you take the material in this guide and bring it to your context and community, what are the values that ground your work on trauma, healing and resilience?

Root in and reach towards justice and the sustainability of life on earth. At this moment in history, trauma, healing and resilience frameworks are proliferating. The same tools I am applying to Jewish community-building and social justice are currently being put to use in other contexts as forms of control, and to enable people to focus more successfully on the pursuit of profit over collective well-being. It is, therefore, crucial to articulate my values; they are not inherently or automatically present in all trauma frameworks. Articulating a power and privilege analysis is foundational to my understanding of what it means to be trauma-informed. I am committed to anti-racism, economic justice, gender justice, and an ever-deepening anti-oppression understanding and practice.

I am a white, cisgender, queer, class-privileged, currently able-bodied, Ashkenazi Jewish woman, living as a settler on Leni Lenape land. I work to be mindful of and ask questions about how my identities and lived experience of power, privilege and oppression shape my understanding and impact my actions. I do this work to serve organizers, activists and movements for justice. I seek additional ways to integrate work for justice into work about trauma, healing and resilience.

Work to embody trauma-informed and healing principles. Work focused on trauma, healing and resilience can activate people's experiences of harm. Talking and learning about trauma can trigger people's trauma responses. Yet, it is possible to create trauma education that is in and of itself trauma-sensitive. Our organizing, fundraising, thinking, planning, writing and communicating about trauma, healing and resilience can provide opportunities for healing and resilience. We can do this by being intentional about how we work: creating dynamic and spacious learning environments that attend to power dynamics; paying attention when fear, scarcity, hurt and grief arise; attuning to and caring for each other as whole people; investing in living-wage jobs and sustainable workloads; incorporating spiritual practices into our work; and encouraging creativity, collaboration and joy.

Explore the intersections of individual, intergenerational, collective, and historical traumas and healing. Trauma impacts us in our individual bodies, minds and spirits; shapes our communities; plays out in our families; and is passed down through the generations in families, communities, culture, values and traditions. Healing must, therefore, happen in our bodies, our families, our communities and in how we understand and relate to our ancestors, stories and traditions. We need to articulate the differences between individual, intergenerational, collective and historical layers of traumas. We need to notice and work with the different ways the impacts of trauma are expressed at these different spheres. We also need to understand that the intersections and complexities of our individual, communal and cultural identities influence the ways in which different types of trauma show up in each of us in distinctive ways. We need to develop strategies for working with diverse individuals, groups and communities in non-pathologizing ways.

Multi-disciplinary and multi-perspective. There is incredible wisdom about trauma, healing and resilience in the fields of psychology; body work and somatics; healing justice; organizing; social services; art; education; spirituality and more. I believe there is no one right way to heal. I am part of a diverse ecosystem of healers and justice seekers. I cultivate tools rooted in what I know best: Jewish life, education, tradition, history, ritual, culture and spirituality. I am mindful of and name the lineages, traditions and frameworks that I bring as an Ashkenazi Jew, raised in and ordained as a rabbi in the Reconstructionist movement. I strive to learn from everyone, integrating diverse theories and practices into my teaching and writing. I believe it is important to name sources of information, and the lineage and frame from which the theories and practices come.

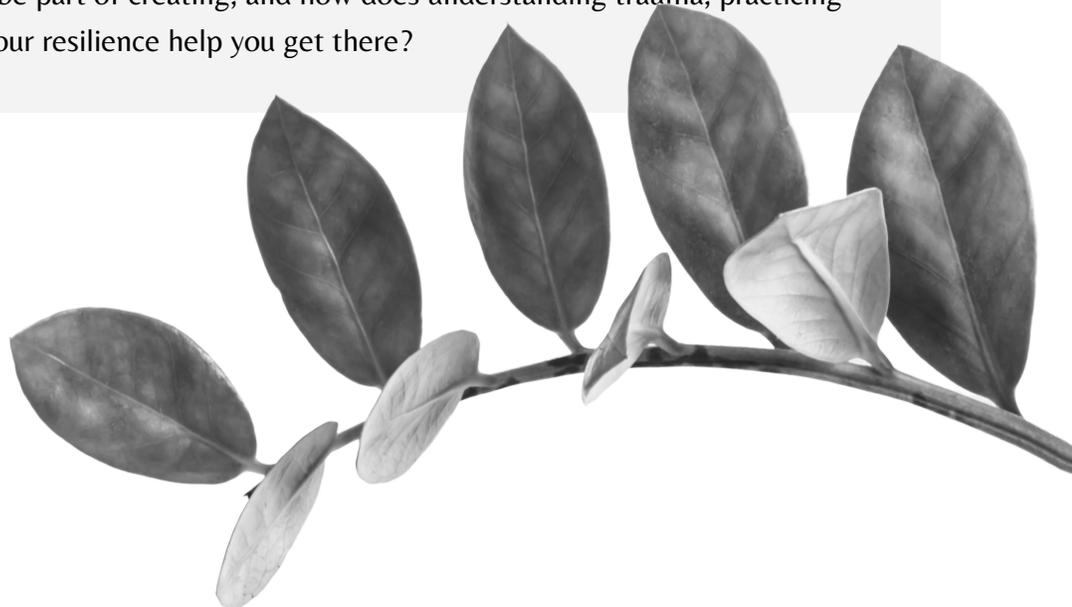
Jewishly rooted. Jewish practices, rituals, traditions and cultural expressions have nurtured, fed, inspired and literally kept Jews and Jewishness alive through experiences of overwhelming suffering and violence. Uncovering, sustaining and cultivating culturally specific healing modalities rooted in Jewish traditions and ways of life provide particular nourishment to Jewish people. At the same time, experiences of suffering, violence and harm have shaped Jewish practices, rituals, traditions and cultural expressions. There is work to do to lovingly examine our traditions in order to understand which of them continue to be healing and reparative in our time, and which expressions may perpetuate harm and trauma, and no longer serve our well-being.

Spiritually engaging. Trauma creates ruptures in people's spirits and sense of connection to the Divine, and severs connections between people, sacredness and the earth. Holistic healing must attend to spiritual wellness. Attending to spiritual needs is essential and, for Jews, employing Jewish tools as part of that attention can be deeply generative. Rabbis, Jewish educators and organizers have opportunities to discover what this looks like and to engage our communities in the work of the spirit, including discovering what that looks like.

These are the values that guide the learning, teaching and writing I do about trauma, healing and resilience. I am inspired by Aurora Levins Morales's conception of historian as *curandera* (healer) in her book *Medicine Stories*.²¹ She teaches that the politicized historian has a role to play in collective healing. The politicized-healer-historian asks: What stories have we been telling about where we came from? How do those stories shape how we understand our current position and our possible futures?

I understand the rabbinate as one path to immersing myself in Jewish text, tradition, story and history — not as an objective outside observer, but as someone with a stake in the Jewish past, present and future. I see the work of teaching, organizing, and leading ritual and prayer as one important site of intervention for the kind of healing and transformation I so desperately yearn for in Jewish communities. I feel beyond blessed to be able to organize and teach from this place of deeply embedded reciprocal care for Jews and Jewish people.

What are the values that guide your work? How have these values been shaped by your own experiences in the world as they relate to your unique identities? What's your vision of the world that you want to be part of creating, and how does understanding trauma, practicing healing and expanding our resilience help you get there?



21. Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press: 1998)

Recommended Reading

There are many exciting sources for learning about trauma, healing and resilience. See below for a selection of books, articles and podcasts.

Collective, Intergenerational and Historical Trauma- Community Healing:

Abadian, Sousan. [“Cultural Healing: When Cultural Renewal is Reparative and When it is Toxic.”](#) Presentation at Healing Our Spirits Worldwide Conference, 2006.

[Ancestral Resistance from Mijente: Offerings & Practices \(full text in Spanish and English\).](#)

Bloom, Sandra. [Creating Sanctuary: Toward the Evolution of Sane Societies](#). New York: Routledge, 2013.

DeGruy Leary, Joy. [Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing](#). Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005. [Dr. Leary’s Website, Articles and Trainings](#).

Ginwright, Shawn. [Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement](#).

[Healing Legacies: A Panel on Intergenerational Trauma](#), video from [The Icarus Project](#).

[Historical Trauma and Cultural Healing Introduction and Resources from the University of Minnesota](#).

Herman, Judith. [Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence — from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror](#). New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Haines, Staci K. [The Politics of Trauma: Somatics, Healing and Social Justice](#). North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, California: 2019.

Linklater, Renee. [Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories and Strategies](#). Fernwood Publishing, 2014.

Miller-Karas, Elaine. [Building Resilience to Trauma: The Trauma and Community Resilience Models](#). Routledge Press: NY, 2015.

Nieto, Leticia. [Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment: A Developmental Strategy to Liberate Everyone \(Video here\)](#)

Yehuda, Rachel. "How Trauma and Resilience Cross Generations," Interview at On Being, July 30, 2015.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Maria. *Historical Trauma and Healing in Native American Communities*.

Embodied Trauma and Healing

Levine, Peter. *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma: The innate capacity to transform overwhelming experiences*. (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books: 1997)

Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press: 2017.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Viking, 2014.

[What is Interoception?](#) Video by Embodied Philosophy

Jewish Trauma and Healing, Spirituality and Healing

Burg, Avram. *The Holocaust is Over, We Must Rise from Its Ashes*, trans. Israel Amrani. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Firestone, Tirzah. *Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Trauma*. Monkfish Publishing: 2019.

[Hashivenu Podcast](#)

Horwitz, Claudia. *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work, and Your World*. New York: Penguin Press, 2002.

Klein, Melissa. "A Place Where You Belong: Jewish Healing Circles".

[Resources for Resilience](#), from Bend the Arc Jewish Action

[Ritualwell: Rituals for Healing and Hard Times](#)

Rosenwasser, Penny. *Hope into Practice: Jewish Women Choosing Justice Despite Our Fears*. 2013.

Somerson, Wendy Elisheva. "A Ritual Dismantling of Walls: Healing of Trauma Through the Jewish Days of Awe." *Tikkun Magazine*: Vol. 29. No 3: Summer 2014.

Treleaven, David. *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing*. W. W. Norton and Company, 2018.

Healing Justice and Disability Justice

Berne, Patty. "Disability Justice - a working draft," June 9th, 2015

Healing Justice is More Than Just Words on a Page, Report from Nexus Community Partners

Healing in Action: A Toolkit for Black Lives Matter Healing Justice & Direct Action

Irresistible Podcast

Kukla, Elliot. "The Holiness of Being Broken: Trauma and Disability Justice," Evolve.

Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah. "A Not-So-Brief Personal History of the Healing Justice Movement, 2010-2016." Mice Magazine.

Lamm, Nomy. "This Is Disability Justice"

Transform Harm: a resource hub about ending violence

Environmental Justice, Trauma and Healing

Canty, Jeanine M, ed. Ecological and Social Healing: Multicultural Women's Voices. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. Love Letter to the Earth. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2013.

Roszak, Theodore, Mary E. Gomes, Allen D. Kanner, eds. Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind. New York: Sierra Club Books, 1995.

Secondary and Vicarious Trauma, Moral Injury

Nakashima Brock, Rita and Gabriella Lettini. Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War. Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.

Secondary Trauma in the Workplace: Tools for Awareness, Self-Care, and Organizational Response in Montana

"Survival Tips for Radical Empaths" by Adrienne Marie Brown

van Dernoot Lipsky, Laura with Connie Burk. Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others. San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers, 2009.

Vicarious Trauma for Professionals, Wendt Center for Loss and Healing

Accountability, Transformative Justice, Conflict Resolution and De-Escalation

Conflict Resolution with Power and Privilege in Mind from Compasspoint

Dixon, Ejeris & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, eds. *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2020.

Guide to Trauma-Informed De-Escalation During Actions and Protests from Open Table Nashville

Haga, Kazu. *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2020.

Hemphill, Prentis, with the BLM Healing Justice Working Group, *Black Lives Matter's Tools for Addressing Chapter Conflict*.

Kaba, Mariame & Shira Hassan. *Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators*. Project NIA/Just Practice, 2019.

Nonviolent Community Safety and Peacebuilding Handbook by pt'chang: nonviolent community safety group.

Resource List from Conflict Transformation Fund

