

After the War: A Conversation with Teens about the Ceasefire

 movingtraditions.org/curriculum/responsive/after-the-war-a-conversation-with-teens-about-the-ceasefire

Objectives

Participants will . . .

- Understand the recent news about the ceasefire and release of the hostages
- Reflect on what changes have occurred in their lives and communities over the course of the long war in Gaza
- Express hopes, needs, and thanks for Israel and for a more peaceful future according to their own values

Materials

- Writing Utensils (1 per participant)
- (Optional, if you already have them) [David cards](#)
Alternative: Using Google images or another search tool, find and print a few copies each of 10-12 different abstract images (can be a small size) that would lend themselves to interpretations (example: clouds, stop sign, praying hands, a seed sprouting, etc.). Cut them out and shuffle them.
- (Optional) Arrange chairs in a circle to allow for conversational sharing
- (Optional) Device to play the video, "[Gazans and Israelis celebrate ceasefire deal](#)" and to play background music during writing activity
- (Optional) Lulav and etrog (1 per participant or a few to share)
- (Optional) Shofar

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1. Getting the Basic Information (10-15 minutes)

SAY:

As you may have heard, there has been some big news about Israel this past week.

ASK:

What have you already heard? What do you already know?

PLAY the video [Gazans and Israelis celebrate ceasefire deal with hopes for lasting peace](#) (about 7 minutes for the full video) or **SUMMARIZE** using the suggested language below.

SAY:

(Adjust based on your group's background knowledge) Israel's government approved a ceasefire deal in Gaza on Oct. 9, brokered by President Trump, that brought home all 20 living Israeli hostages on October 13 — nearly two years to the day since they were captured — and could finally end the two-year Gaza war. Both Trump and Hamas officials have said the war was “over,” and Trump arrived in the Middle East over the weekend for a signing ceremony. The deal also included the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and the arrival of 200 U.S. troops in Israel to help observe the ceasefire. The U.N. is preparing to rush food, medicine, and other aid to Gazans, where hunger and property destruction are widespread. Still, not everyone is convinced peace will last. Several controversial issues remain, like who will govern Gaza and whether Hamas will disarm. Despite uncertainty, many in Gaza say the agreement offers a rare glimmer of hope after two years of immense suffering.

2. Reflecting on the Past Two Years (15-20 minutes)

Facilitator's Tip: If your group may feel uncomfortable closing their eyes and/or meditating, we suggest you lead the activity below as a writing activity. They can then share one thing that they wrote about with the person next to them.

SAY:

Considering this development, let's reflect on the past two years in our own lives and communities. We're going to do a short meditation that will help us reflect. It may feel a little silly – that's OK. Just go with it; it really does help us take stock of what's going on.

READ the following meditation slowly, pausing after each sentence.

SAY:

Close your eyes or just look down as we prepare to time travel. We're going to travel back to a little over 2 years ago, before the October 7 terrorist attack and the prolonged war in Gaza began. The news and headlines about the war are swirling around us and disappear. The politics and debate about Israel also disappears. We're now arriving back in time to the early fall of 2023, just before the High Holidays. You were two years younger, and you had just

started a new school year. Think about what going to school then was like. Think about what kinds of things you talked about with friends or family, or things that were filling your social media feed. Think about what coming to synagogue, if you were coming to synagogue then, was like. You can look up or open your eyes.

ASK:

Can you quickly share one detail from what life was like 2 years ago? *(Take a few responses. Keep it quick.)*

SAY:

Now close your eyes or look down again. We'll step back into the time machine and travel back to the present day. As time whirls around us, we start to see yellow ribbons and hostage necklaces. We see the hostage posters. We may see people tearing them down, and someone else pasting them up again. We see campus protests. We hear people yelling at each other about Israel, about Gaza. We hear news stories about huge losses of life in Gaza. We see disturbing images of hostages who are suffering. We see some happy images of hostages returning home. We see some tragic images of hostages coming home in coffins. We see a blur of social media over the past two years, a lot of it toxic and divisive. Our friends may have changed over these 2 years, our conversations may sound different, our Jewish communities may have changed.

Now open your eyes again or look up. Let's think about what is different from two years ago to today. Turn and talk to the person next to you about what changes you've noticed over the past 2 years—in yourself, in your communities, or in Israel.

ALLOW a few minutes for participants to talk.

ASK:

- Who can share a change that took place at school that had something to do with Israel, the war, or being Jewish?
- Who can share a change that took place in their Jewish communities? *(If needed, point out some differences in your own community, such as singing Acheinu, saying prayers for the hostages or for peace, attending protests as a community, or increased security.)*
- Who can share any other change that took place anywhere?
- What changes do you want to see remain?
- What changes do you want to see go away for good?

Optional: David Cards Activity

Facilitator's Tip: If you do not have a set of David Cards, you can print out a few copies each of about 10-12 different abstract images of your own choosing that offer a variety of associations, or you can simply skip this activity.

SPREAD OUT the David Cards or other images on a table or other surface.

SAY:

These are abstract images – meaning that you get to interpret them however you want. Look at the options and choose one that you feel represents how you relate to Israel right now. There are no right or wrong answers; just choose something that makes sense to you.

ALLOW time to select.

SAY:

Now everyone, hold up your card for everyone else to see. Look around and notice the range of images.

ASK:

Would anyone like to share why they chose that image?

ALLOW a few responses. **VALIDATE** participants' feelings and **REMIND** participants as necessary that everyone has a right to their own feelings, and we can disagree respectfully.

SAY:

Thank you all for sharing your reflections. You can return your image to the stack.

3. Prayers for the Moment (15-20 minutes)

DISTRIBUTE [Prayers for the Moment](#) and **DIVIDE** participants into groups of 3-4.

SAY:

For many of us and for the world, the news of the ceasefire and the return of the hostages is a mix of joy, relief, questions, worries, and possibly grief and fear. On the one hand, everyone wants to see a peaceful future for Israel and Gaza, and so many of us have been praying for the release of the hostages and the end of war for a long time. On the other hand, we may all have very different opinions on what should happen next, worries about the future, and concerns about whether this ceasefire will last. We may also be mourning the many, many lives that were lost on Oct 7 and during the two years of war including those of the hostages who will not return alive.

Our tradition has prayers for occasions like this, though no one prayer can truly express all the different responses we might have in this historic time. In your groups, read the selections of prayers and discuss the questions below the prayers.

These prayers use a lot of “God language.” I am not necessarily expecting everyone to believe in God. You may believe in some kind of higher power, or you may believe in the goodness of humanity as a whole, or you may not believe in anything. All of that is OK. For thousands of years, Jews have expressed hopes, dreams, fears, and values through the

language of the siddur. That tends to use the language of God, but that does not mean Jews throughout all of history have believed. You can find meaning, values, or poetry in the language of prayer, regardless of whether you believe literally in God or not.

ALLOW about 10 minutes to discuss, then **CALL** the group back together.

ASK:

- Which prayers resonated with you?
- Which prayers missed the mark for you?

4. Our Own Prayers for Israel and the World (15-20 minutes)

DISTRIBUTE [My Prayer for Israel and the World](#).

SAY:

We sometimes think of the central Jewish prayer, the Amidah, as a series of “Wow-Please-Thanks.” The Amidah starts off with statements of “Wow” (or *Shevach*, praise) – we express wonder and awe; we connect with a feeling of something bigger than ourselves. Then we move to “Please” (or *Bakasha*, request) – we ask God or a higher power for things like health, peace, and wisdom. Finally, we close with “Thanks” (or *Hodayah*, gratitude.) We recall all the things we already have to feel grateful for.

We’re going to take a moment to write our own prayer using this format. Again, if the God language is not something that feels meaningful for you, you can think of this as a form of writing to express your ideas and feelings and to be in communication with something bigger than yourself. If the language of God *is* meaningful for you, of course you are welcome to use it.

Use the structure that you have on the handout to help organize your ideas. You are welcome to “plagiarize” the traditional prayers! Recycle and quote any words that resonated with you. You can also write something completely new.

We’ll take about 15 minutes to write, and then you can share if you want. Please take your time, slow down, and think about what you want to express.

PLAY background music while students write. When time is up or most people are done (and have done a thorough job), **CALL** the group back together.

ASK:

- What was it like to write your own prayer?
- What was it like to reflect on the state of Israel, Gaza, and/or the world at this moment in history?

Option A: Read Aloud

SAY:

Let's go around the circle. If you want to share, read your prayer. We'll all say "Amen" when you're done. If you want to pass, just say "pass."

ASK:

Who is ready to go first?

When everyone is done, consider **SHARING** your own thoughts of a brief "wow-please-thanks," and be sure to express thanks for your participants for sharing their thoughts and reflecting maturely!

Option B: Hoshanot

INSTRUCT participants to line up and march in a circle with lulav and etrog. Have students take turns reading their prayers aloud. After someone reads their prayer, the group can respond with "Hoshia Na" – which means "Please save us now" and is part of the traditional way we petition for Divine help on the 7th day of Sukkot, Hoshanah Rabbah.

Facilitator's Tip: On this day, we also traditionally take out the willow branches from the lulav and beat them on the floor until all the leaves are off. You might also perform this ritual and suggest that participants think of hard moments or moments when they might have said things they regretted over the last two years that they want to release with the willow leaves.

SAY:

May all our *bakashot* (requests) come true, speedily and in our days!

Please put your writings somewhere safe. You can pull this page out and recite the words when more Israel news comes up in the future, and you may also find this writing 10 or 20 years from now and be glad for the opportunity to time travel back to this historic moment.

If available, **CLOSE** the session by blowing the shofar (as is custom on Hoshanah Rabbah) as a proclamation of freedom for the released hostages and for the hope of freedom from ongoing war.

5. Survey (5 minutes)

SAY:

I am going to ask each of you to please complete a survey about our time together today. Your feedback is very important to us and to our partner, Moving Traditions. All you need to do is take out your phone and go to <https://tinyurl.com/motrspced>. This session was called "After the War: A Conversation with Teens About the Ceasefire" so when asked, that's the answer!

Or print out this [QR code](#) and have the participants scan it with their phone.

Note to Educator: When you are done using this session, please take the same survey to give us feedback about it! You can use the same QR code or access the survey here:
<https://tinyurl.com/motrspeced>.