

# GUIDE TO PLANNING A YOM HAZIKARON CEREMONY FOR SYNAGOGUES/ COMMUNITIES

## **Purpose of the ceremony**

Yom HaZikaron, Israel's Memorial Day, honours the memory of fallen soldiers and victims of terror. The ceremony should strike a delicate balance between mourning and unity, memory and resilience. It must be respectful, emotionally engaging, and relevant for both older and younger generations.

# Ceremony flow and key components



## 1. Opening Segment (10 min)

- Ceremony Introduction (by a host)
  - Briefly explain the purpose of the evening.
  - Share a few key facts or current statistics to anchor the audience in the present reality.
  - Set the emotional tone—quiet, reverent, and unified.
- Preparation for Moment of Silence:
  - Invite everyone to rise.
  - Frame the moment with a few words about national remembrance.
- Musical Interlude & Silence ( 1 min) – can lower the ISRAELI FLAG if available.
  - Last Post
  - 1-Minute Silence.
  - Reveille (symbolizing continuation and legacy).

## 2. Prayer and Reflection (3–5 min)

- Yizkor / El Male Rachamim:
  - A cantor or spiritual leader recites this memorial prayer.
- Emotional Video (2–3 min):
  - A pre-recorded video that includes testimonies, visuals of the fallen, or footage from recent conflicts.

## 3. Musical Segment (approx. 10 min total)

Choose from the following meaningful songs, ideally performed live by a choir or soloists. Including children adds emotional resonance.

- Acheinu – expressing solidarity with our brothers in distress.
- Mi Sheberach for the IDF – a prayer for the safety of soldiers.
- Avinu Shebashamayim – prayer for the State of Israel.
- Eli Eli – a haunting melody evoking longing and hope.
- Oseh Shalom – a call for peace and healing.

Perform songs throughout the ceremony to break up spoken segments and provide emotional punctuation.

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## 4. Featured Speaker – Personal Testimony (8–10 min)

Invite a guest speaker to share a first-hand story related to Yom HaZikaron. This could be:

- A bereaved family member.
- A wounded veteran.
- A survivor of a terror attack.
- Someone who made aliyah and served in the IDF. Their story should connect personal pain to national memory and resilience.

## 5. Poetry and Readings (5–7 min)

Select well-known Hebrew poems that have become part of the Yom HaZikaron tradition.

These should be recited by youth or respected community members.

Recommended Poems:

- The Silver Platter by Natan Alterman
- ("HaMagash HaKesef") – iconic text linking sacrifice to the founding of Israel.
- Here Lie Our Bodies by Haim Gouri
- ("Kan Gufotenu Sham") – powerful reflection on comradeship in war.
- I Wanted to Write You the Softness of the Rain by Eli Mohar
- ("Ratziti Likto'v Lach Et Rakhut HaGeshem") – poetic juxtaposition of everyday life and national pain.
- Letters from the Front – compiled letters or excerpts from soldiers or victims.

## 6. Candle Lighting Ceremony (10 min)

Introduce the segment with a short explanation of its symbolic meaning.

Suggested 8 Candles (to be lit by different individuals):

- All fallen soldiers and defenders of Israel.
- The War of Independence (1948).
- The Sinai War (1956) and Six-Day War (1967).
- The Yom Kippur War (1973).
- The Lebanon Wars (1982 and 2006).
- Gaza operations: Cast Lead (2009), Pillar of Defence (2012), Protective Edge (2014).
- Victims of terror in Israel and abroad.
- Victims of the October 7, 2023 attacks and hostages still in captivity.

Each candle can be accompanied by a brief reading or reflection.

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## 7. Closing Section (7–10 min)

- Spiritual Message (3–5 min):
  - Delivered by a rabbi or community leader.
  - Should focus on memory, resilience, the Jewish people's strength, and hope for peace.
- Hatikva:
  - The national anthem of Israel.
  - Ask everyone to stand and sing together, creating a shared, uplifting conclusion.

## Practical Tips

- Timing: Keep the total ceremony to around 60–75 minutes.
- Diversity of Participation: Include children, teens, adults, and elderly to reflect the whole community.
- Tone and Atmosphere: Lighting, sound, and pacing should support a mood of reverence.
- Rehearsals: Ensure all participants understand their roles and have rehearsed.

## Optional Enhancements

- Memorial Table or Wall: With names, photos, candles, or symbolic items.
- Program Booklet: Include order of ceremony, translations, song lyrics, and brief bios of participants.
- Community Involvement: Invite people to submit stories or names of loved ones in advance.