

Moon Magic: Marking the Months

Starting Your Day

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SUMMARY:	The Jewish calendar is built around a luni-solar cycle, drawing energy and structure from the start of each month's new moon. There are a number of beautiful rituals to mark each month's specific qualities, connecting to the month's holidays and weather as well as other cultures' ways of marking time and moon cycles. Some of these rituals focus specifically on celebrating women. In this session, we'll learn about these Rosh Chodesh (new month) rituals, in particular with ideas for celebrating the summer months of Tamuz and Av.
TOPIC(S):	Prayer - Alternative, Holidays and Celebrations
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	Participants will know more about the holiday of Rosh Chodesh. Participants will learn rituals to mark the beginning of the Hebrew month and set an intention for the month ahead.
AUDIENCE:	Written for staff; can be adapted for most camper groups
TIMING:	60 min
APPENDICES:	Copies of the Blessing for the New Moon
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Assorted art supplies (specifics depending on your art project)
SET-UP DETAILS:	It would be great for this program to take place outside. You'll also need there to be a hard surface for people to be able to draw and write.

SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:

Intro/framing:

- Start with explanations of how the Hebrew calendar is constructed (in relationship to the moon) and how the Rosh Chodesh holiday came to be. There are great resources for that information at the following websites:
 - <https://wrj.org/rosh-chodesh-0>
 - <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/rosh-chodesh/>
 - <https://www.atthewellproject.com/about>

- Clarify that even though some explanations of the significance of Rosh Chodesh emphasize the significance of the connection between the moon's cycle and menstruation that should not be a limiting entry point into this ritual. Important points to cover here:
 - Not all women menstruate. The bodies of female-identified people can (and do) look different, feel different, and function differently from each other.
 - Rosh Chodesh rituals can speak to this connection to women in at least two ways: by gathering in a mixed-gender group but focusing on rituals that specifically honor women; making your Rosh Chodesh gathering a space specifically for people who identify as female and who want to be in a space exclusively with other female-identified people.
 - Anything that draws specifically on a gender-based lens should actively acknowledge that the ways that we all practice and experience gender are wildly wide-ranging and individual (at the same time that they're influenced by societal norms). Gender-related rituals do not necessarily have to presume that there is anything essentialist about anyone's gender experience, but we do have to take care to make sure that we've created an environment that encourages those varied expressions of gender identity. Doing these activities in a gender-based structure builds off a larger premise that there is value to gathering in identity groups of many types to reflect on the shared aspects of that identity and to celebrate and create ritual in ways that are exclusively contained by relationships within that identity group. One way to make sure these spaces can remain as respectful and safe as possible is to make sure to stick only with self-identification (i.e. don't determine for people whether or not they belong in a particular group; allow anyone who identifies with that group to attend). Another is to make sure to remind people to stay with "I" statements when reflecting on their own experience with that identity or with identifying ways that someone else's statements might resonate with them.
 - Encourage people that they don't have to set aside any discomfort they might be having with this premise. If you want, this can be a good time to give people a few minutes to discuss those potential discomforts in pairs or trios, sharing their concerns and also what drew them to this particular practice/structure and what they hope to get out of it.

Blessing those who came before:

- Ask everyone to think of a female-identified person they would like to honor.
- Ask everyone to go out into the nature surrounding the space where you're meeting and bring back an item that reminds them of that person.
- When everyone comes back, go around and have each person honor the individual they're thinking of and place the item they brought back in the middle of the circle. Depending on how much time you have, this can be an opportunity for everyone to talk about that individual and what that person meant to them, or (if time is more limited) they can simply share the person's name and relationship to them (i.e. Alana and Aaren and Adina, my sisters).

Blessing the month ahead:

- Read the Blessing for the New Month together (you can use the prayer and translation in your camp's siddur or you can print any of the many interpretive translations online). If there's time, study it in chevruta (study partners) - look at the language of the blessing and discuss questions, possible interpretations, any aspects or phrases that especially inspire you or make you wonder or that you struggle with.
- You can also write your own blessings - what do you want to wish for in the month ahead?

Month-specific learning and ritual:

- Each Hebrew month has particular themes, sometimes linked to whatever holidays are coming in that month. For any Rosh Chodesh group practices, someone should prepare specific readings or text study or discussion or ritual linked to that month's themes. There are wonderful materials available at the sites listed in the first section of this outline, and you can also contact Moving Traditions for their "Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing" materials: <https://www.movingtraditions.org/programs/rosh-hodesh/our-approach/>
- Here are some specific ideas for the two Hebrew months that will begin during the camp months:
 - Tammuz: One of the origin stories for why Rosh Chodesh is considered especially a holiday for women (and specifically for why some commentators say that women are supposed to take those days as holidays and not be expected to work) is a *midrash* (interpretive story) that the Israelite women in the desert refused to give their jewelry to make the Golden Calf. The story of the Golden Calf (and in particular, Moses' discovery of it) supposedly takes place during the month of Tammuz.
 - Create a word cloud of synonyms for the word "worship". Discuss:
 - How do you feel about the various words on this list? Which ones inspire you? Which ones carry a negative connotation for you?
 - Do you experience worship as something that enriches your life? If so, what particular types of worship?
 - Do you struggle with the idea of worship? If so, why?
 - When do you notice yourself "worshipping" in a way that you think isn't good for you? What's not good about it?
 - Art project idea:
 - Show images of Andy Goldsworthy's art. Goldsworthy creates pieces primarily from natural materials and usually creates them in such a way that they will eventually decompose or melt back into their original natural surroundings, or that they will remain but will blend with their natural surroundings.
 - Give everyone time to go out into nature and create a small sculpture that will blend into its surroundings and/or will be there temporarily until the wind or rain blows or washes it away. After everyone comes back together, you can either do a group tour of all of the pieces that were created or (if you're short on time) participants can pair up and take each other to their pieces so that everyone gets to share theirs with at least one other person.

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- Journaling:
 - What do you want to hold up as worthy of admiration? What are your weaknesses for “idolizing” things or people that you think aren’t actually worthy of that? What goal do you want to set for how to make sure you’re directing your energy and attention towards what you believe is most holy?

- Av: The month of Av contains two holidays, one about love and one about destruction. Tu B’Av (the 15th of Av) is a holiday that is specially dedicated to celebrating love, especially with music and dancing. Tisha B’Av (the 9th of Av) commemorates the destruction of the ancient Jewish Temples in Jerusalem and is a fast day on the Hebrew calendar. Tisha B’Av has a number of designated customs to mark it as a day of mourning, while Tu B’Av is a lesser-known holiday and does not have widely-observed communal rituals, although those who want to mark it have done so with festivals or other celebrations.
 - Holding celebration and mourning together:
 - Sing a mourning song and a love song. Ask a few people to share stories of love and stories of mourning. Make a card for someone you love and make a card for someone who’s going through a tough time.
 - Discuss: what feelings connect these experiences of celebrating love and commemorating difficulty?
 - Destruction and rebuilding:
 - Do an art project that first involves dismantling items in some way (i.e. tearing paper, breaking items, etc) and then using those pieces to build something new.
 - Discuss: what are some examples out in the world of people working to build something new out of the pieces of what’s been destroyed (either literally or metaphorically)?

Opportunities for general reflection and support:

- In addition to exploring the specific themes of each coming month, Rosh Chodesh groups can be wonderful opportunities for regular reflection. Here are some potential questions for participants to share about:
 - What were your successes and challenges in the previous month?
 - What are you proud of? How do you want to bring those achievements into the month ahead?
 - What are you struggling with? What do you want to leave behind as you go into a new month? What do you want to approach differently in the coming month?
 - What do you need from this group over the coming month?
 - What is an intention you’d like to set for the coming month? Do you want to give yourself a motto or slogan or guiding phrase?



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ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:

This kind of conversation and program will look very different depending on the age of the participants and the relationships between them (i.e. are these people who know each other well and spend ongoing time together?). Be sure to craft your specific set of rituals with all of those factors in mind. For younger campers, spend more time on the art projects related to that month's themes. For groups of people who don't know each other as well, it can be best to stick with more individually-focused activities (like journaling or art projects).