



INSTITUTE FOR
**Jewish
Spirituality**

***Returning Anew:* Guidance for Practice in Times of Upheaval and Polarization**

Practicing in times of profound upheaval at home and abroad

We come together in a tumultuous and deeply challenging time in the US and the world. Each of us has a different experience and different relationships and proximity to current domestic and foreign political developments, and the resulting violence, ongoing devastation, and tremendous loss of life. We may be shaken, fearful for our own and others' safety. We may be agitated, grieving, frozen, and/or (re-)traumatized. Some of our most cherished relationships may be strained or even broken.

Each of us is touched differently by the policies, executive actions, and debates that take place on the political stage. Many of us live with or love those with politicized identities, including but not limited to: immigrants, LGBTQ+ folks and particularly transgender individuals, women, disabled folks, and religious minorities, including Jews. We recognize that even those without traditionally politicized and marginalized identities have been touched by the policies, debates, and actions of the current administration.

Violence, political upheaval, and uncertainty can leave us feeling unsettled, fearful, anxious, and even unsafe. These experiences can activate our natural reactions to shut down, protect ourselves and our loved ones, and often to other, dehumanize, or demonize those who are positioned differently. Our practice at this retreat will be both to notice experiences such as these when they arise, and to cultivate openness of the heart while resting in a sense of profound *welcome* for all of our parts, identities, and perspectives.

Coming together in a pluralistic Jewish space to practice can be a deep source of care for ourselves and each other in this time. At the same time, we may also be carrying assumptions and expectations about what participants in a Jewish meditation retreat share in common, and we may feel upset when our assumptions don't hold. To support everyone in our practice of softening and opening our hearts, and looking deeply at what is arising, we are offering these shared understandings and boundaries and asking that all participants agree to them:

Accepting our diversity regarding Israel & Palestine

I understand that each of us has our own experience, relationships with Israelis and Palestinians, responses to 10/7 and its aftermath, and beliefs about how peace, safety, and justice may be supported in the region. I will not assume that any of my beliefs or experiences are shared by other participants.

Refraining from political speech

During times when speaking is permitted (Q & A, group meetings), I may speak about my experience and what is arising for me, including in my relationship to Israel/Palestine, the United States, and beyond. I agree to take care and to refrain from engaging in political analysis, ideological statements, evaluations, disputed factual claims, or judgments about the actions or beliefs of others (including other participants, political leaders, countries, people in my family, or the wider community). I do this to increase my ability to focus on what's happening in my body and my senses in the present moment—as opposed to the stories, narratives, or analyses running through my mind. I refrain from political speech during this retreat so that everyone here can grow in their ability to use mindful speech in difficult conversations outside the retreat.

Noticing and practicing with "othering"

I will practice noticing my thoughts and feelings as they arise, especially when I'm shutting down or when my heart is closing, when I am "othering" someone who is different from me, or some part of myself that is different from how I understand myself. I will practice bringing compassionate curiosity to these noticings.

Following teachers' instructions

I understand that the teachers are responsible for supporting the retreat experience for all participants. I agree to follow the teachers' guidance and instructions as they hold our community boundaries during times when speaking is permitted.

Brave Space

The teachers will do their best to maintain our retreat as an emotionally supportive space for all participants. I understand that there may still be times when I feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or activated. At these times, I may practice being in brave space: checking in to see what level of discomfort is present and what I'm able to tolerate. If I find myself emotionally flooded to the extent that I am beyond my window of tolerance, I agree to take a break and/or to seek 1:1 support from a teacher.

This document has been adapted from a statement by Rabbi Dev Noily, from an Or HaLev Jewish Meditation Retreat. Thank you, Rabbi Dev!