

BUILDING CommUNITY

*A Practical Guide for the
Nine Days...and Beyond*



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Educating. Engaging. Motivating. Inspiring.

About Areyvut

For more than two decades, Areyvut has educated, engaged, motivated and inspired people of all ages to put Jewish values into action. Through innovative programs, practical educational resources and commUNITY-building initiatives, Areyvut helps individuals, families, schools, camps, synagogues and organizations strengthen Jewish life and make a meaningful difference in their communities.

This resource is one example of our commitment to providing timely, relevant and practical materials that can be used immediately and throughout the year. We hope it sparks meaningful conversations, inspires positive action and helps strengthen relationships within your family, school, camp, synagogue and commUNITY.

If you find this resource meaningful and useful, we encourage you to explore our many other free educational resources and learn more about Areyvut's programs and initiatives by visiting www.areyvut.org.

Together, we can continue educating, engaging, motivating and inspiring others while building a kinder, stronger and more connected commUNITY.

Every year during the Three Weeks and the Nine Days, Jews throughout the world remember the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and reflect upon the events and behaviors that led to this profound national tragedy. Our Sages teach that the Second Beit HaMikdash was destroyed because of Sinat Chinam—baseless hatred. While we cannot change the past, we can and must learn from it and help shape a better future.

The Nine Days are not intended to be a period of sadness alone. They are an opportunity for introspection, growth and action. They challenge us to strengthen our relationships, deepen our commitment to one another and build the kind of commUNITY that reflects the very values upon which the Beit HaMikdash was built.

This resource was developed to help transform the Nine Days into meaningful opportunities for learning, discussion and positive action. Rather than focusing solely on what was lost, it encourages us to consider what each of us can do to strengthen our families, schools, camps, synagogues, workplaces and communities throughout the year.

Designed for rabbis, educators, camp professionals, parents, grandparents, lay leaders, students, families and individuals, this guide provides practical tools that can be incorporated into sermons, lectures, classrooms, camp programs, board meetings, family conversations and personal reflection. While created specifically for the Nine Days, we hope you will return to it throughout the year whenever you seek to educate, engage, motivate and inspire yourself and others.

Although this resource is rooted in Jewish tradition and was developed primarily for the Jewish commUNITY, many of the values it explores—including kindness, compassion, gratitude, respect, responsibility and service to others—are universal. We hope that people of all backgrounds who encounter this guide will find meaningful ideas, practical inspiration and opportunities to strengthen their families, organizations and communities. While our sources are distinctly Jewish, our aspiration to build a more caring, compassionate and connected world is one we proudly share with others.

Throughout this resource, you will notice that we intentionally write commUNITY to emphasize that strong communities are built one person, one relationship and one act of kindness at a time. Our hope is that this serves as a reminder that each of us has both the opportunity and the responsibility to help create the kind of community in which every person feels welcomed, valued and inspired.

Our tradition teaches that every act of kindness matters, every relationship matters and every person matters. May the conversations, reflections and actions contained in these pages inspire each of us to strengthen our communities and help build a brighter Jewish future.

How to Use This Resource

This resource is intentionally flexible and designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of audiences.

It may be used:

- One section each day during the Nine Days.
- As the basis for a sermon, class or Dvar Torah.
- During camp staff training or cabin discussions.
- In classrooms and youth group programs.
- At synagogue board and committee meetings.
- Around the Shabbat table.
- For personal reflection or chavruta learning.
- Throughout the year whenever meaningful conversations and practical action are needed.

Each section contains:

- Why It Matters – A brief introduction to the theme.
- Jewish Text for Reflection – A classic Jewish source to study and discuss.
- Additional Jewish Sources – Traditional sources for further learning.
- Conversation Starters – Questions to spark meaningful discussion.
- Reflection – Prompts for personal introspection.
- Build CommUNITY Challenge – Practical actions that translate Jewish values into everyday life.
- Ready to Use – A simple read, discuss and do format that can be incorporated immediately into a sermon, classroom, camp program, meeting or family discussion.

Whether you use one page or the entire resource, our hope is that these ideas will inspire meaningful conversations, strengthen relationships and motivate positive action long after the Nine Days have ended.

SECTION ONE: Why the Nine Days Still Matter

The Nine Days invite us to pause, reflect and remember. We mourn the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, but Judaism also challenges us to become builders—of stronger relationships, stronger communities and a stronger Jewish future.

Our Sages teach that the Second Beit HaMikdash was destroyed because of Sinat Chinam (baseless hatred). If that is true, then every act of kindness, every effort to bring people together and every opportunity to strengthen our commUNITY helps move us closer to the redemption for which we pray.

Rather than asking only what happened thousands of years ago, perhaps the more important question is: What can I do today to strengthen my family, my synagogue, my school, my camp and my commUNITY?

Jewish Text for Reflection

"The Second Temple, wherein people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot and acts of kindness—why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred (Sinat Chinam) among them. This teaches that baseless hatred is as severe as the three cardinal sins of idolatry, immorality and murder combined." —Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9b.

Additional Jewish Sources

- Psalms 34:15
- Pirkei Avot 1:12
- Leviticus 19:18
- Isaiah 56:7

Reflection

- When have you felt most connected to the Jewish people?
- Who helped create that feeling?
- How do your daily choices strengthen your commUNITY?
- What kind of Jewish commUNITY do you hope future generations inherit?

Conversation Starters

1. Why do we continue to observe the Nine Days nearly 2,000 years after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash?
2. What does the Beit HaMikdash represent today?
3. What makes a Jewish commUNITY strong?
4. What causes people to feel that they belong?
5. What weakens a commUNITY?
6. What strengthens it?
7. How can one person positively influence an entire commUNITY?
8. What responsibility do we have for Jews we have never met?
9. If you could improve one aspect of Jewish communal life, what would it be?
10. What does redemption look like in today's world?

Build CommUNITY Challenge

1. Introduce yourself to someone you have seen many times but never met.
2. Invite someone to join you for a meal, class or program.
3. Thank someone who quietly serves your commUNITY.
4. Reach out to someone you have not spoken with recently.
5. Learn the names of three people you regularly see.
6. Include someone who may otherwise feel left out.
7. Pray for someone outside your immediate family.
8. Perform one anonymous act of kindness.
9. Thank a volunteer.
10. Identify one way you can strengthen your commUNITY this week.

Ready to Use

Read: "The Second Temple, wherein people occupied themselves with Torah, mitzvot and acts of kindness—why was it destroyed? Because there was baseless hatred (Sinat Chinam) among them. This teaches that baseless hatred is as severe as the three cardinal sins of idolatry, immorality and murder combined." —Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9b

Discuss: If Sinat Chinam contributed to destruction, what qualities help build a stronger commUNITY? How can each of us help cultivate those qualities?

Do: Invite someone new to sit with you at shul, camp or another Jewish gathering this week.

Take It Further: Discuss one practical way your family, school, camp, synagogue or organization can become even more welcoming during the coming year.

SECTION TWO: Ahavat Yisrael: Building a Culture of Caring

Ahavat Yisrael is more than simply loving other Jews—it is recognizing that every Jew is created B'Tzelem Elokim (in the image of God) and deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and compassion. While we may differ in our backgrounds, opinions, experiences and levels of observance, we remain one people with a shared history, shared destiny and shared responsibility.

Ahavat Yisrael is demonstrated not only through grand gestures, but through everyday interactions. It is reflected in the way we greet people, welcome newcomers, offer encouragement, celebrate another person's success and reach out during difficult times. Every interaction presents an opportunity to strengthen relationships, foster belonging and build the kind of community in which every person feels seen, valued and appreciated.

Jewish Text for Reflection

"Hillel said: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them closer to Torah." —Pirkei Avot 1:12

Additional Jewish Sources

- Leviticus 19:18
- Shabbat 31a
- Sifra, Kedoshim
- Yevamot 79a
- Genesis 18:1-8

Reflection

- Who has made you feel welcomed and accepted?
- When was the last time you intentionally welcomed someone else?
- Is there someone with whom you should reconnect?
- How can you help another person feel that they truly belong?

Conversation Starters

1. What does Ahavat Yisrael look like in everyday life?
2. Can you genuinely care about someone with whom you strongly disagree? Why or why not?
3. What makes people feel welcomed into a Jewish community?
4. Think about a time someone made you feel included. What did they do?
5. What prevents people from feeling that they truly belong?
6. How can we demonstrate kindness without expecting anything in return?
7. Why is encouragement often remembered longer than criticism?
8. What responsibility do we have toward Jews we have never met?
9. How can our homes, schools, camps and synagogues become more welcoming?
10. What can each of us do to help another person feel seen, valued and appreciated?

Build Community Challenge

1. Welcome someone you do not know at synagogue, camp, school or another Jewish program.
2. Invite someone new to your Shabbat table.
3. Introduce two people who you think would enjoy getting to know one another.
4. Call someone simply to ask how they are doing.
5. Learn the names of three people you regularly see but have never formally met.
6. Thank someone who quietly strengthens your community.
7. Sit next to someone different at services, a class or an event.
8. Reach out to someone who may be feeling lonely or isolated.
9. Include someone who might otherwise be left out of a conversation or activity.
10. Perform one anonymous act of kindness.
11. Write a note, send a text or make a phone call encouraging someone who may need it.
12. Make a conscious effort today to greet every person warmly—with a smile, eye contact and genuine interest.

Ready to Use

Read: "Hillel said: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them closer to Torah." —Pirkei Avot 1:12

Discuss: Aaron is remembered not only as the Kohen Gadol (the High Priest), but as someone who actively pursued peace and brought people together. What does it mean to pursue peace rather than simply hope for it? How can we follow Aaron's example in our homes, schools, camps, synagogues and communities?

Do: Before today ends, introduce yourself to someone you do not know well, learn their name and make them feel genuinely welcomed.

Take It Further: Think of one person who helped shape your Jewish journey. Reach out to them this week to express your appreciation and consider how you can play that same role in someone else's life.

SECTION THREE: Dan L’Kaf Zechut: Giving Others the Benefit of the Doubt

Every person has a story, and we rarely know all the facts. Dan L’Kaf Zechut (giving others the benefit of the doubt) challenges us to judge others favorably, assume positive intentions and respond with patience, empathy and understanding rather than rushing to judgment.

Our first impressions are not always accurate. A delayed response, a harsh comment or an unexpected action may reflect circumstances we cannot see. Judaism encourages us to pause before drawing conclusions, seek understanding before criticism and extend the same compassion to others that we hope they would extend to us.

When we give others the benefit of the doubt, we strengthen relationships, reduce conflict and build families and communities rooted in trust, respect and compassion.

Jewish Text for Reflection

“Judge every person favorably.” —Pirkei Avot 1:6

Additional Jewish Sources

- Leviticus 19:18
- Shabbat 127b
- Pirkei Avot 2:4
- Proverbs 3:3
- Proverbs 19:11

Reflection

- Have you ever been grateful that someone gave you the benefit of the doubt?
- Is there someone you may have judged unfairly?
- How can you become more patient before reaching conclusions?
- What practical step can you take to become a more understanding person?

Conversation Starters

1. Why is it often easier to judge someone than to understand them?
2. Have you ever changed your opinion about someone after learning more about their situation?
3. Why do misunderstandings occur so frequently?
4. What does it mean to “give someone the benefit of the doubt”?
5. How can assumptions damage relationships?
6. Why is patience an important part of healthy communication?
7. When is it difficult to judge someone favorably?
8. How can giving others the benefit of the doubt strengthen a family or community?
9. What role does humility play in understanding others?
10. How can we teach children to avoid jumping to conclusions?

Build COMMUNITY Challenge

1. Before drawing a conclusion about someone’s behavior, think of at least one positive explanation.
2. Ask questions before making assumptions.
3. Give someone the opportunity to explain before responding.
4. Accept a sincere apology with grace.
5. Apologize to someone you judged unfairly.
6. Give someone a genuine second chance.
7. Look for three positive qualities in someone you find challenging.
8. Choose patience instead of frustration during an inconvenience.
9. Forgive a minor offense that you’ve been holding onto.
10. Tell someone what you appreciate about their character.
11. Pray for someone with whom you disagree.
12. Before going to sleep tonight, reflect on one situation where choosing understanding over judgment strengthened a relationship.

Ready to Use

Read: “Judge every person favorably.” —Pirkei Avot 1:6

Discuss: Why do you think the Mishnah tells us to judge every person favorably? Is this teaching about ignoring inappropriate behavior or is it about recognizing that we rarely know the complete story? How might our families, schools, camps, synagogues and communities be different if we consistently chose understanding before judgment?

Do: The next time someone disappoints, frustrates or surprises you, pause before reacting. Think of at least one possible explanation that reflects positively on that person’s intentions before responding.

Take It Further: This week, intentionally practice Dan L’Kaf Zechut. Keep a simple journal of one situation each day in which you choose understanding over assumption. At the end of the week, reflect on how this practice influenced your conversations, relationships and outlook.

SECTION FOUR: Words Build Worlds: Choosing Words That Heal, Encourage and Unite

Judaism teaches that words are among the most powerful tools we possess. With a few carefully chosen words we can inspire, comfort, encourage and strengthen another person. With careless or hurtful words we can damage relationships, discourage others and create lasting pain.

The Nine Days remind us that rebuilding the Jewish people begins with rebuilding the way we communicate. Every conversation presents an opportunity to create understanding, deepen relationships and strengthen our commUNITY. Before speaking, we should strive to ask ourselves not only, "Is it true?" "Is it kind?" "Is it necessary?" "Will these words strengthen this relationship?" Our words leave a lasting impression. May they always reflect the Torah values by which we strive to live.

Jewish Text for Reflection

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it shall eat its fruit." —Proverbs 18:21

Additional Jewish Sources

- Leviticus 19:16
- Proverbs 15:1
- Arachin 15b
- Chafetz Chaim, Introduction
- Proverbs 16:24

Reflection

- Do your words generally encourage or discourage others?
- Is there someone who deserves an apology?
- Is there someone who deserves sincere appreciation?
- How can you become a more thoughtful listener?

Conversation Starters

1. Why do words often leave a deeper impression than actions?
2. What qualities make someone a good listener?
3. Why is listening often more difficult than speaking?
4. Have you ever been deeply encouraged by something someone said to you?
5. What makes an apology sincere and meaningful?
6. Why does gossip spread so easily?
7. How can a few encouraging words change someone's entire day?
8. When is remaining silent the wisest response?
9. How can respectful communication strengthen families and communities?
10. What words do you hope people remember you for?

Build CommUNITY Challenge

1. Offer three sincere compliments today.
2. Refrain from speaking Lashon Hara or gossip throughout the day.
3. Thank someone whose efforts often go unnoticed.
4. Encourage someone who may be discouraged or struggling.
5. Pause before responding during a difficult conversation.
6. Allow others to finish speaking before offering your opinion.
7. Apologize if your words have hurt someone.
8. Speak positively about someone who is not present.
9. Send a handwritten note, text or email expressing your appreciation.
10. End every conversation today with words that encourage, uplift or inspire.

Ready to Use

Read: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it shall eat its fruit." —Proverbs 18:21

Discuss: Why do you think Judaism places such extraordinary emphasis on speech? Think about a compliment, conversation or piece of advice that positively influenced your life. Why has it remained with you? Conversely, why do hurtful words often linger for so long?

Do: Before speaking today, pause for a brief moment and ask yourself: Will these words strengthen this relationship? If the answer is yes, say them with sincerity. If not, consider whether they need to be said at all.

Take It Further: Choose one conversation this week that deserves your full attention. Put away your phone, eliminate distractions and intentionally listen more than you speak. Afterwards, reflect on how that changed the quality of the conversation and the relationship.

SECTION FIVE: Building CommUNITY: Every Person Matters

Healthy, vibrant communities do not develop by chance. They are built intentionally through relationships, shared responsibility and countless everyday interactions. Every smile, every welcome, every invitation, every expression of gratitude and every act of kindness help create an environment where people feel that they belong.

Building commUNITY is not reserved for rabbis, educators, professionals or organizational leaders. Every one of us has the ability—and the responsibility—to help shape the culture of the places where we live, work, learn and pray.

A stronger commUNITY begins when we stop asking, “What can my commUNITY do for me?” and begin asking, “What can I do for my commUNITY?” Each of us possesses unique talents, experiences and abilities that can enrich the lives of others. When everyone contributes, everyone benefits.

Jewish Text for Reflection

“In a place where there are no leaders, strive to be a leader.” —Pirkei Avot 2:5

Additional Jewish Sources

- Shevuot 39a – Kol Yisrael Arevim
- Leviticus 19:18 Zeh Bazei
- Isaiah 58:10-11
- Sukkah 49b
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Reflection

- Who made you feel that you belonged?
- Who has encouraged you to become more involved?
- Is there someone who may be waiting for an invitation or a warm welcome?
- How can you help create the kind of commUNITY that you would like others to experience?

Conversation Starters

1. What makes a commUNITY feel welcoming from the moment someone walks through the door?
2. Think about a place where you immediately felt that you belonged. What created that feeling?
3. What small gestures often have the greatest impact on another person?
4. What responsibilities do we have toward newcomers?
5. Why do some people become actively involved while others remain on the sidelines?
6. How can every individual become a leader regardless of their title or position?
7. What traditions help strengthen your family’s connection to the Jewish commUNITY?
8. How can gratitude help strengthen an organization or commUNITY?
9. What gifts, talents or experiences do you bring to your commUNITY?
10. If you could improve one aspect of your synagogue, school, camp or neighborhood, what would it be?

Build CommUNITY Challenge

1. Learn the name of someone you regularly see but have never formally met.
2. Welcome someone attending a program, service or event for the first time.
3. Introduce two people who would benefit from knowing one another.
4. Invite someone to join you for a meal, class, volunteer opportunity or program.
5. Thank a volunteer whose contributions often go unnoticed.
6. Reach out to someone who has not participated recently and let them know they have been missed.
7. Ask someone, “How can I help?”—and be prepared to follow through.
8. Volunteer your time or talents to strengthen a Jewish organization or commUNITY initiative.
9. Thank someone who has helped build your commUNITY.
10. Identify one practical way you can make your synagogue, school, camp, workplace or neighborhood more welcoming.

Ready to Use

Read: “In a place where there are no leaders, strive to be a leader.” —Pirkei Avot 2:5

Discuss: Leadership is often associated with titles or positions, yet Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) teaches otherwise. What does this Mishnah suggest about leadership? In what ways can every individual become a builder of commUNITY regardless of age, profession or experience?

Do: Identify one need in your synagogue, school, camp or commUNITY that is not currently being addressed. Rather than assuming someone else will take care of it, take one concrete step toward becoming part of the solution.

Take It Further: Think about someone who consistently strengthens your commUNITY—perhaps a volunteer, educator, custodian, administrator, board member or neighbor whose efforts often go unnoticed. Reach out this week to thank them personally. Your words of appreciation may encourage them far more than you realize.

SECTION SIX: Chesed in Action: Turning Jewish Values into Daily Living

Chesed is not simply something we do—it is part of who we are. From the very beginning of the Torah until its final verses, we are taught to care for others, recognize their needs and respond with compassion, generosity and sensitivity. While acts of chesed often benefit the recipient, they also shape the character of the person performing them and strengthen the community as a whole.

Some acts of chesed require significant time or resources, but many of the most meaningful require neither. A warm greeting, a thoughtful phone call, a visit, a handwritten note, an offer to help or simply being fully present for another person can leave a lasting impact.

Judaism encourages us not to wait for opportunities to perform chesed, but to actively seek them. When kindness becomes intentional rather than occasional, it transforms individuals, families and entire communities.

Jewish Text for Reflection

“The world stands upon three things: upon Torah, upon avodah and upon gemilut chasadim.” —Pirkei Avot 1:2

Additional Jewish Sources

- Sukkah 49b
- Micah 6:8
- Genesis 18:1-8
- Sotah 14a
- Bava Metzia 30b

Reflection

- Who has shown you extraordinary kindness?
- How did that kindness affect your life?
- Whose needs might you have overlooked recently?
- How can you become more intentional about performing acts of chesed?

Conversation Starters

1. What is the difference between kindness and chesed?
2. Which act of kindness has had the greatest impact on your life?
3. Why are small acts of chesed often remembered for many years?
4. Is it easier to perform chesed for strangers or for the people closest to us? Why?
5. How can we become more aware of the needs of others?
6. What sometimes prevents us from helping even when we know someone needs assistance?
7. How can families make chesed a natural part of everyday life?
8. How can schools, camps and synagogues create cultures where kindness becomes the expectation rather than the exception?
9. How do acts of chesed strengthen the person performing them?
10. What opportunity for chesed might be waiting for you?

Build Community Challenge

1. Visit someone who would appreciate company.
2. Call someone who may be feeling lonely.
3. Deliver a meal or treat to an individual or family.
4. Offer practical help before someone asks.
5. Write a heartfelt thank-you note.
6. Visit someone who is ill, homebound or grieving.
7. Offer transportation or assistance to someone who needs it.
8. Donate food, clothing, books or other needed items to a local organization.
9. Perform one anonymous act of kindness today.
10. Ask someone, “How can I help?”—and follow through.
11. Include someone who may otherwise feel left out.
12. Before going to sleep tonight, write down one act of chesed you performed and one additional act you hope to perform tomorrow.

Ready to Use

Read: “The world stands upon three things: Torah, avodah and gemilut chasadim.” —Pirkei Avot 1:2

Discuss: Why do you think our Sages taught that acts of chesed are one of the three pillars upon which the world stands? What would our families, schools, camps, synagogues and communities look like if every person intentionally performed one act of chesed each day?

Do: Don’t wait for someone to ask for help. Before today ends, identify one person who could benefit from your kindness and take the initiative to brighten their day through one thoughtful act of chesed.

Take It Further: Choose one act of chesed that you will commit to performing on a regular basis. Whether it is making a weekly phone call, visiting someone, volunteering, inviting guests for Shabbat, mentoring a young person or supporting a local organization, transform one-time kindness into an ongoing commitment. The greatest acts of chesed are often not extraordinary—they are the ordinary acts performed consistently with love, compassion and intention.

SECTION SEVEN: Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh: We Are Stronger Together

One of Judaism's most powerful teachings is Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh—all Jews are responsible for one another. This timeless principle reminds us that our lives are interconnected. We celebrate together, mourn together, pray for one another and respond when members of our commUNITY experience joy, loss, illness or challenge.

Responsibility extends beyond responding during times of crisis. It means noticing when someone is struggling before they ask for help, celebrating another person's accomplishments without jealousy, sharing another person's burden and recognizing that every member of our commUNITY has inherent value and deserves to feel supported.

When each of us accepts responsibility for someone else, our families become stronger, our institutions become healthier and our communities become more compassionate, resilient and united.

Jewish Text for Reflection

"Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh." "All Jews are responsible for one another." —Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a

Additional Jewish Sources

- Leviticus 19:16
- Deuteronomy 15:7-11
- Bava Batra 8b
- Taanit 11a
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Reflection

- Who has accepted responsibility for you during your lifetime?
- Whose burden can you help lighten this week?
- Are there needs around you that have gone unnoticed?
- How can you become someone others know they can depend upon?

Conversation Starters

1. What does it truly mean to be responsible for another person?
2. How is responsibility different from kindness?
3. When have you experienced a commUNITY coming together to support someone in need?
4. Why do some people naturally notice the needs of others while others do not?
5. What prevents people from offering help?
6. How can children learn responsibility for others at an early age?
7. What responsibilities do we have toward Jews living in other cities, states and countries?
8. How can synagogues, schools, camps and organizations create cultures where people instinctively help one another?
9. What does it mean to "share another person's burden"?
10. If every member of your commUNITY embraced this teaching, what would be different?

Build CommUNITY Challenge

1. Check in with someone who may be going through a difficult time.
2. Offer practical help before someone asks for it.
3. Pray for someone who is ill or facing a challenge.
4. Volunteer for a synagogue, school, camp or local organization.
5. Support a family experiencing illness, loss or another significant life challenge.
6. Visit someone who may appreciate company.
7. Ask someone, "What do you need?"—and genuinely listen to the answer.
8. Thank someone who consistently helps others without seeking recognition.
9. Identify one unmet need within your commUNITY and consider how you might help address it.
10. Commit to one ongoing act of responsibility that will continue well beyond the Nine Days.
11. Offer to mentor, guide or encourage someone younger than you.
12. Become more intentional about noticing those who are often overlooked.

Ready to Use

Read: "Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Bazeh." "All Jews are responsible for one another." —Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a

Discuss: This teaching is often quoted, but what does it actually require of us? Does responsibility begin only when someone asks for help, or does it challenge us to notice needs, take initiative and become active partners in strengthening our commUNITY? How would our families, schools, camps, synagogues and organizations look if everyone embraced this responsibility?

Do: Identify one person who could benefit from your support this week. Rather than waiting to be asked, reach out first. A phone call, visit, offer of assistance, invitation or simple expression of encouragement may have a greater impact than you realize.

Take It Further: Create a personal "Responsibility List." Write down the names of five people for whom you feel a special sense of responsibility—a family member, friend, neighbor, student, colleague or someone in your commUNITY. Over the coming month, intentionally check in with each of them, offer encouragement, celebrate their successes and support them through their challenges. Small, consistent acts of caring strengthen relationships and help build the kind of commUNITY our tradition envisions.

SECTION EIGHT: Hope and Redemption: Building the Jewish Future Together

Although the Nine Days culminate with Tisha B'Av, Judaism does not end with destruction. Our story is one of resilience, renewal and hope. Even during our most difficult moments, we have never lost faith in the promise of redemption or our ability to help shape a brighter future.

Hope is not passive optimism. It is the belief that our actions matter. Every mitzvah we perform, every act of chesed, every effort to strengthen a relationship, every sincere prayer and every commitment to build commUNITY brings us one step closer to the world we hope to create.

The Nine Days remind us not only to remember what was lost, but to become builders of what can still be achieved. Every one of us has the opportunity to contribute to a stronger Jewish future.

Jewish Text for Reflection

"Thus said the Lord of Hosts: The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall become occasions of joy and gladness and happy festivals for the House of Israel; therefore love truth and peace." —Zechariah 8:19

Additional Jewish Sources

- Isaiah 2:2-4
- Makkot 24b
- Psalms 27:14
- Sanhedrin 97a
- Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11-12

Reflection

- What gives you hope during difficult times?
- Who has inspired you through their resilience, faith or optimism?
- How can you become a source of hope and encouragement for others?
- What legacy do you hope to leave for future generations?

Conversation Starters

1. Why has hope remained such a defining characteristic of the Jewish people throughout history?
2. What gives you hope about the future of the Jewish people?
3. Why is redemption such a central theme in Judaism?
4. How can small acts of kindness contribute to building a better future?
5. What role does optimism play in Jewish leadership?
6. Why do you think Rabbi Akiva responded differently than his colleagues after witnessing the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash?
7. How can we inspire hope during times of uncertainty?
8. What kind of Jewish world do you hope future generations will inherit?
9. What responsibility do we have to leave the Jewish world stronger than we found it?
10. If you could strengthen one aspect of Jewish life, what would it be?

Build CommUNITY Challenge

1. Encourage someone who is facing a personal challenge.
2. Share an inspiring Jewish story with a friend or family member.
3. Thank someone whose leadership has strengthened your commUNITY.
4. Learn about a Jewish leader whose perseverance inspires you.
5. Reach out to someone who may need encouragement or hope.
6. Perform a mitzvah today with extra intention and enthusiasm.
7. Support an organization that is strengthening Jewish life.
8. Tell a child, grandchild or student why you are optimistic about the future of the Jewish people.
9. Include a heartfelt prayer for peace, unity and the rebuilding of Jerusalem in your daily tefillot (prayers).
10. Make one commitment today that will strengthen the Jewish people long after the Nine Days have ended.
11. Share one positive story about the Jewish people with someone else this week.
12. Think about one way you can help build the Jewish future and take the first step today.

Ready to Use

Read: Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues saw foxes emerging from the site of the destroyed Beit HaMikdash. While the others wept, Rabbi Akiva laughed, explaining that just as the prophecies of destruction had been fulfilled, so too would the prophecies of redemption. —Makkot 24b

Discuss: Rabbi Akiva looked at the very same scene as everyone else, yet he saw hope where others saw only devastation. What enabled him to respond that way? How can we cultivate that same sense of optimism, resilience and faith while facing today's challenges?

Do: Identify one action you can take this week that will strengthen your family, your synagogue, your school, your camp or your CommUNITY. Hope grows when it is accompanied by action.

Take It Further: Write a letter to yourself, your child or grandchild describing the kind of Jewish commUNITY you hope they will experience twenty years from now. Include one or two specific commitments you are making today to help make that vision a reality. Return to that letter next year during the Nine Days and reflect on the progress you have made.

SECTION NINE: From Mourning to Meaning: Becoming Builders of CommUNITY

The purpose of the Nine Days is not simply to remember what was destroyed. It is to inspire us to build what is still possible. While we cannot change the events of the past, we help shape the future through the choices we make each day. Every act of kindness, every welcoming smile, every word of encouragement, every sincere apology, every meaningful conversation and every mitzvah performed with intention strengthens our families, our communities and the Jewish people.

None of us can solve every challenge facing the Jewish world. Yet Judaism never asks us to do everything. It asks us to do something. Imagine the impact if every person committed to one additional act of kindness, one additional act of gratitude, one additional act of inclusion and one additional mitzvah each day. Individually, those actions may appear small. Collectively, they have the power to transform our homes, our schools, our camps, our synagogues and our communities. The work of rebuilding begins with each of us.

Jewish Text for Reflection

"It is not your responsibility to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." —Pirkei Avot 2:16

Additional Jewish Sources

- Zechariah 8:16-17
- Isaiah 1:17
- Psalms 133:1
- Yoma 9b
- Avot D'Rabbi Natan 12

Reflection

- Which section of this resource was most meaningful to you?
- Which conversation do you hope continues beyond the Nine Days?
- What relationship would you like to strengthen?
- What commitment are you prepared to begin today?

Conversation Starters

1. Which idea from this resource challenged or inspired you the most?
2. Which Jewish value do you most want to strengthen during the coming year?
3. What kind of Jewish community do you hope future generations will inherit?
4. How can one person's actions positively influence an entire family or community?
5. Which Build Community Challenge are you most likely to continue?
6. What responsibility do you have that you may not have fully appreciated before?
7. How can kindness become part of your daily routine rather than an occasional act?
8. What is one change you hope to make in your own life because of the Nine Days?
9. What role can your family play in strengthening the Jewish people?
10. If every Jew committed to one additional mitzvah or act of chesed each day, what impact might that have?

Build Community Challenge

1. Choose one act of chesed that you will perform every week.
2. Reconnect with someone from whom you have grown apart.
3. Begin a new family tradition centered on kindness, gratitude or Jewish learning.
4. Volunteer regularly for an organization whose mission you believe in.
5. Invite someone new to your Shabbat table in the coming month.
6. Thank someone who has significantly influenced your life.
7. Learn Torah regularly with a friend, family member or chavruta.
8. Identify one way to make your synagogue, school, camp, workplace or neighborhood more welcoming.
9. Share this resource with someone else and encourage them to use it.
10. Write down one commitment that you will begin today—and review it one month from now.
11. Become more intentional about noticing opportunities to perform chesed each day.
12. Continue building community after the Nine Days have ended.

Ready to Use

Read: "It is not your responsibility to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." (Pirkei Avot 2:16)

Discuss: This Mishnah reminds us that we are not expected to solve every problem facing the Jewish people. At the same time, we are not permitted to stand on the sidelines. What responsibility does each of us have to help build a stronger Jewish future? What can you do that no one else can?

Do: Choose one commitment from this resource and begin today. Invite a family member, friend or colleague to join you. Positive change grows when people work together.

Take It Further: Create your own Build Community Plan for the coming year.

Choose:

- One relationship you will strengthen.
- One new act of chesed you will perform regularly.
- One organization you will support with your time, talents or resources.
- One Jewish value you will intentionally model for others.
- One way you will help make your family, synagogue, school, camp or COMMUNITY more welcoming.

Review your commitments before Rosh Hashanah, again before Pesach and once more during next year's Nine Days.

May this resource serve not as the end of a conversation, but as the beginning of a lifelong commitment to educating, engaging, motivating and inspiring ourselves and others to build stronger relationships, stronger communities and a stronger Jewish future.

The Work Begins Now

Over the past nine sections, we have reflected on timeless Jewish values, explored meaningful conversations and considered practical ways to strengthen ourselves, our relationships and our communities. The question now is not what we have learned—but what we will do.

The Nine Days remind us that the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash was not simply the result of one event. It reflected a gradual breakdown in the way people treated one another. If that is true, then the rebuilding of the Jewish people will likewise occur one conversation, one relationship and one act of kindness at a time.

None of us can solve every challenge facing the Jewish people. We cannot personally eliminate hatred, loneliness, poverty, illness or division. Judaism, however, does not ask us to do everything. It asks each of us to do something. Every welcoming smile matters.

Every act of chesed matters.

Every thoughtful conversation matters.

Every expression of gratitude matters.

Every apology matters.

Every mitzvah matters.

Every person matters.

Whether you are a rabbi preparing a sermon, an educator, a camp counselor leading a discussion, a parent around the dinner table, a grandparent sharing wisdom, a lay leader strengthening an organization or an individual seeking to make a difference, you have the ability to positively influence those around you.

Our hope is that this resource will not remain on a bookshelf or computer. Use it. Discuss it. Share it. Adapt it. Return to it throughout the year whenever you want to educate, engage, motivate and inspire meaningful conversations and positive action.

The Jewish future will not be built solely by organizations or institutions. It will be built by individuals who choose to care a little more, listen a little better, welcome a little warmer, forgive a little sooner and act with greater kindness, compassion and responsibility.

May these Nine Days inspire each of us to become builders—of stronger relationships, stronger families, stronger schools, stronger camps, stronger synagogues and stronger Communities.

And through those efforts, may we merit to witness the fulfillment of the prophet Zechariah's vision that these days of mourning will one day become "days of joy and gladness."

The work begins now.

Build CommUNITY Today

Small actions, performed consistently, have the power to strengthen individuals, families and communities. Challenge yourself to complete as many of these as possible—not only during the Nine Days, but throughout the year.

Today I Will...

- ☐ Welcome someone I do not know.
- ☐ Learn the name of someone I regularly see but have never formally met.
- ☐ Invite someone to join me for a meal, class, service or program.
- ☐ Call or visit someone who may be lonely.
- ☐ Reach out to someone with whom I have lost touch.
- ☐ Thank a volunteer or someone whose efforts often go unnoticed.
- ☐ Introduce two people who would benefit from knowing one another.
- ☐ Offer words of encouragement to someone who may need them.
- ☐ Write a thank-you note, email or text expressing my appreciation.
- ☐ Refrain from speaking Lashon Hara or gossip.
- ☐ Give someone the benefit of the doubt before judging their actions.
- ☐ Listen carefully without interrupting.
- ☐ Apologize to someone if I have hurt them.
- ☐ Forgive someone for a minor offense.
- ☐ Perform one anonymous act of chesed.
- ☐ Pray for someone outside my immediate family.
- ☐ Support a synagogue, school, camp or Jewish organization with my time, talents or resources.
- ☐ Welcome someone who may otherwise feel left out.
- ☐ Learn Torah with another person.
- ☐ Share a meaningful Jewish teaching or story.
- ☐ Smile and greet people warmly throughout the day.
- ☐ Thank my parents, spouse, child, teacher, mentor or friend.
- ☐ Look for an opportunity to help before being asked.
- ☐ Identify one need in my commUNITY and take a step toward addressing it.
- ☐ Perform one mitzvah with extra care and intention.
- ☐ Share this resource with someone else.
- ☐ Commit to one new practice that will strengthen my family or CommUNITY throughout the coming year.

Reflection

As you look over this checklist, ask yourself:

- Which actions came naturally?
- Which challenged me the most?
- Which should become part of my daily or weekly routine?
- Which one action will have the greatest impact on my family, my commUNITY and the Jewish people?

Remember, rebuilding the Jewish future does not happen all at once. It happens one conversation, one relationship, one mitzvah and one act of kindness at a time. Build CommUNITY today—and every day.

Continue Building CommUNITY with Areyvut

If you found this resource meaningful and useful, we invite you to continue the journey with Areyvut. Explore our many free educational resources, participate in our programs, volunteer opportunities and other initiatives and discover practical ways to bring Jewish values to life throughout the year.

If our work has inspired you, please consider partnering with us. Your tax-deductible support enables Areyvut to develop timely educational resources, create meaningful volunteer experiences and educate, engage, motivate and inspire people of all ages to strengthen the Jewish community and beyond.

To learn more, access additional free resources or make a contribution, please visit www.areyvut.org, email info@areyvut.org or call 201-244-6702. For donations through a donor-advised fund, our EIN is 37-1463393. To donate appreciated securities, please contact us for instructions.

Together, we can continue building a stronger, more caring and more connected commUNITY.

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May this resource inspire meaningful conversations, thoughtful reflection and acts of kindness, connection and unity during the Nine Days and throughout the year. Thank you for partnering with Areyvut as we work together to build a stronger, more caring and more connected commUNITY.