



Minyan Atara's Approach to Israel

Everything we love about Atara—our beautiful traditional egalitarian davening, delicious kiddushes, close-knit social community, welcoming culture, and the incredible volunteerism that sustains it all—stems from the wonderful people who comprise and contribute to it. Our community members hail from an unusually wide range of geographic, religious, and ideological backgrounds. This is a blessing and a strength. It makes our community vibrant and dynamic, and it gives us all the opportunity to connect with and learn from people who challenge us and broaden our horizons.

We are genuinely proud of the Atara community's diversity. It shows that our community members are generally open-minded, inclusive, curious, flexible, and willing to engage respectfully and compromise when necessary to serve the needs of the broader community. We are committed to these values. They are the ingredients needed to sustain community across differences.

Even with this strong foundation, navigating ideological diversity on the topic of Israel (and everything connected to it) within a Jewish community is very challenging – especially these days. Our community members have deeply held personal beliefs about Israel. And because people often feel so strongly, disagreements within the community about this topic can be uncomfortable, or even painful. To preserve communal cohesion, Minyan Atara has generally sought to hold space for a wide range of perspectives on Israel, including in the aftermath of October 7th, 2023. We remain committed to this goal. Now, to support our vision for Minyan Atara and to address topics we received the most feedback on, we are recalibrating some of our practices.

Our Vision

Minyan Atara is a spiritual home where people come together to pray, learn, celebrate, and mourn as a community rooted in halachic egalitarian Judaism. We strive to find meaning in Jewish practice, wisdom in our inherited tradition, joy in friendship, and deep connection to Am Yisrael.

Our Practices

We describe our approach to several communal practice areas below. Broadly, we aim to ensure these practices support our vision for Minyan Atara, uphold shared values, and meet community members' needs as much as possible.

August 2025

1. Expressing Care for Israel in Community

People want reassurance that Atara is a place where they can express care for Israel, especially by mourning loss of life among Jews and/or Israelis. Our vision includes being a community where people can express deep connection to Am Yisrael. We believe it is appropriate and important for Atara to mark moments of tragedy and loss that involve Jews and/or Israelis. We will participate in events that memorialize these losses without trying to be neutral or apolitical. We will make special space for world events (current or historical) that impact Am Yisrael, and we will participate in broader community events for Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom HaZikaron.

2. The Prayer for the State of Israel

Many people appreciate the balance we strike by providing silent time for people to say the Prayer for the State of Israel (and the US) if they wish, and not if they don't. We also heard from some who want to say the Prayer for the State of Israel out loud and from others who find this prayer alienating for a variety of reasons.

To hold space for the wide range of perspectives, Atara will continue our current practice of offering time for people to say the prayer for Israel (and the US) if they wish. We note that the [text](#) Atara uses was developed through a community-driven process and reflects many shared values: our desires for peace, for leaders to act without hatred or ill-will, and for the well-being of all who dwell in the land.

3. Praying for Hostages and Peace

As an Atara community, we pray for the safe release of the hostages. Some community members feel that our current prayer for captives (found in the Koren siddur) elevates members of the IDF apart from other hostages, detracting from their intention to pray for all hostages equally. Additionally, for some community members, political and ideological concerns about some actions of the IDF strain their relationship with a prayer they may otherwise find meaningful. For others in the community, we heard that the reference to the IDF is a point of connection to Israeli soldiers known to them personally, as well as an acknowledgment of the unique risks soldiers face by dint of their mandatory service.

To maintain the focus on our shared concern for all hostages, Atara will switch to a [text](#) that more accurately reflects the current reality of the hostages still held in captivity in Gaza—soldier and civilian, Israeli and foreign nationals, Jewish and non-Jewish. We will also continue to include a song for peace in this section of our service, and our [prefatory language](#) will continue to explicitly reflect our desire for a better future of peace, safety and security for all in the region – Israelis and Palestinians alike.

4. Wearing Keffiyehs in Communal Space

This is a particularly complex and contentious topic. Keffiyehs have become infused with symbolic meaning, and, as with many symbols, different people interpret keffiyehs differently.

We are aware that keffiyehs are worn in activist spaces that call for peace and justice for both Jews and Palestinians in the land of Israel. We have heard that some community members feel morally compelled to wear keffiyehs, *davka* in Jewish spaces, as a way of conveying sympathy and support for Palestinians affected by the current war – a war that they feel is being fought in their name.

We are also aware that keffiyehs are worn in spaces that promote or celebrate violence against Jews and Israelis. We have heard that some community members are deeply uncomfortable with keffiyehs being worn in a Jewish communal prayer space, experiencing them as a symbol of anti-Jewish or anti-Israeli hostility. The presence of keffiyehs in our prayer space, especially during moments of communal and personal mourning, has caused pain and alienation during a vulnerable time when many sought comfort and solidarity in community.

We request that community members not wear visible keffiyehs at Atara.

We emphasize that this decision aims to avoid harm and preserve communal cohesion and is not a judgment of intent. Indeed, we recognize that some community members who have worn keffiyehs at Atara have felt their intentions were misinterpreted, that they were the subject of lashon hara, or they were made to feel unwelcome. That is not our goal, and we also ask all community members to “give others the benefit of the doubt in judgement” (“הוֹי דִּן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת” – *Pirkei Avot* 1:6).

Our Principles

In addition to addressing feedback from community members, we also feel we have a responsibility to articulate principles that guide Minyan Atara on the topic of Israel for a couple of reasons. First, doing so supports future minyan decision-making. Navigating such a nuanced and emotionally laden topic is difficult under any circumstances. But it is especially difficult without a set of articulated values or guiding principles.

Second, we recognize that different people look for their Jewish communities to provide different things regarding Israel. Being transparent ensures people can make fully informed decisions about the communities they choose to be part of. We believe in the type of space we are trying to cultivate, and we sincerely hope that Atara meets your needs and that you feel welcome and at home here. But for those who seek out other spaces that take a different approach, we understand and we respect your decision.

Minyan Atara will seek to ensure our practices align the following principles:

- (1) Minyan Atara is a part of Am Yisrael, connected to Jews around the world by religion, culture, and history. We care about the well-being, safety, and thriving of Jews everywhere, including in Israel. When world events occur that impact Jews, we celebrate Jewish joy and mourn Jewish pain in particular.
- (2) We believe the futures of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples are intertwined. We affirm both peoples' rights to safety, security, and self-determination, and we reject ideologies that celebrate violence or deny the humanity of any people regardless of their national origin.
- (3) We value ideological and cultural diversity as sources of strength and richness. We welcome community members across the ideological spectrum so long as they treat fellow community members with dignity and care. We expect community members to engage respectfully across differences in beliefs and practices.

Building Community Together

Vision statements and guiding principles serve important institutional functions, but Atara is ultimately defined by what community members do, not what community leaders say. While the organizing team takes responsibility for the important role community leaders must play, we ask for your continued help in the holy work of building our community. Being in community requires hard work and the capacity for some discomfort, but we fervently believe it is well worth it. We are lucky to be part of a community as rich, vibrant, and beloved as Atara. Thank you for being our partners in this rewarding project.