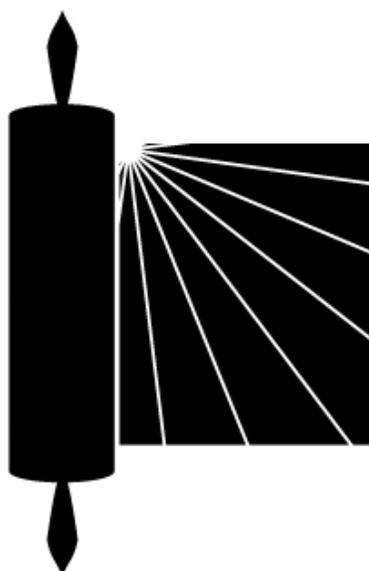


**Hillel's Joseph Meyerhoff Center for
Jewish Learning**

Rosh Chodesh Groups Guidebook



**HILLEL'S JOSEPH MEYERHOFF
CENTER FOR JEWISH LEARNING**

How to Use the Rosh Chodesh Groups Guide

Introduction

Rosh Chodesh, the celebration of the beginning of each month in the Jewish calendar, has always existed as a women's holiday. In the past 30 years, women's connection to Rosh Chodesh has been intensified with the formation of Rosh Chodesh groups across the world. Each Rosh Chodesh group is unique and should reflect the interests, personalities and passions of the women involved. There is no one way to celebrate Rosh Chodesh and there are no rules for establishing a Rosh Chodesh group. At the core, it should be comprised of women who gather on a monthly basis to celebrate the new month and their lives as Jewish women. The following resource guide is intended to help facilitate the formation and monthly meetings of Rosh Chodesh groups on campus. The activities and rituals in this guide are simply suggestions. Each group should decide for itself how its monthly meetings will be conducted. Especially on a college campus, where there is constant turnover in population and changing concerns of the student body, regular assessment of the goals of the Rosh Chodesh group is crucial for the group's success.

For an excellent discussion on how to develop a successful Rosh Chodesh group, see the article "Starting and Growing a Rosh Chodesh Group" by Ruth Berger Goldston and Merle Feld which is available at <http://www.ritualwell.org/Rituals/ritual.html?docid=915>

General Structure of Monthly Meetings

While there are no set rules for conducting a Rosh Chodesh group, it is strongly recommended that each month's meeting follow a similar basic structure. This helps to provide continuity from month to month and helps to make the Rosh Chodesh group "sacred space." The suggested structure is to begin with an opening ritual. The ritual should set the context for the group's meaning. It should be meaningful to those women who participate every month, but also welcoming to new participants. Once the opening ritual is complete, a brief explanation of the month being celebrated should be given. The explanation may include mention of Jewish holidays that occur during the month, as well as famous Jewish women associated with the month. Next, the group should do some sort of activity. Activities of the group should vary from month to month and may include a text study, a crafts project, and/or a conversation. The activity may relate directly to the month being celebrated or may address a general topic or theme of interest to the group. The meeting should end with a closing ritual.

Suggested Structure for Rosh Chodesh Group Meeting

- I. **Opening Ritual** – Should be meaningful to regular participants and welcoming to new ones.
- II. **Brief Explanation of the Month** – May include Jewish holidays that occur during the month, famous Jewish women associated with the month, or themes of the month.

- III. **Activity** – Should vary from month to month and may include a text study, a crafts project, conversation, etc.
- IV. **Closing Ritual** – A chance to reflect on the meeting and share wishes and blessings for the upcoming month.

Using the Guide: Opening Ritual

The opening ritual is designed to be meaningful to regular participants while being welcoming to new participants. It begins with a brief explanation of Rosh Chodesh and its significance to women. This helps to orient new participants while setting the context of the meeting as “sacred space.” Groups may want to experiment with how the opening ritual is presented. Some groups may have each person read a paragraph. Others may choose a different leader each month, and some may have the same woman lead the opening ritual at every meeting.

Announcing the New Moon

This section requires a bit of preparation to find out exactly when the new moon appears. To get the exact time, consult a Jewish calendar or visit <http://www.ezrastorah.org/calendar.html> You may want to familiarize yourself with the Sanctification of the New Moon ritual found in the Shabbat Morning services of most *siddurim*.

Lighting a Candle

The lighting of the candle is intended to recall the ancient practice of announcing Rosh Chodesh by lighting bonfires on mountaintops across the Land of Israel. As such, there is no formal blessing associated with lighting the candle. The group may want to create a formal ritual associated with lighting the candle, such as selecting a text to read. The group may also want to experiment with the types of candles it uses (i.e., scented, braided, different colors, etc.).

Introductions

This is a crucial part of the gathering for making everyone feel welcome and comfortable in the group. It is important that all the participants take it seriously and are open with each other. The format for introductions is:

Participant: “I am X bat (the daughter of) X .”

Group: “Shalom Aleichen X !”

Participant: “Aleichen Shalom! My Jerusalem was...”

One possible variation on this format is to have each woman mention her female heroes or role models in addition to or instead of her mother.

You may want to look at the *Kidush Levana* or “Sanctification of the Moon” prayer found in traditional *siddurim* to familiarize yourself with this section.

Using the Guide: Introducing the Month

Once the introductions are complete, someone should give a brief introduction to the month being celebrated. The month profile sheets in the Resource Guide will be helpful in preparing the introduction. The introduction may include an explanation of the Month's Zodiac, an overview of Jewish holidays and/or significant events that occur during the month, a profile of women associated with the month, etc. This introduction should highlight aspects of the month on which the group's activity will **not** focus.

Using the Guide: Activity

The activity for the month should reflect the needs and interests of the Rosh Chodesh group. If your group is comprised primarily of "Hillel regulars" who come to most other Hillel events, it may not make sense for the month's activity to focus on a holiday or theme for which your Hillel has activities planned. If, on the other hand, your group is comprised primarily of students who do not attend most other Hillel events, the Rosh Chodesh group is an excellent time to do an activity based on an upcoming holiday. The type of activity should vary from month to month as well. Unless your Rosh Chodesh group has expressed a strong interest in text study, it does not make sense to do text studies for three meetings in a row.

The month profile sheets can be used to create many kinds of activities. Feel free to use the sheets however you would like. You may want to combine several of the suggestions into one activity, or borrow elements of one activity for a different one. Your group may also want to use its meetings as a chance to hear from guest speakers, or to program with other groups on campus.

The month profiles were created to help put together meaningful Rosh Chodesh activities with minimal effort. They are also intended to provide you with ideas to create your own activities. Feel free to contact Hillel's Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning for further ideas or to help create your own activities.

The month profiles all follow the same structure

Mazal/Constellation

The Jewish tradition recognizes the astrological symbols of each month. In fact, many of the Jewish months get their names from ancient Babylonia.

Significance of the Month

This describes the month's place in the Jewish calendar as well as its significance in Jewish tradition.

Holidays

This section describes all Jewish holidays that occur during the month. It provides brief descriptions of the holidays and how they are observed. When applicable, it also provides modern holidays and observances of world Jewry and the State of Israel.

For more information on Jewish holidays visit the “Jewish Resources” section on www.hillel.org

Women to Celebrate

This section highlights women who are associated with holidays or themes that fall during the month.

Famous Women’s Yahrziet

Jewish tradition commemorates our dead by memorializing them on the anniversary of their death. This section highlights famous Jewish women who passed away during the month.

Text Studies

This section refers you to text studies about holidays, themes, and personalities associated with the month. For more text studies visit the “Jewish Resources” section of www.hillel.org

Activities

This section gives some suggested activities that tie into the themes and/or holidays of the month. Many of them can be done in conjunction with one of the text studies or conversations.

Conversations

This section highlights some themes and issues that may lead to rich and meaningful conversations. You may want to prepare some talking points to ensure that the conversation flows.

Opening Ceremony

We are gathered to celebrate Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the new Jewish month. When introducing the commandment of Rosh Chodesh, the Torah says: “This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months for you” (Exodus 12:2). Commenting on the fact that the verse says “*This month shall mark for you,*” Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes: “This renewal of the moon shall be a beginning of renewals for you. Noticing, realizing the fresh birth of the moon shall induce you to achieve a similar rejuvenation. You are to fix *your* moons, *your* periods of time by taking note of this ever fresh recurring rejuvenation.” Rosh Chodesh is a time for introspection and reflection on the previous month that was, and on the new month that will be.

Rosh Chodesh is an especially meaningful day for Jewish women. It has blossomed into a celebration of women and femininity. According to tradition, when the Children of Israel built the Golden Calf, the women refused to participate. As a reward, they were given Rosh Chodesh. Another connection between women and Rosh Chodesh is the similarity between the moon’s 29 ½ day cycle and women’s menstrual cycles. Robin Zeigler, a modern writer on Judaism, explains: “All throughout the generations women have experienced the same cycles of life. Like the familiar moon, the body gently speaks to us.”

Women throughout Jewish history have celebrated Rosh Chodesh by taking a break from their everyday lives and gathering together. We join our foremothers as we gather to celebrate the new month and our lives as Jewish women. In the words of Hannah Senesh:

There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth
though they have long been extinct.
There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world
though they are no longer among the living.
These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark.
They light the way for mankind.

Announcing the New Month

When the Sanhedrin, or Supreme Court, used to convene in Jerusalem, the new month was not declared until two witnesses who were able to verify that they had seen the new moon came and testified before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin would then declare it Rosh Chodesh and would let the rest of Israel know, originally by sending signals through fires lit on mountaintops, and later by sending messengers to all the villages and towns of Israel. When the Sanhedrin was disbanded in the 4th Century CE, a fixed calendar was instituted in which Rosh Chodesh was determined based on astronomical calculations of the new moon. As a vestige of the old system, and to remind us of the centrality of Jerusalem in Jewish thought and Jewish life, Rosh Chodesh is determined based on the appearance of the new moon over Jerusalem. When the new month is announced in synagogue on the Sabbath before Rosh Chodesh, the exact

moment when the new moon appears over Jerusalem is announced as well. Let us now announce the new month that we have gathered to celebrate.

ANNOUNCE ROSH CHODESH AND THE “MOLAD”

Rosh Chodesh for the month of X , will be/was (**give day of Rosh Chodesh**) at X (**give exact calculation**). (To get the exact calculation of Rosh Chodesh visit <http://www.ezrastorah.org/calendar.html>)

In keeping with the ancient tradition where the Sanhedrin would light fires on mountaintops to spread the news that the new month had been declared, we will now light a fire to mark the new month.

Light a candle

Introductions

There is an ancient custom associated with Rosh Chodesh known as *kiddush levana*, or “the sanctification of the new moon.” This prayer is said outside in the moonlight. Its source is a Talmudic passage which states: “Whoever blesses the month in its proper time, receives the Divine Presence.” The Talmud further teaches, “If Israel had only merited to receive the Divine Presence once per month, it would have been sufficient for them.” Part of this prayer includes the traditional Jewish greeting of saying “Shalom Aleichem,” “Peace upon you,” to which one responds “Aleichem Shalom,” “Upon you peace.”

As we are gathered to sanctify the new month and new moon, let’s introduce ourselves to the group using the traditional greeting. Since we are all women, we can use the feminine form of the greeting “Shalom Aleichen” and “Aleichen Shalom.” Each person here should introduce herself using either her Hebrew or English name and the name of her mother, and grandmother if she chooses.

Participant: “I am X bat (the daughter of) X .”

Group: “Shalom Aleichen X !”

Participant: “Aleichen Shalom!”

We will also use this opportunity to reflect on the previous month and to maintain the unity with Jerusalem that is inherent in Rosh Chodesh. More than a physical place in the world, Jerusalem exists in our minds and our hearts. As each one of us introduces ourselves, think back on the previous month and identify “your Jerusalem” from the month. Your Jerusalem may be a pleasant memory, a nice thought, or a memorable conversation.

Everyone introduces herself using the formula above. After the individual responds to the group “Aleichen Shalom” she should say “My Jerusalem was...”

Introducing the Month and the Activity

After everyone has introduced herself to the group and identified her personal Jerusalem, someone should introduce the month being celebrated with a brief description of the month, its major holidays and women to celebrate that are associated with the month. Once the month has been introduced, someone should describe the month’s activity.

Closing Ceremony

Let's take a moment to bless the new month and bless each other. The traditional blessing of the new moon, which is said in synagogue on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh concludes with a brief prayer for the upcoming month. We will start by saying this prayer, and anyone who wants to add to it is welcome.

May the Holy One, blessed be He, grant that the new month bring to us and to all his people, the house of Israel, life and peace, joy and gladness, salvation and comfort,

**Pause to allow people to add their personal wishes for the upcoming month.
When everyone is done, conclude:**

And let us say, Amen.