



**JWB Jewish
Chaplains Council**
Serving Jews Who Serve

a signature program of



**JCC Association
of North America**

Veterans Day

Programming Guide



Background

Veterans Day is a United States federal holiday, observed annually on Nov. 11. The holiday honors people who have served in the U.S. armed forces. Nov. 11 is observed as Armistice Day and Remembrance Day in other parts of the world, marking the anniversary of the end of World War I and acknowledging those who served in that war. The U.S. observed Nov. 11 as Armistice Day until 1954, after which Congress signed a bill into law that set the day as a time to recognize all veterans, not just those who served in World War I. The day was renamed Veterans Day in recognition of all veterans.

Veterans Day celebrates the service of all U.S. military veterans. This day should not be confused with Memorial Day, a day of remembering those who gave their lives and died in service to our country, or Armed Forces Day, a day when we honor the service of those currently in our U.S. armed forces.

The Jewish community has a proud history in the U.S. military, with Jews protecting and defending America since the Revolutionary War. That history continues today, as nearly 10,000 Jewish men and women serve in our nation's military. Veterans Day is an opportunity for the Jewish community to acknowledge and honor the men and women who dedicate their lives to ensuring our freedom.

Welcoming our Veterans Year Round

Although Iraq is over and Afghanistan is coming to an end, [this] is something that you and I will have to deal with in the future. I'm always surprised that when I was involved with Jewish things it was completely separate of my military life and finding those two things which I love so much, those two things that are such deep parts of myself and seeing them come together is really beautiful and encouraging to me.

—Katherine, former Marine

While this is a program guide for Veterans Day, it is important for us to recognize that veterans don't shed that identity following Nov. 11. They are veterans year-round. Katherine describes her experience of entering Jewish spaces and having to leave her identity as a veteran behind. Yet, JCCs are uniquely positioned to welcome Jewish veterans in their entirety. There is almost no limit to the numbers of ways JCCs can welcome veterans and offer them access to the extensive programming and opportunities JCCs provide each day. In the coming months, JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, will create a Veterans' Marketing and Programming Bank that will crowdsource from JCCs the ways they reach out to veterans throughout the year. In the interim, here are some ideas to consider:

1. Offer one free month/week of membership to veterans.
2. Use images in part of the JCC, or throughout, that display the JCC's patriotism and respect for veterans.
3. Target advertising to veterans, using messages and appearing in papers and social media that appeal to veterans.
4. In program descriptions, emphasize how the program might relate specifically to veterans.

As veterans deepen their connections to JCCs, they will likely become leaders in support of Veterans Day and Memorial Day programming.

Program Suggestions

General Programming

Many of the events running at JCCs throughout November can be transformed into a Veterans Day program with only minor adjustments.

- Ongoing author and film series can focus on service members or veterans for the November selections.
- For JCCs with theater or gallery space, include a theater or artist program that focuses on veterans and the veteran experience. [See Program Resources.](#)
- Invite a speaker or host a panel discussion, encouraging veterans to talk about their experiences. Jewish chaplains are located throughout the country and can be contacted to speak at a JCC, discussing the role of Jewish clergy in the military. Other organizations that can connect JCCs with speakers can be found in the [Program Resources section](#). The panel can focus on the experience of being Jewish in the military, current issues relevant to veterans, or another topic of interest in your community. [Discussion questions are included in this guide.](#)
- Thank the veterans of your community by holding an event where veterans are invited to relax and spend time with their families and other veterans in the JCC. If your community has a large military or veteran population, consult with service members and veterans about what they would like to see on Veterans Day.

Social Action and Veterans Day

One way to honor veterans' service to our country is to engage in social action in support of veterans.

- Connect with a local VA hospital to find out about opportunities to make cards for veterans or donate clothing or food items to homeless veterans. VA hospitals have an office of volunteer services that coordinates these efforts.
- Groups can also make cards or assemble care packages for active duty service members. Contact JWB Jewish Chaplains Council for more information, jwb@jcca.org.

Programming for School-Age Children

Guidelines for guest speakers and school-age children:

- Invite veterans or, if near a military base, active duty service members, to speak with the group about their experiences and why they chose to serve.
- Explain to the group when this person served and that the U.S. military is a volunteer force.
- Explain that people have different jobs within the military and if possible, give some explanation of the speaker's job.
- Encourage children to ask questions about different places veterans have lived, why they served, life on base/aboard ship.

- It is possible that a child will ask a veteran, “Did you shoot anyone?” While this question displays the curiosity civilians have about those in the military, it is often uncomfortable for the veteran to answer these questions. Children should be reminded prior to the speaker’s arrival about the many roles service members play, including protecting people and themselves. Weapons are used in the military only in support of specific targeted missions and for self-defense.

Service projects – Social action projects, such as coordinating with a VA hospital or making cards for service members, can be performed by school age children. If there is a senior group at your location that is holding a program for veterans, invite children to participate in the program and hear the veterans’ stories.

Create awareness – Children can help construct a Veterans Wall, including names of veterans in the community, their branch of service and point of service (when they served). By interviewing participants in the senior program who are veterans, children can connect with seniors at the JCC.

Discussion Guide

These topics and questions can be used with groups of varying sizes, or for panel discussions. Many of the questions are directed to service members and veterans but can be adapted for discussion with a civilian group.

Why I Serve

What are ways people serve their country? Why does military service stand out from other types of service?

What influenced your decision to serve in the U.S. armed forces?

What might influence someone to serve in the U.S. military?

Why do so few Americans choose to serve in the military?

Jews in the U.S. Armed Forces

What are some challenges of being Jewish in the military?

How does someone adapt their Judaism to their life in the military?

Why might a connection to Judaism help someone serving in the military? What role do faith and spirituality play in military life?

What is the perception, from the civilian community, of Jews serving in the U.S. military? How can the Jewish community support Jews serving in the military and their families?

Adjusting to Civilian Life

What can the Jewish community do to support veterans in their transition from military to civilian life?

What are some of the challenges veterans face in their transition out of the military?

What are some challenges service members face while transitioning to different locations or home from a deployment?

Program Resources

Color guards, honor guards, military bands, and speakers may be requested for events through the public affairs officer of a local military installation. JCCs can also contact the public affairs office of the National Guard for their state.

Local VA hospitals can connect JCCs to volunteer opportunities and veterans to speak at programs. Contact the volunteer services office at a VA hospital near your JCC for more information. To find a VA hospital near your JCC, go to www.va.gov.

[The Telling Project](http://thetellingproject.org) (thetellingproject.org) A theater program that works with military, veterans, and family members to tell their stories and help increase understanding of military life by civilians. Contact the program directly for information about bringing The Telling Project to your community.

[Jewish Book Council](http://jewishbookcouncil.org) (jewishbookcouncil.org) This organization, in addition to being a resource center on the American Jewish literary scene, often features authors who write about the military and veteran experience.

[Veteran Artist Program](http://veteranartistprogram.org) (veteranartistprogram.org) An organization that works with artists who are veterans and connects them to mainstream creative arts venues. For more information about their programs and artists, contact Veteran Artists Program directly.

[Women Vets SPEAK](http://womenveteranspeakers.com) (womenveteranspeakers.com) This organization showcases the voices of servicewomen, bringing their training and leadership experiences to audiences throughout the country. Speakers focus on topics such as the transition from military leadership to civilian leadership, entrepreneurship, balancing family and career, mentoring others, and more. Contact the organization directly to arrange a speaker.

Ceremonies

Explanations and outlines for typical Veterans Day ceremonies are found below. Ceremonies can be changed to reflect the community.

Veterans Day Ceremony

1. Posting of Colors

This is performed by a color guard. The term “colors” refers to the flag of the United States, as well as flags for each branch of service—Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard—used for ceremonial events. For information on contacting military color guards for this ceremony, please see the Program Resources section.

2. The Pledge of Allegiance and National Anthem

3. Opening remarks

These remarks may include a brief history of Veterans Day, an overview of your JCC’s connection to Veterans Day, and an introduction of any special guests.

4. Musical selection

There are many patriotic songs that are appropriate for this event. This point is an opportunity to include children's choirs, community choirs, or other talented community members. Patriotic songs include: "America" (My Country, 'Tis of Thee), "America the Beautiful," "Star Spangled Banner" (the national anthem), "God Bless America."

5. Speaker

There are several options for speakers for Veterans Day programs. JCCs can honor a veteran on staff or a JCC member who is currently serving or has served in the military. The public affairs office at a local base can help connect JCCs with current service members. JWB Jewish Chaplains Council can suggest Jewish chaplains who can speak at a Veterans Day program.

6. Honor Veterans

Depending on the number of service members and veterans in attendance, veterans can be asked to stand in place or can be called to the stage/front of the room for acknowledgment and thanks. Saying "thank you for your service" is an important part of the ceremony for the veterans and the civilian community.

7. [Prayer for America's Military Personnel](#)

This Jewish prayer recognizes that servicemembers today remain in harm's way and prays for their safety. The prayer can be recited in English or Hebrew. It can be sung or a [video of the prayer](#) being chanted can be played.

8. Closing

The ceremony ends with the retiring of the colors by the color guard. Any closing remarks should happen before the colors are paraded out of the room.

Flag Raising Ceremony

Weather permitting, this outdoor event works well for large groups. JCCs can begin their program by gathering by the flag pole for this brief ceremony, which can include the Pledge of Allegiance and the national anthem. A veteran on staff or in the community can speak briefly about the significance of this ceremony.

Text Study – A View from Jewish Texts

Jewish tradition has a variety of texts on serving in the military and what it means to go to war. The texts below are taken from the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and focus on war and military service. Below each text are observations and questions, designed to start conversations about the text.

Military Service

Isaiah 2:4

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Observations and Questions

This well-known and often-cited verse is a prophetic vision from the Book of Isaiah. Jewish tradition is hopeful for this time, but also understands that wars may be necessary.

How does this vision fit in with Judaism's permission to go to war?

Who Can Serve?

Numbers 1:3

From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war.

Observations and Questions

Here we learn about age requirements for the military. Being old enough to go to war changed people's status, making them adults.

- 1. What can be learned from the idea that participation in a war defines adulthood?*
- 2. In this verse, everyone goes into military service, unless unable to serve. This is a citizen military, not a professional military where one chooses to serve. What are the differences between the two types of militaries? What are the implications of these distinctions?*

Deuteronomy 20: 5-8

Then the officials shall address the troops, as follows: "Is there anyone who has built a new house, but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her." The officials shall go on addressing the troops and say, "Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades flag like his."

Observations and Questions

These verses teach about who should not serve or is exempt from service. There are four reasons given for exemption from service: a new house, a new vineyard, a recent marriage, and fear.

- 1. Why would these four categories exempt a person from service?*
- 2. What is the concern in the first three categories compared to the fourth category?*
- 3. Fear is a natural response to going to war. Why is there concern about how one's fear may influence others? What can be done to help someone who is fearful but wants to serve?*

Fit for Battle

Judges 7: 2-8

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many troops with you for Me to deliver Midian into their hands; Israel might claim for themselves the glory due to Me, thinking, 'Our own hand has brought us victory.' Therefore, announce to the men, 'Let anybody who is timid and fearful turn back, as a bird flies from Mount Gilead.'" Thereupon, 22,000 of the troops turned back and 10,000 remained. "There are still too many troops," the Lord said to Gideon. "Take them down to the water and I will sift them for you there. Anyone of whom I tell you, 'This one is to go with you,' that one shall go with you; and anyone of whom I tell you, 'This one is not to go with you,' that one shall not go. So he took the troops down to the water.

Then the Lord said to Gideon, "Set apart all those who lap up the water with their tongues like dogs from all those who get down on their knees to drink." Now those who "lapped" the water into their mouths by hand numbered three hundred; all the rest of the troops got down on their knees to drink. Then the Lord said to Gideon, "I will deliver you and I will put Midian into your hands through the three hundred 'lappers;' let the rest of the troops go home." So [the lappers] took the provisions and horns that the other men had with them, and he sent the rest of the men of Israel back to their homes, retaining only the three hundred men.

Observations and Questions

Earlier texts allowed the troops to self-select, determining for themselves if they were able to serve. These verses tell about a method of determining who will be suitable for service.

- 1. Why is it preferred, in this situation, to have a smaller military than a larger one? What are the benefits of having this smaller group of people?*
- 2. What does this story tell us about those who were selected to serve? Why might their skills or ways of handling a situation be preferred in a military setting?*
- 3. The story of Gideon and his troops, which continues into the next chapter, detailing their victories, is one that focuses on the tactics of war. Other texts focus on the spiritual and emotional implications of military service. What does this say about the need to balance practical obligations of service with the emotional impact of service? How might this need for balance be met in a military context?*
- 4. How can civilian communities support veterans who struggle with their emotions?*

Finding Faith in Service

Joshua 1:9

"...Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

2 Samuel 22:2-4

And he said, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You who rescue me from violence. "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; And I am saved from my enemies."

Psalms 46:1

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Observations and Questions

1. *How can prayer and faith help in times of battle?*
2. *Jewish tradition has many stories of military triumph and people giving thanks for those victories. What are ways we prepare for challenges today? How do we show gratitude for getting through those challenges?*

No One Returns from War Unchanged

Numbers 31:19, 24

You shall then stay outside the camp seven days; every one among you or among your captives who has slain a person or touched a corpse shall cleanse himself on the third and seventh day...On the seventh day you shall wash your clothes and be clean, and after that you may enter the camp.

Observations and Questions

Many veterans have experiences in war that are beyond the understanding of most civilians. They engage in actions that change who they are, as these actions go against the moral standards set by society. In Numbers 31, Moses instructs the Israelites to engage in a battle with the Midianites, killing people and destroying towns. After battle, Moses gave instructions for returning home, seen in verses 19 and 24.

1. *Why might those who engaged in battle need to stay outside the camp for seven days? How does that mirror the process of returning home and returning to civilian life that a veteran may experience today?*
2. *Judaism has a tradition of using the mikvah, a ritual bath, as a way of spiritually cleansing oneself and transitioning from one event in a person's life to another. Why would this cleansing be necessary for one who engaged in battle? How might a mikvah be used for a veteran today? What would it mean for a veteran to go through this process?*

T'filah L'Chayalei Tz'va Artzot Ha-B'rit / Prayer for America's Military Personnel

Ribbono Shel Olam! Sovereign of the Universe!

We invoke your blessings upon the members of our American armed forces, those brave men and women whose courage and commitment to our country protects us all. Whether by air, land or sea, wherever their orders take them, we ask, dear God, that they be protected within your sheltering Presence.

Shield them from harm and from pain, assuage their loneliness, and sustain their faith in the face of the formidable enemies that they confront on a daily basis.

May all of their efforts be crowned with victory, and the assurance that we who depend on their courage appreciate and understand the great difficulty of their work.

Most of all, we pray what for all soldiers is the ultimate prayer—that they be privileged to return to the loving arms of their families and a grateful country safely, speedily, and in good health.

Because of their courage, may we all be privileged to know and savor the blessings of true peace and security.

Amen.

For more information on Veterans Day and creating ongoing programs for military personnel and veterans at your JCC:

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