



# SENSELESS HATRED

## Activities and Discussions for Our Time of Division

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On Tisha B'Av, the Jewish people remember the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem. It is a time of mourning for our exile from our political, spiritual, and ancestral homeland. On Tisha B'Av we spend a day collectively reflecting on the plight of our ancestors—now refugees who were forced to migrate.

If we only spend time remembering our own long history of persecution, however, we are missing a profound lesson of the day. We also reconnect to these memories so that we can empathize with others who are experiencing pain and suffering. In the words of Dr. Brené Brown, “Empathy is a choice, and it’s a vulnerable choice. In order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling.”

Maybe if we took some time to better understand why the Temples were destroyed we would empathize with other people who are currently suffering. While the Rabbis provide us with a number of different rationales, the most famous of reasons for our destruction and exile was *Sinat Chinam*, “hatred without cause”. As the Talmud says:

But why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, observing the laws, and giving *tzedakah*? Because therein prevailed *Sinat Chinam*, hatred without cause. That teaches you that senseless hatred is considered as of even gravity with the three sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed together (Yoma 9b)

This is making a significant claim as to the severity of *Sinat Chinam*, but what is the definition of hatred without cause? It seems to be groundless animosity brought on without provocation. I would not say that hatred as a response to something with a rationale is good per se, but at least in that situation there is a pathway to reconciliation. The challenge of *Sinat Chinam* is that its origin seems to be without cause. How do you repair something if it’s impossible to tell why it broke in the first place?

Unlike any time in recent history, we are living in a world of hatred without cause. We are seeing a tremendous spike in anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism, misogyny, incitement, acts of hatred, and a general lack of civility like no other time in recent American history. As I write this, we are still reeling from the most recent [wave of hate-fueled gun violence](#). It is especially clear that the toxic combination of hateful rhetoric and easily available weapons present a national crisis. Many of these shootings were influenced by white supremacist ideology, the aim of which is to annihilate “others”; in this case, immigrants and communities of color (or “invaders” as the El Paso perpetrator said). Hateful supremacist doctrine is an affront to us as Jews, who deeply empathize with the experience of being “othered.”

As a companion to [the resource of text and discussion to reflect on the immigrant experience in the spirit of the Three Weeks in the context of today’s events](#) we wanted to share other modalities to help you with campers explore issues of xenophobia and senseless hatred on Tisha B'Av. For additional resources, please contact Rabbi Avi Orlow at [avi@jewishcamp.org](mailto:avi@jewishcamp.org).

## ACTIVITY # 1

**Name:** Love Without Cause

**Description:** Two videos to explore how we show up in the face of discomfort

**Materials:** A way to stream two videos

**Activity:**

Below we have two different stories, offered to show a striking contrast; one of senseless hatred and one of welcoming a complete stranger. These two stories shed light into two very different ways to treat others and the different outcomes that came of those actions.

The story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza is the telling of a series of events that lead to the destruction of the Second Temple ([Gittin 55b-56a](#)). Watch this bimbam video for a nice summary the story -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6t3Zm7nMTg>

This is a story of senseless hatred. What could have happened if Bar Kamtza was allowed to stay at the party? What is the opposite of senseless hatred?

The next clip from Seth Meyers is an exploration of what might be considered the opposite of senseless hatred. This is surely a story we need right now.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MG2dCGTSFBs&feature=youtu.be>

How might we show up and make the party better? If we are planning the party, how can we ensure that more people are included and feel welcome?

**Reflection:** In a day commemorating senseless hatred, what would it take for us to show up with love without cause?

- What do we have to do to make others feel welcomed?
- What is a time from this summer where you may have excluded someone, made someone not feel welcome, or not shown up as fully as you could have?
- How do we help each other be present and love without cause?

## ACTIVITY # 2:

**Name:** Best Friends

**Description:** Social Laddering Activity

**Materials:** Circle stickers with the numbers 1, 2 and 3 written on them.

**Activity:**

- With the group in a circle, make sure that you have consent to place a sticker on their forehead.
- Make sure to place either a 1, 2, or 3 on their forehead without them knowing their own number while trying to keep the amount of 2's or 3's the same with fewer 1's.
- Explain the following: 1's are your best friends, you want to make as many of the best friends as possible. 2's are the people that you like but you still want to make best friends with the 1's. 3's are people that you don't know and while you do not want to be mean you really want to see your best friends, the number 1's.
- Provide the group 5 minutes to mingle around the room and try to meet as many people as possible.
- After the activity, ask people to share what number they thought they were

- Once a couple of people have identified their numbers, have people who were different numbers share their experiences of being part of that group.

**Reflection:** This activity can open the door to conversation about the hierarchy of privilege and the implications of assigning greater inherent value to certain types of people over others.

- Many of the people who go to Jewish summer camp tend to be in the societal position of the 1's and 2's. What does this mean for the 3's, and what is our responsibility?
- What does it feel like being excluded without cause? would it take for us to show up with love without cause.
- Beyond the game what are times that you have felt like a 3?
- What are times that you made someone else feel like a 3?
- What do we have to do to make others feel welcomed?

### **ACTIVITY # 3:**

**Name:** Social Norms

**Description:** Help People Empathize With Newcomers

**Materials:** None

**Activity:**

- Sit the group in a circle for a quick game!
- Ask for 3-5 (depending on the size of your group) individuals to leave the room briefly.
- While they are gone, ask the group to come up with some customs that they can easily do. (Examples: whenever anyone says camp everyone claps, whenever someone says up everyone pats their head, whenever a question is asked the two people next to them have to say "that's a good question")
- The group inside the room practices these customs to make sure they have them memorized.
- Then the volunteers are invited back in. The facilitator leads a conversation with the group with a simple question like "What was the best part of your day so far?" and the group that was inside the room follows the customs as the conversation happens.

**Reflection:** After a few minutes, the facilitator asks the following questions:

- To those who were outside of the room earlier, how did you feel when you walked in? What did you think was happening?
- Did you try to learn the customs or ignore them?
- To those who were inside the room, did you try to include anyone in our new customs?
- How did you feel when you realized they didn't know the things we all did?