

Tisha B'Av Guide:

על אלה אני בוכיה

For What are We Crying? Connecting the Disconnect on Tisha B'Av

Session Outline

*This session includes two activities. Activity 1 helps the participants better understand their relationship to loss. The second activity helps us connect to the themes of specific kinot. It corresponds to a quote in the session (see the ***) from Erica Brown's book In the Narrow Places, about images helping us connect to Tisha B'Av liturgy. This activity and can be found at the end of the session outline and can be used independently of the rest of the session.*

Activity 1:

Goal: What losses do we mourn? Why do we mourn some things more easily than others?

Distribute a set of six pictures, depicting various losses to every group member: (The pictures can be found at the end of the session outline)

- 1) You may not sleep in the white house tomorrow night
- 2) You lose your phone for 1 hour
- 3) Losing an autograph from a singer you admire
- 4) Can't get to a friends party
- 5) No morning coffee today
- 6) Not included in a group chat

What to do: Ask the group members to rank the losses by putting the cards in order from what they believe to be the most significant loss to the least (emphasize the fact that there is no right or wrong answer, that everyone should be honest and answer what they personally feel, not what they think others will do or what they think they're "supposed to" say)

Then go around the group and ask NCSYers to discuss what criteria went into their ranking of the loss

Point out the following two ideas about mourning

1. When we don't connect to or appreciate something, if it's not something we value, its loss is not as significant
2. We feel loss when we expect something and our current reality does not have it (we expect to be included in a group but we're left out, we expect to have our phones but it gets taken away- when reality doesn't match with what we know we could have, we get upset)

When do we cry?

Rebbetzin Heller

We cry when we experience a disparity between what we see as potential vs current reality.

What makes us sad, or brings us to tears is when we expect something to be a certain way, but our reality doesn't reflect what we expect to be; when we see a potential for life to be a certain way and it's not. You might cry when you don't do well on a test because you studied hard and know you had the potential to receive a certain grade, but the number you see on your paper doesn't match with the potential you saw for yourself. A person might cry when she doesn't get elected for G.O. because she saw a potential for herself to be president, but her currently reality is that she will not be president. When you lose something special to you, you'll probably be upset and cry because you could have had that item with you but in reality it's not there anymore.

The same is true when it comes to the Beit Hamikdash. What causes us to cry in its absence is the fact that we don't have something we know we could; that our reality in galus does not match with the potential life we could have with the Beit Hamikdash present. But if we cannot cry over the loss of the Mikdash we are missing one of two things: we either don't fully believe or understand the potential of the Beit Hamikdash to exist and how it would change our lives, or we don't really comprehend the reality of our galus and what we are missing here.



→ Ask campers to provide their own examples of this phenomenon

Keren Gottlieb Story

Israeli teacher broke the devastating news to Ethiopian families who still thought that the Beit Hamikdash was standing, that it was actually destroyed over 2,000 years ago

http://www.aish.com/h/9av/aas/The_Heart_Rending_Cry.html?s=srcon

(See full story available in print at the end of the session outline)

We cry when reality and potential do not align. These Ethiopian families mourned because the Beit Hamikdash was real to them and suddenly that reality was taken away.

Rabbi Akiva Tatz, The Thinking Jew's Guide to Life, simpletoremember.com

Happiness is doing what you should be doing -The face may reflect pain, the face may be tear-stained and taut with strain; but if the journey is proceeding, if you are aware that you are building what you must build, your heart will be singing within you, despite the pain of your body and the tears on your face.

If happiness is doing what we should be doing, growing in the way we should be. Perhaps mourning and crying are a result of a lack of happiness when we don't feel fulfilled, when we don't feel like we're living up to our potential

Yonasan Goldson- <https://www.learning-mind.com/why-do-we-cry/>

True happiness comes from feeling part of something greater than oneself, from working toward a higher purpose with a sense of positive, forward motion. True sorrow comes from feeling stymied in the attainment of one's potential and held back from fulfilling the reason for one's existence. Crying is a response to these extremes: we cry when we feel absolutely connected, or absolutely disconnected, from the part we are destined to play on stage of eternity.

Why is it so hard to mourn the loss of the Beit HaMikdash?

A Love Story, Samantha Barnette- Rectifying the Divine Relationship

Sometimes it can be difficult for us to relate to the loss of a Temple we never knew and a relationship with G-d we never experienced. We don't even know anyone who has known it!



→ “We don't even know anyone who has known it!”- Are there people in our lives now that we can look at to gain a greater understanding of what a real relationship with HaShem is supposed to be?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe- Daas Shlomo

"We should contemplate how the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash affects us, and if we find that it does not affect us in a significant way, then we should at least anguish that we are so disconnected."

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Around the Maggid's Table, ArtScroll Publications, p. 105

“I cry because I don't know what there is to cry about.”

We should be crying for the mere fact that we're so far removed from the tragedies of Tisha B'Av- we're crying for our lack of understanding of what we're missing

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Vol. III, p. 284

We feel satisfied, even with all the suffering surrounding us, as if we are not lacking anything physical or spiritual at all. This feeling prevents us from being able to properly mourn the destruction, as we cannot feel nor sense what, in essence, we are missing.



→ According to Rabbi Friedlander what prevents us from mourning the churban? Give specific examples of the phenomenon he describes.

How can we mourn something we never experienced?

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Vol. III, p. 284

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to learn and understand the deep consequences of the destruction and to feel and understand how our situation has declined from the time of the destruction until now."



→ What is our world lacking since the time of the Beit Hamikdash?

*****Erica Brown- In the Narrow Places (p.94)**

"Where words fail us, images sometimes help create the picture of a loss. A destroyed Jerusalem as a mourning mother is an image we may all sadly recognize. We will never see a howling sun which refused to shine, and yet the imaginative powers are drawn to highlight the absurdity of it. Destruction, too, has both these faces: the pitiful and the absurd. On these days when our national history speaks to us in its melancholy voice, it asks us to stretch the imagination and make what is animate, still, and what is inanimate weep"-in discussing the value of personification of the suffering of the time period, emphasizing how crucial it is to make it applicable and personal from its original formulation.

****See activity at the end that relates to this quote**

Are we afraid to mourn?

Erica Brown-In the Narrow Places (p.4)

"We have to remind ourselves that we don't diminish our happiness when we spend a day or a few weeks meditating on the tragedies of history from which we emerged. We become more grateful, holding on tightly to our blessed lives because we can."



→ Can you think of a time that sadness made you feel grateful for what you had?

How can mourning/crying be productive?

Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit 30b

One who understands the loss of the Temple, will be motivated to embark on its rebuilding

A Love Story, Samantha Barnette- Rectifying the Divine Relationship

Most importantly, we don't cry because we feel hopeless. We cry to change ourselves. We cry because through tears we hope to grow. This world was created for us to connect with G-d, and we must cultivate our inner longing to unite with Him. Our relationships with each other are a taste of this divine relationship. With that in mind, how could we not direct every effort into developing and cultivating them? How can we settle for anything less?

Erica Brown- In the Narrow Places (p.77)

Rabbi Lamm speaks of three types of tears: the tears that come when our myths of absolute security and certainty are shattered; the tears of those who resign themselves to hopelessness; and the tears of those who cry over reality, not from frustration or resignation, but from determination to change and renew that reality. Jewish crying fits the last of these three categories: the act of crying, according to Rabbi Lamm, is the beginning of transformation - the tears are those of protest and resolute purpose.

Conclusion

There are a number of reasons why it is difficult for us to mourn the loss of the Beit Hamikdash.

- We never experienced life with a Beit Hamikdash
- It is hard to imagine a future with a Beit Hamikdash - it can feel out of reach that it will one day be rebuilt.

- We generally lead satisfying lives with seemingly little lacking in our lives. Life is good as it is.
- If we recognize what we are lacking we choose not to focus on it for fear that it will diminish our happiness

It is important to learn about the glory of the Beit Hamikdash. We need to recognize that acknowledging that our lives are incomplete today, does not have to make us unhappy, but will further our growth, and make us more grateful for what we have. We need to believe in our own potential to build a better world including a Beit Hamikdash. Tears and mourning can motivate that change. Recognizing the reality of our loss and our potential to rebuild is a key to growth.

Realize. Recognize. Respond.

where we are now

where we could be

what can we do to get there?

Activity 1 Pictures:



You lose your phone for 1 hour



Sorry, you can't sleep in the White House tonight



No morning coffee today



You were excluded from a group your friends made

CANCELLED

You're not allowed to go to the party tonight



You lost an autograph you got from your favorite singer!

****** Addendum Activity (based off of Erica Brown quote about visualization):**

This activity requires a Hebrew English kinot for each participant. The goal is help the participants better relate to the kinot and the churban thru pictures.

Part I: Present the following visuals from **Group A** to the participants: (pictures provided at end of the session outline)

Pencil with broken point

Homes post hurricane

Cracked iPhone screen

Messy bedroom

Car broken down

Faucet with no running water

Ask session participants to choose an image and ask them to describe how it makes them feel.

Encourage as many descriptive words as possible to express the emotion they feel when looking at the picture.

Part II: The Kinot use imagery in a similar way to depict that tragic loss of the churban. In order to best feel the loss we are given descriptive imagery to relate to the destruction.

Study each of the following kinot (31, 384, 21, 25, 45, 386, 41) and choose one of the images from **Group B** (hunger, lost and found, “who’s your hero”, mourning mother, Holocaust, child crying in grandparent’s arms, Jewish oppression, memory box) to best depict the content of each of the kinot. Match the picture to the appropriate kinah.

Suggested answers are found in the chart below.

Images	Kinah	Additional Points for Consideration
Mourning Mother, Hunger, Child Crying in Grandparent's Arms	<u>45-Eli Tzion:</u> This kinnah details what was lost as a result of the destruction, and why it is so tragic. It compares cries of mourning to the cries of a woman in childbirth.	These images help connect to a time period that may seem distant. The pictures evoke emotion and allow participants to see the pain as real and relatable.
“Who’s Your Hero”	<u>21-Arzei Halevanon:</u> Kinnah that focuses on the Asara Harugei Malchut - great leaders and heroes of the Jewish people.	The Roman’s brutally murdered the Jewish leaders, heroes, and role models of the time. Who are the heroes in your life? Why are they important to you?
Memory box	<u>31-Esh Tukad:</u> This kinnah compares the great joy that the Jews experienced when they left Egypt to the terrible pain they felt when they left Jerusalem. It describes the reversal of events which started out with great potential only to end tragically. Joyous times became a distant memory	The Jewish people’s positive memories and experiences were transformed to visions of pain and loss. How do positive memories help us? What does it mean to lose a memory? Think of a happy time you experienced and imagine how it would feel for that experience to be taken from you.
Lost and Found	<u>41- Sha’ali Serufa Ba’esh:</u> This kinnah was written in reference to the burning of the Talmud manuscripts that took place in Paris in 1242. Precious books were lost forever.	In the times of the destruction, precious items of the Jewish community such as sefarim, manuscripts and valuables were taken away and some burned before their own eyes. Think what it would be like for your own precious items to be taken from you
Holocaust	<u>Kinnot 384 and 386</u>	This Kinnah is unique in that it was actually written much later than the rest and describes a time of pain and loss that we are much closer to. As a nation we’ve experienced great suffering from the times of the destruction and throughout history until today. If a modern day kinah was written, what might be the subject?
Antisemitism and Oppression (“No Jews” sign)	<u>25- Mi Yiten Roshi Mayim:</u> This kinnah was written to commemorate the events of the First Crusade in 1096. Jews were targeted because of their religion.	From the times of the destruction through today we’ve been an outcast nation. Where in recent times can you see Jews being targeted because of their religion?

Activity 2 Pictures: GROUP A





GROUP B



**Who Is
Your Hero?**





***Full Keren Gottlieb story from above “Why do we cry?” section**

The Heart-Rending Cry

Aug 2, 2003

by Keren Gottlieb

How is it possible to mourn something that happened 2000 years ago?

Every year when Tisha B'Av came around, I would have a certain dilemma. This is supposed to be a day on which we mourn the destruction of our Temple. It is a day when we do not eat, drink or wear leather shoes and follow varied and unique mourning customs. Every year I would arrive at the synagogue to hear the Book of Lamentations, which bemoans the destruction of Jerusalem. However, every year I would end up daydreaming about totally unrelated things. As the cantor would be reading about the Temple, I would completely disconnect, planning my summer vacation, celebrating the end of my exams, or just hoping that the fast will go well this year. It's difficult to be truly mournful over something that took place 2000 years ago – something that we've never seen and don't really feel lacking in our daily life. But all that was about to change.

The Turning Point

As part of my army service in the Israeli army I was placed, to my delight, in a teachers' unit. I served at the Bat Hatzor caravan site located near Gedera. The site held 700 caravans, which housed thousands of new Ethiopian immigrants. In the mornings I taught immigrants at the Yad Shabtai School in Ashdod. In the afternoon and evening hours I served as a counselor on the site. This was shortly after Operation Solomon in 1993, during which roughly 14,500 Jews from Ethiopia were airlifted to Israel. It was a special and moving operation, and the entire Israeli population was surprised to see that suddenly there were Jews walking around here who had, in fact, been severed from our nation many generations ago.

They observed Shabbat, were familiar with most of the holidays and kept Jewish tradition in a devout and traditional manner. But it was clear that they didn't know everything; the separation they had undergone throughout all those years had influenced their system of traditions.

They had never heard of Independence Day or Yom Yerushalayim, or even about Purim or Chanukah – none of the latter historical events that took place subsequent to their break-off from the Jewish nation.

I realized that unless I concentrate on filling these gaps of knowledge, their adjustment in Israel would never be complete. I decided to allot a considerable amount of time each day to teach them about Judaism.

Passover and Ascending to the Temple

The month of Nissan had arrived and I started teaching about the holiday of Passover. My class consisted of 20 students, grades 3-6. (They were placed according to their reading level rather than chronological age.) These children had come to Israel only a few months beforehand and more than anything else, they loved to hear stories, mainly because they didn't have to read or write in Hebrew which was still quite a difficult task for some of them.

My plan was to first connect Passover to the other holidays by very briefly reviewing the three major festivals during the year when the Jewish nation would ascend to Jerusalem.

"Today is the first day of Nissan and Passover is celebrated on this month," I began. "Passover is one of the three festivals when the entire Jewish people used to go to Jerusalem to the Temple."

At this point, a student jumped up, cutting me off in mid-sentence. "Teacher, have you ever been to the Temple?"

I smiled at him, realizing that he was somewhat confused. "No, of course not. That was a very long time ago!"

My student was insistent, and a few more pairs of eyes joined him. "Fine, it was a long time ago. But were you there? Were you at the Temple a long time ago?"

I smiled again, this time slightly confused myself. "*Doesn't he understand? Perhaps my Hebrew is too difficult for him,*" I thought.

"No, of course not. That was a *very* long time ago!"

Now the rest of the students joined him in an uproar. "You've never been there?" "Teacher, what's it like being in the Temple?" "What does the Temple look like?"

"Quiet!" I tried calming everyone down. "Listen everyone – there is no Temple! There used to be a Temple many years ago but today we don't have a Temple. It was destroyed, burned down. I have never been to it, my father's never been to it, and my grandfather has never been to it! We haven't had a Temple for 2000 years!"

I said these words over and over, having a very hard time believing that this was so strange for them to hear. What's the big deal? This is the reality with which we've all grown up. Why are they so bothered by it?

The tumult in the class was steadily increasing. They began talking amongst themselves in Amharic, arguing, translating, explaining, shouting, as I lost total control over the class. When the bell rang, they collected their things and ran home. I left the school exhausted and utterly confused.

Next Day's Surprise

The next morning I was hardly bothered by the previous day's events. In fact, I had nearly forgotten all about the incident. That day I had planned to just teach math, geometry and other secular subjects.

I got off the bus and leisurely made my way toward the school. As I neared the gate the guard approached me, seeming a bit alarmed. "Tell me," he said, "do you have any idea what's going on here today?"

I tried recalling a special activity that was supposed to be going on, or some ceremony that I had forgotten about, but nothing exceptional came to mind.

"Why do you ask?" I asked him. "What happened?"

He didn't answer. He only pointed towards the entrance to the school.

I raised my head and saw a sizeable gathering of Ethiopian adult immigrants – apparently, my students' parents. *What are they doing here? And what are they yelling about?*

I went over to them, attempting to understand what was the matter from the little Amharic that I knew.

As I came closer, everyone quieted down. One of the adults who's Hebrew was on a higher level, asked me, "Are you our children's teacher?"

"Yes," I answered. "What is the matter, sir?"

"Our children came home yesterday and told us that their teacher taught them that the Temple in Jerusalem no longer exists. Who would tell them such a thing?" He looked at me in anger.

"I told them that. We were discussing the Temple and I felt that they were a bit confused. So I explained to them that the Temple had been burned down thousands of years ago and that today, we no longer have a Temple. That's all. What's all the fuss about?"

He was incredulous. "What? What are you talking about?"

I was more confused than ever. "I don't understand. What are you all so angry about? I simply reminded them of the fact that the Temple was destroyed and that it no longer exists today."

Another uproar – this one even louder than before.

The representative quieted the others down, and again turned to me. "Are you sure?"

"Am I sure that the Temple was destroyed? Of course I'm sure!" I couldn't hide my smile. What a strange scene.

The man turned to his friends and in a dramatic tone translated what I had told him. At this point, things seemed to be finally sinking in.

Now, however, a different scene commenced: one woman fell to the ground, a second broke down in tears. A man standing by them just stared at me in disbelief. A group of men began quietly talking amongst themselves, very fast, in confusion and disbelief. The children stood on the side, looking on in great puzzlement. Another woman suddenly broke into a heart-rending cry. Her husband came over to her to hug her.

I stood there in utter shock.

I felt as if I had just brought them the worst news possible. It was as if I had just told them about the death of a loved one. I stood there across from a group of Jews who were genuinely mourning the destruction of the Temple.

Tisha B'Av

A few months later it was Tisha B'Av. I had already been discharged from the army, on my way to college, and my military service seemed as if it had been such a very long time ago.

As I did every year, I went to synagogue. Everyone was already seated on the floor (as is customary for mourners), and I was waiting to hear the Book of Lamentations. I had expected, as in previous years, for this to be a time for some daydreaming and hoped I wouldn't get too hungry.

The *megillah* reading began, and I started reading the first two verses.

"Alas, she sits in solitude...like a widow...She weeps bitterly in the night and her tear is on her cheek. She has no comforter from all her paramours; all her friends have betrayed her, they have become her enemies."

Suddenly that first day of Nissan began replaying in my mind. The angry looks of those children. The parents' screams. The mothers' crying. The men's pitiful silence. The shock they were overcome with as they received the terrible news as if I had just told them about the death of a loved one.

At that moment, I understood.

I understood that this was exactly how we are supposed to mourn the Temple on Tisha B'Av. We are supposed to cry over the loss of the unity and peace throughout the entire world. We are supposed to lament the disappearance of the Divine Presence and holiness from our lives in Israel. We are supposed to be pained by the destruction of our spiritual center, which served to unify the entire Jewish nation.

We're supposed to feel as if something very precious has been taken away from us forever. We are meant to cry, to be shocked and angry, to break down. We are supposed to mourn over the destruction of the Temple, to cry over a magnificent era that has been uprooted from the face of the earth. The incredible closeness that we had with God – that feeling that He is truly within us – has evaporated and disappeared into thin air.

Now when Tisha B'Av rolls around, I go back to that incident with my students and their parents and try to reconnect to the meaningful lesson that they taught me – what it truly means to mourn for the loss of our holy Temple.