

# It's okay to grieve these High Holy Days

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The collective anxiety in the daily COVID press conference is palpable: what will Christmas look like this year?

More than three months out from the holiday, it is clear that the prospect of Christmas without family is, for many Australians, utterly unthinkable. Yet for those of us who belong to minority religions, multiple festivals and commemorations have taken place throughout lockdown, bringing with them the particular challenge of celebrating or observing in the shadow of COVID.

That's especially true for Jewish Victorians these High Holy Days.

*For many, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur already present a challenge. It is a time when loss and loneliness hit particularly hard; when we feel acutely the absence of loved ones, or the pain of isolation or disconnection.*

Some will experience that sadness for the first time this year. Family and friends unable to gather together over tables laden with brisket and honey cake; grandparents yet to meet new babies; for those living alone, the prospect of a solitary yom tov; or just the disappointment of disrupting long-held traditions. For many, whether a regular attendee or a once-a-year shul-goer, these High Holy Days may be the first in their life where they haven't gathered in synagogue to reflect, pray, and connect with community.

This High Holy Day period will certainly be different; even – to use that current buzzword – unprecedented.

## And it is okay to grieve that loss.

Some might be surprised at the depth of sadness they feel as this unusual Rosh Hashanah draws near. It's important to acknowledge and validate that experience; it is okay to feel sad, disappointed or angry. It's okay to miss loved ones, or to feel resentful at missed opportunities.

*But just as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are traditionally a time of reflection, it is important to reflect on how we can navigate this challenging time, and take steps to look after ourselves. Some may even find ways to embrace it (but it's okay to just survive it, too).*

As Rosh Hashanah draws near, we invite you to consider: how can we engage in ways that are meaningful? How can we best connect with our loved ones and community? What strength can we draw from the experiences of our ancestors, who shared festivals and holy days in the most terrible of circumstances? And how can we be gentle with ourselves and our needs during this time?

### Tips for managing the High Holy Days

- If you are feeling apprehensive, it may be useful to develop a plan in advance for how you will manage the day. What can you do to look after yourself? Consider how you will spend your time, and plan something to look forward to.
- Consider COVID-safe ways to connect with community and tradition. Can you **hear the shofar**, or walk to a local park for tashlich? Can you prepare a special meal, or try starting a new ritual? Can you deliver a card to someone living alone, or reconnect with an old friend to wish them Shana tova?
- Finally, if you are having a hard time – reach out. Let someone know that you are struggling, and ask if they can check in with you.

Whatever these High Holy Days look like for you, they will no doubt go down in history as yet another example of the strength and resilience of our community.

Shana tova u'metuka. May 5781 bring a sweeter and healthier year for us all.

**There is always someone there to listen.**

Jewish Care COVID Helpline – 8517 5555

**Lifeline** (24/7) – 13 11 14

**Suicide Call Back Service** – 1300 659 467

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