



# Rituals for Marking a Year

UNITED HEBREW CONGREGATION RECOGNIZES ONE YEAR OF COVID-19

## “525,600 minutes, how do you measure, measure a year?”

March 13, 2020 marks the last Shabbat service held in-person in our building. March 18, 2020 is the day that our schools and buildings closed and our lives were drastically changed by COVID -19. Time and our need for our community and rituals hasn't stopped even though our usual ways of marking holy moments have been interrupted. This year, we found new ways to gather, even in the absence of physical presence, and continued to mark the important life cycle rituals of birth, B'nai Mitzvah, weddings, deaths, and yahrzeits. How do you measure a year? By living the Jewish calendar, we measured our year by completing the full cycle of holidays and Jewish rituals, celebrating the festivals, and lighting candles (or baking challah) each week to welcome Shabbat.

Ecclesiastes teaches: *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.*

As we approach the milestone of this unique and challenging year, we recognize the deep loss and grief, innovation and resilience, joy, blessing, and hopefulness that this year has brought to us.

To mark this moment, we invite you to explore and engage in any of the rituals and blessings that speak to you during the anniversary week of the beginning of this pandemic.



## ACCIDENTAL MONKS

a Pandemic Poem by Alicia Jo Rabens

Sometimes I am glad to retreat from the world  
Sometimes I can't bear my longing for it  
Sometimes I am certain I've grown wiser  
Sometimes I know I know less than ever  
Sometimes I think I could do this forever  
Sometimes I think I can't last another minute  
Sometimes I wonder which is real  
This life or the one I had before?  
I live with other accidental monks  
We study the holy books of love & distance:  
Some days, love across distances  
Some days, the distances inside love  
We never meant to be monks, my love  
But here we are Not the first to find ourselves  
Inside a sudden solitude  
Walking these stone corridors  
Navigating this open sea  
Praying to learn the simplest  
And most difficult lesson  
How to move through the days  
With grace

## Sheltering in Place

May it be Your will,  
G-d of our fathers and mothers,  
That our sheltering in place  
Be for health and healing,  
Longevity and life,  
Sustenance, renewal and love.  
Let our best selves shine forth  
In these moments of uncertainty,  
These moments of unfamiliar distances,  
These moments that may yield stress or conflict,  
Confusion or despair.  
Let peace arise inside us.  
Let kindness flow between us.  
Let deliverance rise up from heaven,  
And let health and goodwill radiate throughout the world  
As a river of blessings.

© 2020 Alden Solovy and tobendlight.com.



### RITUAL #1: Shehecheyanu blessing: We are grateful to be here at this time!

Shehecheyanu is a blessing of gratitude, encouraging and allowing us to offer our thanks to God for new and unusual experiences, for which this past year, truly was. Find a meaningful moment to say Shehecheyanu around this anniversary of the pandemic. Perhaps reflect on the following with friends and family:

- What has it meant to celebrate the full cycle of holidays during the pandemic?
- What have you learned this year?
- How have you changed?
- For what are you grateful?
- What is a blessing you've experienced this year?

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׁהַחַיְנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, she'he'cheyanu v'ki'y'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.*

Praised are You, O God, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this day.

### RITUAL #2: Rock Garden

Spring is in the air, COVID rates are down, vaccination rates are rising, and many of us are feeling hopeful. And yet, we are experiencing a myriad of feelings about this past year and the unknown that still lies ahead. How can we share and express our feelings with one another? A Rock Garden! We invite you to share your feelings of hope, grief, gratitude, whatever you are feeling, by decorating a rock or rocks to place in our community garden.

1. Find a rock (any size/shape that you can pick up!)
2. Paint or decorate it with acrylic paint or sharpies. You can paint a message or a picture, dedicate your rock to the memory of someone you lost this year, or write or draw a message of hope—anything that speaks to you.
3. Bring it to UH and leave it in the bin near the sanctuary doors on Friday, March 19 at 10:00 a.m. or anytime after.  
We will shellack it and add the waterproofed rocks to the UH Rock Garden, a new, permanent fixture in our Messing Garden.

This is a living, growing garden - please continue to add to it, anytime you need to express your feelings, or just come and visit the garden, to experience and find some inspiration and uplift from the rocks.

### RITUAL #3: Light a Yahrzeit candle to remember a loved one or to recognize the grief we've held in this year.

The Talmud teaches us that “just as one says a blessing on the good, so too [we] bless on the bad” (Berachot 48b).

The blessing we utter when we hear of a death is “*Baruch Dayan HaEmet* – Blessed is the True Judge.”

This year many of us have lost loved ones and we haven't been able to grieve in the ways we are used to: with family, in shiva minyanim, with hugs, or by sharing food. There have been so many other losses as well. While we are aware of them, it can be validating to recognize them on this anniversary and also acknowledge our strength and resilience for living with these losses for 365 days and counting.

Take a moment to remember this unprecedented year.

What or Who have I lost? What have I missed?

As you light your candle:

*For all the ups and the downs, the highs and lows, the joy and tears, I light this candle of remembrance. I remember the year that has been, I grieve the many losses I have experienced, and I move forward with strength, resilience, and hope, not forgetting this year, but not letting the grief and loss overwhelm me.*

כִּי עִמָּךְ מְקוֹר חַיִּים, בְּאוֹרְךָ נִרְאָה אוֹר

*Ki imcha mekor chayim, borcha nireh or*

For with You is the source of life, in Your light we see light



#### **RITUAL #4: Say Mi Sheberach**

We've reached a milestone of living a year with COVID but the virus hasn't disappeared. There are still many who will get sick, even with the vaccine. There are many who will continue to experience physical after effects of the virus that plagued their bodies, and there are many of us whose hearts and minds still hold onto fear and worry. For all of this, we offer words of healing.

Dear God,

We ask that You be there for us,  
as you were for our ancestors,  
a pillar in our midst.

Help us to turn to You, O God,  
for guidance during these troubled times.  
Give us strength for the weeks ahead.

Help us to reach out in love and compassion to one another,  
to support those who are ill or recovering from an illness.

Be with our doctors and caregivers,  
our nurses and scientists,  
as they care for those who are ill.

Stay with all who are ill and their families,  
offering them Your compassion.  
And, we pray, Your healing.

Remember us O God.

Help us to find the inner strength  
to be patient when our nerves are tested.

You are our Still Waters  
when we are surrounded by fear  
and anxiety.

Our Rock, to Whom we can turn  
abate our worry and fears.

Dear God our Shelter,  
our Guide, our inspiration,

Keep us safe today and every day.

Written by Rabbi Leah Doberne-Schor

#### **RITUAL #5: Blessing Upon Receiving the COVID Vaccine**

What better way to mark your receiving a life saving vaccine than to offer a prayer. Here is one among many that we have found. Please visit our website for a collection of many more blessing written for this time.

May it be Your will, Heavenly Healer, that this endeavor be for healing and may You grant healing to me, to my loved ones, to my nation, and to all who are in need. Fill me with a sense of gratitude for all who create, distribute, and deliver this vaccine, and for all those who work for the health of individuals and our communities. Empower me to care in good health ever more deeply for others. Blessed are You, Holy One, Healer of all flesh, sustaining our bodies in wondrous ways.

*Rabbi Aaron Starr, based on Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 60a and the Morning Blessings*

#### **RITUAL #6: Be God's Hands in this World**

Sometimes the best way to mark time is to give. Tzedakah allows us to give in a way that helps to make things better. Whether it be in support of a favorite Jewish communal organization that helps in a wide variety of ways, like UH or the Jewish Federation or support of an organization with a very specific mission like the Harvey Kornblum Jewish Food Pantry, Leket, or Magen David Adom. Giving tzedakah is a great way to share one's gratitude and blessings with the world.

#### **RITUAL #7: Communal Shabbat Candle-Lighting**

Light the Shabbat candles with us on Zoom, Friday, March 19, 2021 at 6:00 p.m., the Shabbat anniversary of the pandemic. We will be broadcasting from the new UH Rock Garden in the Messing Garden as we hold space for ourselves and our community and mark a unique and complicated year. Register for the Zoom link [here](#).