



The Woman and the Moon: Getting to Know Rosh Hodesh and One Another

[▶ curriculum.movingtraditions.org/woman-moon-getting-know-rosh-hodesh-one-another](https://curriculum.movingtraditions.org/woman-moon-getting-know-rosh-hodesh-one-another)



Rosh Hodesh 8th Grade: Session 1

Pages to print before the session:

Handout S1.1

Facilitator's Resource S1.1

At a Glance

This gathering is designed for a *Rosh Hodesh* group's initial meeting. It introduces participants to the concept of *Rosh Hodesh* and rituals associated with the holiday. In this meeting, participants start working toward creating a comfortable and supportive

environment for the group. While getting to know each other, they will also spend time reflecting on their own identities and how those identities change based on context (e.g. at school versus at home, at *Rosh Hodesh*, etc).

Objectives

At the end of the session participants will be able to:

- Feel more connected and comfortable with the rest of the group
- Identify key elements of *Rosh Hodesh*
- Describe what to expect from the *Rosh Hodesh* program
- Describe their identities, and how they portray themselves in different contexts

Materials

- Small tapered or straight candles (one for each participant) with foil bases AND one stand-alone candle
- Lighter/starter or matches
- [Prayer for the New Month](#)
- Name tag/paper supplies (name tags/paper, markers, stickers)
- Large piece of chart paper and markers
- Bag of assorted objects if you are doing the “Grab Bag” icebreaker
- A cotton or cotton-blend sheet, tablecloth, or similar piece of fabric in white or a solid light color (minimum size, 6’ x 6’) (Note: Cloth will be used every session this year and coming years should your group continue, so it should be durable and easy to transport. If cloth does not have finished edges, we suggest that you either hem or fringe it)
- [Handout S1.1](#) (one copy)
- Permanent fabric markers, stamps and pads, paints and brushes, and so on, to decorate the cloth
- Plastic liner to place under the cloth if the group members will be using sharpies or markers

Group Leader Prep Work

- Collect and organize materials
- Review the icebreakers from the list of *Rosh Hodesh* icebreakers and decide which icebreaker(s) you might like to lead with your group: movingtraditions.org/rosh-hodesh-icebreakers.
- Choose what information about *Rosh Hodesh* from [Facilitator’s Resource S1.1](#) you want to share
- Decide whether to light the *Rosh Hodesh* candle(s) during the opening blessing or at the end of the meeting

- In your correspondence with group members (and/or parents), ask them to bring two pictures of themselves, each from a different context (i.e. one taken at school and one taken at home, one picture with one friend and one with another friend, etc.). The pictures can be on a cell phone, tablet, or hard copy
- Familiarize yourself with the “[Prayer for the New Month](#),” which you will eventually sing with your group. Mp3 is available [here](#).
- Choose whether to read or sing it for this session, depending on your comfort level with music

Facilitator’s Tips:

- Before participants arrive, spread a plastic drop cloth in a space appropriate for a craft activity and lay the Rosh Hodesh cloth on it. If participants ask about the cloth, explain that it is for a craft activity that you will explain later on in the gathering.
- Consider doing one of the following to make your first meeting special: make tea or hot cocoa in mugs or to go cups, take pictures and share them later, use Oreos for the participants to make a physical (and edible) depiction of what the new moon looks like, hand out a give-away to remind them of the next meeting (lip balm with the next meeting date written on it, a sticker for their phone or a pin for their bag).
- A note about this and future curriculum sessions: Each curriculum session has more activities and discussions than a group can get to in a 2 hour session, especially considering that a portion of those 2 hours will be spent on non-curriculum related (but equally important) activities like catching up and having food. Your role as a group leader is NOT to try and cram in everything, but rather to make thoughtful choices about what activities and discussions will work for your group. Some choices you will make ahead of time and some choices you will have to make on the fly. Every group is unique. Some activities will be better suited to certain groups due to background knowledge, group dynamics, the group’s interests, etc. No one knows your group better than you do, so you are empowered to make decisions about what to include and exclude from each curriculum session.

1. Introductions (5 minutes)

As group members arrive, have them make and decorate a name tag or name paper (something they could put in front of them on the floor instead of wearing a name tag).

Introduce yourself to the group. Briefly share a little about your background and why you’re excited to be leading this Rosh Hodesh group.

Ask group members to share:

- Their name
- Where they go to school
- Something they would like to share about themselves

Go first in order to model the activity and length of time each participant should spend talking.

Facilitator's Tip: If this is not the first year of your group, give group members each a chance to talk about their summer vacations and the first few weeks of eighth grade.

SAY

"We're going to begin today with some icebreakers, followed by a *Rosh Hodesh* ritual, an activity related to selfies, and an art project. Then we will learn more about *Rosh Hodesh* before we leave."

Facilitator's Tip: Allow time for questions.

2. Icebreakers (10 minutes)

Lead with the game(s) you chose from the icebreakers list. We recommend the following for new groups, but there are many other great choices of activities on the list to get your group energized and having fun together. Alternatively, if you have a favorite game that you do not see on the list, you are welcome to lead it with the group!

Line Up

Instruct group to line up in sequence according to the category you name. Examples: first letter of middle name, shoe size, height, birth date. Optional: time the group or instruct the group to line up without speaking.

Grab bag

Bring in a bag full of an unusual assortment of items (toys, knick-knacks, kitchen utensils, etc.). Each person, without looking, takes an item out of the bag. Give group members a minute to think about how this item represents them. They could think about what the item is for, or about qualities of the item (texture, color, etc.), or about how the object makes them feel. As participants go around and introduce themselves, they tell about how the item they picked represents them. Facilitator should model this first.

Story of a name

In *hevrutah*, you have one minute to tell a story about your name. The story could be about your first name, middle name, or last name. It could be about how you got your name, what your name means, how you feel about your name, or all of these. Tell your partner your story and listen to your partner's. After pairs have finished sharing stories, come back to the large group. Ask each participant to introduce her partner and tell something she learned about her partner's name. Then ask the partners if there is anything they would like to add or clarify about the story that the partner may not have said. (This could also be a name-learning activity.)

3. Opening Ritual (10 minutes)

Facilitator's Tip: This is just a brief introduction; you will return to this discussion with more information later.

SAY

"Each month we will begin our gathering by singing this blessing as we light a Rosh Hodesh candle. *Rosh Hodesh* means the beginning of the month and it is considered a Jewish holiday, though a minor one. The candle represents how in ancient times, Jews in the land of Israel lit a fire on the hilltops to announce Rosh Hodesh as soon as a sliver of moon had been spotted. When others saw the fire, they would light a fire on their hilltop, and thus the news of Rosh Hodesh spread to Jews living outside of the land of Israel. This was a very important practice because a set calendar did not exist at that time. Candle lighting on holidays and Shabbat has always been a central part of Jewish women's lives and it will also be central to this group."

Pass out copies for the "Prayer for the New Month" and go over the words and melody with the participants.

Facilitator's Tip: Depending on your musical comfort, you can choose to either read the prayer with the group members or teach them the melody. It may take a few gatherings before participants are familiar and comfortable with the ritual. Give it time.

Ask a volunteer to light the large Rosh Hodesh candle.

Facilitator's Tip: This is the first candle lighting ritual of this session; the second will occur in the "Closing Ritual" section.

4. Selfies (20–30 minutes)

Ask group members to take out the two pictures of themselves that you asked them to bring to this meeting. If there are group members who joined at the last minute and/or did not know to bring pictures, ask these individuals to take a minute or two to find two photos on their phone/tablet.

Ask participants to find a partner with whom to share one picture. Ask them to tell their partner about the picture and the context in which the picture was taken (was it taken at school, at home, with friends, etc.).

Facilitator's Tip: If you have an odd number of participants, make one group of three or participate yourself.

After five minutes, or when it is clear that all participants have shared their photos, ask group members to find a new partner with whom to share their second picture.

After everyone finishes sharing, use the following questions for discussion.

- What is one thing you learned about someone in the group from seeing the pictures?
- How much about who you are can be seen in your photographs? What might be hidden but still very important?

- Do you ever feel like you are presenting a fake or false self? How does that feel?
- People can also have more than one way to be themselves. Sometimes this is called “code switching.” It is a skill that people who belong to more than one culture and/or speak more than one language often have. For example, Jews of Moroccan descent who are fluent in Hebrew may greet friends one way at high school and another way in their homes surrounded by family. How does this relate to your experience?
- What “self” will you present/be in *Rosh Hodesh*?

Facilitator’s Tip: Allow time for responses and discussion.

SAY

“Most of us present ourselves a little differently in different settings. *Rosh Hodesh* is a place where you can come and feel comfortable being yourself. That is the most important thing about this group. Maybe you are not clear yet on what it means to ‘be yourself.’ That is okay. For most people, being a teenager is all about figuring out who you are. Here in *Rosh Hodesh*, you will get a lot of opportunities to experiment with who you are and to think about the question, ‘Who am I?’ At the end of the year we all hope to have a stronger idea of who each one of us is and how to support one another as we continue to figure it out. If you ever feel like something is getting in the way of you being yourself, come and talk to me about it.

“Let’s all put our phones away now. We will come back to the topic of using our phones in groups soon.”

5. Establishing Sacred Space: Group Guidelines (20 minutes)

Facilitator’s Tip: Establishing group guidelines is critical to the success of the group. Facilitating any group can be tough at times. Because this curriculum covers some sensitive material that you will be discussing in a casual environment, it is especially important to be in agreement with participants about how to create a respectful space within the group. It is crucial to allow these guidelines to come from participants with your direction and guidance; Group members are more likely to value the guidelines when they feel ownership. This is a great first exercise for you to practice facilitating rather than “teaching or telling.” Referring back to the agreed-upon guidelines has proven extremely helpful to many group leaders.

SAY

“Thousands of teenagers have experienced Rosh Hodesh as a lot of fun and a really safe and special place to be. It will be casual, unlike school or Hebrew school. We will cover a lot of ground, sometimes being silly and sometimes talking about sensitive or serious topics. Because of that, we will also work together to make it a “safe space,” a place where you feel comfortable and accepted as well as a “brave space,” meaning a space where you feel supported in speaking up and taking risks. To make sure that this group is the best it can be, and that everyone feels comfortable here, we are going to create a list of group guidelines together.”

Ask participants to brainstorm suggested guidelines for the group. Have one participant be the scribe, using a piece of large chart paper and a marker.

Facilitator's Tip: Encourage group members to be as specific as possible. For example, if someone suggests, "Be respectful," ask that person, "What do you mean by that?" The group member might elaborate, "One person speaks at a time," or, "Listen attentively to one another," and so forth. Encourage "fun" rules as well; for example, "Have food at each meeting." For a sample list of guidelines, see [Facilitator's Resource S1.2](#).

Once the group has come up with a sizeable list of guidelines, pass out the Jewish Teaching Cards on [Handout S1.1](#) to a few volunteers. Ask them to read the cards aloud. After each card is read, SAY:

"What guidelines might come out of this principle?"

Facilitator's Tip: Have group members add new guidelines to the list based on this teaching or check off guidelines that are already on the list that relate to this principle. If it does not come up, add a guideline related to confidentiality to the list (e.g., "What is said in Rosh Hodesh stays in Rosh Hodesh").

SAY

"You are encouraged to talk about the interesting things you learn and do in this group, but not private information shared in the group."

"There is one exception to this rule. I will share information with someone outside of the group if I have a reason to worry about the safety of someone in the group. Additionally, if something in the group is making you feel uncomfortable or if something is keeping you from fully participating, I encourage you to come talk to me about it."

Together with the group, create a cell phone policy. The policy could be "Everyone puts their cell phones in a basket as they enter *Rosh Hodesh*" or "Only use cell phones for emergencies or when they are called upon for one of the activities." Make sure whatever policy you create works for you as a facilitator and for the participants. Some group leaders report that they love engaging their participants in activities that involve smart phones and feel able to redirect participants who get distracted by text messages or social media, while other group leaders find that having cell phones out distracts from the participants' experience in the group.

Ask for a volunteer to create a poster of the group's guidelines. Ask them to use their computer or artistic skills to create a clear and attractive list that can be easily displayed at each meeting and brought back next month.

SAY

"These guidelines can be modified and new ones added at any time."

Facilitator's Tip: In order to promote the adding and changing of guidelines, ask the group member who is creating the poster to include space at the bottom for additional guidelines as well as space to the side of the list for editing existing guidelines. Other recommendations are to buy a frame that participants can decorate and then put the guidelines in the frame, or to write the guidelines on the Rosh Hodesh cloth. (This cloth is introduced in the next activity.)

6. Establishing Sacred Space: Rosh Hodesh Cloth (20 minutes)

Hand out craft supplies.

SAY

“The group guidelines we just created will help us provide a safe emotional space for the meetings; we will now work together to create a beautiful physical space. We are sitting around a fabric cloth. We will be decorating this fabric to create a Rosh Hodesh cloth—a cloth that we will gather around each month.”

Ask participants to write their names on the cloth in both English and Hebrew if possible.

Optional: Ask participants to write the Hebrew month in which they were born.

Facilitator’s Tip: They can determine this by using the tool found here: hebc.al.com/converter. Help group members write their Hebrew names on the cloth if you feel comfortable doing so.

ASK

- What are two or three things that you love, can’t imagine living without, or feel are very important to someone understanding your identity or getting to know who you are?
- Ask participants to depict one or two of these things in any way they’d like under or around their name on the *Rosh Hodesh*

Facilitator’s Tip: The group members will be adding words and designs to the Rosh Hodesh cloth as the months go on; encourage them to leave space on the cloth for future meetings.

There are different approaches that Rosh Hodesh groups have taken regarding the Rosh Hodesh cloth. Some group leaders have encouraged their group participants to put their heads together and decide on a large design or theme for their cloth, for instance, a tree or heart design, a night sky, the Hebrew months, or the four seasons. Members of these groups work together to contribute to the large, agreed-upon design. Picking a theme or large design for the cloth may contribute to the unified feeling of the group.

Other group leaders have decided not to have a theme or a large design for the cloth. Instead, they have encouraged participants to draw what they would each like on the cloth, and to add designs that relate to each meeting’s theme or content. This provides group members their own space to express themselves on the shared space of the cloth. Foregoing a large, shared design may contribute to feelings of individuality within a shared group atmosphere.

We recommend that you pick whichever approach feels best for you and your group. We also recommend that you suggest ways for group members to add to the cloth design throughout each gathering. Research has shown that when young people draw and doodle, they experience enhanced comprehension and creative thinking.

In groups of two to four, ask participants to share their drawings with one another. The group members can choose which details to share with the group and which to keep to themselves.

SAY

“What commonalities did you notice among the drawings in your group?”

Optional activity for groups not meeting for the first time:

Ask each participant to think of two to three different identities or experiences that describe them. For instance some identities chosen might be “ Violinist, Only Child, African American, Jew.”

Have them write each identity on a name tag and put the name tag somewhere on their bodies. Then have them walk around quietly and take a look at everyone else’s name tags, giving non-verbal affirmation after they read others’ identity tags. After about 30 seconds to a minute of walking around, have participants pair up with someone else near them and talk to that partner for a minute or two about the identities that they each chose. Encourage them to listen to their partners and let their partners talk rather than ask questions. Repeat the walking/non-verbal affirmation and pairing with a partner once more, with a new partner.

Facilitator’s Tip: You may choose to give participants the option to put the name tags on a sheet of paper that they hold in front of their bodies or that they paste against a wall and stand next to in case they feel uncomfortable with putting them directly on their bodies.

Put out markers, colored pencils, and other art materials. Have participants draw or create a selfie with art materials either on the Rosh Hodesh cloth or off that depicts one or two of the identities they wrote down. Then, have a few volunteers share the identity/identities they chose.

Facilitator’s Tip: Depending on time, you might choose to cut either the name tag piece or the selfie making piece and proceed to questions.

ASK

- *How do these identities affect you?*
- *In what contexts do you show or talk about the identities you chose? In what contexts do you hide or not talk about them? Why?*
- *What identities do you highlight on social media? What identities (if any) do you usually hide? Why?*

Affirm the identities that everyone shared by saying something like “Thank you all for sharing. Your identities shape how you experience the world! I encourage you to bring all of your identities to Rosh Hodesh each month and, as much as you feel comfortable over the course of the coming year, share with us your experience of what it is like to be you.”

7. What is Rosh Hodesh? (5 minutes)

SAY

“We started today with a little about *Rosh Hodesh* and we’re going to return there now. The key thing to know is that *Rosh Hodesh* is an ancient holiday for Jewish women reclaimed by modern women and girls, like us!”

Share, in your own words, some additional information about *Rosh Hodesh* in [Facilitator's Resource S1.1](#).

Give participants an overview of what the year will look like: how often you will meet, what topics you will cover (read through the curriculum prior to this session to familiarize yourself with topics). Introduce the concept of a host for every session and ask for volunteers to host the next session.

Facilitator's Tip: If a participant volunteers to host, make sure you or the participant checks in with parents before officially committing. Allow time for any questions in general about the group.

8. Closing (5–10 minutes)

Facilitator's Tip: Regarding candle lighting, some groups prefer to light one candle at the beginning of the gathering, while other groups prefer holding candles with foil bases at the end of the gathering and passing the candle flame around the circle (see below). We recommend deciding with your group which version of the candle lighting ritual you all prefer to do for the remainder of the year's gatherings after they have experienced both versions of the ritual.

SAY

"To link ourselves to the people in Jerusalem and surrounding communities who spread the news about *Rosh Hodesh* and the new moon by lighting fires on the hilltops, we will pass around a flame as if we were spreading the news of *Rosh Hodesh* from hilltop to hilltop."

Pass out candles with tin foil bases to each person and ask participants to stand in a circle.

Ask the host to light a candle and then silently light the candle of the person to the left.

Have this person also silently light the candle of the person to the left and so on, around the circle.

When all the candles have been lit, offer a wish or a hope for the group and blow out your candle; have the group members, one by one, do the same.

SAY the following prayer for the group:

"The fire of *Rosh Hodesh*, which has been kept alive for centuries, has now been passed to this group. Each month we will physically reignite it by lighting a candle at the beginning of our gathering. Our growing bonds together will also be part of keeping that fire going.

"We now welcome the month of *Tishrei*, when we begin the Jewish New Year. May the month of *Tishrei* be a month of blessings: blessings of goodness, blessings of joy, peace and kindness, friendship and love. May this month of *Tishrei*, when Jews all over the world begin a New Year, bring us closer to ourselves and to one another."

Facilitator's Tip: As your gatherings progress, you will often close with some personal sharing or blessings during this ritual. In the first one or two meetings, it may take some participants longer than others to feel comfortable opening up to the group. That's okay. Trust and confidence in the group will build organically

over time. Also, as you end the first session, take some notes on what you have learned that will inform your second session.