

### The End of Baseless Hatred: Jewish Unity + Tisha B'Av *Elective 2*

<b>AUTHOR(S):</b>	Meir Balofsky and Caroline Rothstein
<b>SUMMARY:</b>	A fresh look at Jewish unity, pluralism, and the end of baseless hatred through the lens of Tisha B'Av (aka the saddest day of the Jewish calendar and the most important summer "festival" during camp season!). All are welcome; no previous knowledge of any or all things Tisha B'Av are required! - <i>Submitted by Meir Balofsky and Caroline Rothstein</i>
<b>TOPIC(S):</b>	Tisha B'Av, Pluralism
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b>	Participants will leave this session with a deeper degree of awareness of how we are conditioned and how we are both pawns and perpetrators of a hate feed (aka hateful "newsfeeds").
<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	While any age range is appropriate, we recommend thinking about which age groups at your camp are most receptive to critical thinking and constructive dialogue.
<b>TIMING:</b>	90 minutes
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	Talmud in Yoma 9B
<b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appendices</li> <li>• Blank paper</li> <li>• Writing utensils</li> <li>• Flip chart/poster board paper</li> <li>• Participants' phones (if your camp is tech-free, it is absolutely possible to either remove the tech-focused activity below and/or adjust the activity so that it does not rely on technology/smartphone use.</li> </ul>
<b>SET-UP DETAILS:</b>	Either a circle of chairs or a set up around tables where people are both able to see everyone for the group conversations and discussions and/or feel comfortable writing.

#### **SESSION TIMELINE & OUTLINE:**

Welcome everyone to the session. Say that we will dive right in to an opening exercise.

#### **OPENING EXERCISE: (5 minutes)**

Begin with a Free-write activity.

Participants are given the following prompts (60 seconds each) to respond openly to:

- 1) What does it mean to honor the past?
- 2) What does it mean to mourn the present?
- 3) What does it mean to pray for the future?

Asks for volunteers to share some of their responses.

### **TISHA B'AV 101: (10 minutes)**

Offer that today's goal is to learn about Tisha B'Av both as a way to engage with and honor it at camp and beyond, as well as use it as a lens for engaging with Jewish pluralism.

Short history for background / refresher:

- Tisha B'Av - literally the 9th day of the Jewish month of Av
- The first "Tisha B'Av": In the desert after the Exodus - there was not supposed to be 40 year of "wandering." The plan had been, Exodus, Receive the Torah, Build the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and go straight to the promised land. Moses dispatched 12 "spies" to visit the land in advance and report back. 10 of the 12 spies gave a report indicating that while the land may be bountiful, the inhabitants will kill us and the nation is doomed. The nation was convinced that Israel would be a death sentence and they rejected the land, even suggesting they'd best return to slavery in Egypt. Due to this lack of trust in God and rejection of Israel, the generation was sentenced to die out over the subsequent 40 (38.5) years. This happened on Tisha B'Av.
- In 586 BCE the First Temple in Judea was destroyed and burned on Tisha B'Av by the Babylonian Empire (was rebuilt in 516 shortly after the Purim story)
- In 70 CE the Second Temple was destroyed and burned on Tisha B'Av by the Roman. Was not yet rebuilt as of this writing.
- A goal of Tisha B'Av is to challenge the age old adage that "time heals wounds" by asking us to not be complacent and forget our pasts.

The practices and rituals of Tisha B'Av today are in place to support this goal:

Some practices today include (for many communities):

- Fasting
- Sitting on the floor
- Not bathing or greeting each other, reminiscent of sitting shiva
- Trying to make ourselves feel the sadness/grief

Ask participants: what have you done, seen, or practiced both at camp and elsewhere? Is there anything specific or unique that happens at your camp for Tisha B'Av?

Do a quick round of responses to allow the group to hear some of the diversity of practices - and also note that after the session, "Please feel free to follow up with anyone about their unique observances of Tisha B'av to get more information and ask any questions."

### **TEXT STUDY + NEWSFEED ACTIVITY (25 minutes):**

Hand out "Talmud in Yoma 9B" reading and have participants break into cchevruta/pairs to read. Suggest as a cchevruta model: in your groups of two or three, read it privately and circle or highlight words or phrase that stand out to you and then use those highlighted/circled parts as a structure for discussion.

ALTERNATIVELY: Distribute "Talmud in Yoma 9B" and have each participant individually read privately and circle/ highlight words or phrases that stand out to you. Then have them break up into chevrotas of 2 or 3 and discuss the text, giving the choice to use the highlights as a starting point or basis for the discussion.

Short group discussion naming any significant points from chevruta/groups.

Now, ask everyone to consider the following text (written flip chart paper):

The greatest problem with 'baseless hatred' is that we convince ourselves that it's not baseless.

Rabbi Ari Kahn

**Ask participants to take out their phone:** Open up to your newsfeed or whatever social media platform you use frequently.

Scroll for 60 seconds (don't click, don't dwell, just keep scrolling). Look at the items and try to notice if any of the posts you're seeing, while keeping Rabbi Ari Kahn's words in mind:

- inspires / encourages hate
- inspires / encourages jealousy
- inspires / encourages divisiveness

In a large group discussion, ask/answer the following questions as participants consider their newsfeeds:

- How much of what we see on our newsfeed was put there to make us feel jealous?
- What percentage of what we are "fed" in our newsfeed was intended to spark hate?
- Is all hate created equally, or are there degrees to hate?

Other questions for the facilitator to consider - either directly to/for the group, or when facilitating the conversation:

- Is jealousy perhaps an accomplice to hate? How much of what we see on our newsfeed was put there to make the audience feel jealous. (i.e. "Be jealous of me - look what I'm doing!"). Might this also promote hatred by way of jealousy?
- Is there a way to have humility and recognition that we may be creating jealousy while still sharing and posting one's highlight reel of life?
- Do people justify their behavior (online and in real life) that might be considered to have a degree of hate by thinking it's the right thing?
- It's often easy to feel in solidarity and to "preach to the choir" to people with whom we are in agreement. What about how we communicate with people who think differently than we do?
- How often do you/we post something in our newsfeed that we justify as being ok - even if it includes a degree of hate - by telling ourselves we are right and/or "the good person" here?

### **REFRAMING THE STORY ACTIVITY (20 minutes):**

Consider: Have you ever latched on to the first version you heard of story? Have you ever seen anyone else do that? Have you ever seen the media or society at large do that? Choose one of the following fairy tales (or pick a different one, as long as there is a clear protagonist and villain):

- Little Red Riding Hood
- The Three Little Pigs
- Beauty and the Beast

Imagine YOU are the villain in the story. Tell your buddy what happened from YOUR point of view! Take a few minutes to prepare some thoughts and notes and then present your tale of woe!

(NOTE: There are multiple perspectives! Usually far more than two!)

Some follow up questions to consider as a larger group:

- What was your experience as a listener? As the sharer?
- Did this activity - whether as the listener/sharer - impact your ability to garner/have empathy?

Now, transition into larger group discussion questions addressing: “What can we do now?” and “How can we look to a brighter future?”

- Do you ever find that it's easier to look at other cultures and religious experiences - outside of Judaism - with respect and admiration, rather than other groups of Jews who have different religious practices than you do?
- Is there a group of Jews that come to mind for you whereby you default to saying, “Oh, they are simply wrong and messing up the rest of us”? How does that make you feel? Where do you think that default thinking comes from? Do you want to change that default thought?
- Consider an idea that often, when Rabbis/community leaders teach and preach about unity they are often speaking to their own community, which is generally a singular demographic. How often is this message given to an intersection of various Jewish groups?
- How can you actually bring the larger part of what you're learning at Cornerstone (a space that often represents a large spectrum of Jewish experiences, though clearly not all) back to your camp and all of your Jewish and other communities?

### **A CALL TO COFFEE ACTIVITY (25 minutes):**

As an opportunity to practicing putting this last section of questions into play, gather into chevruta with someone else in the session that you don't already know. You're going to have a “coffee hang out.”

First, each participant considers and writes down/shares three “Jewish-related causes” or “priorities” about which they are most passionate.

Then, find someone in the group with whom you have not yet engaged and share your list.

- a) You must now include ONE of your partner's causes in your list!. Where will this fourth cause rank? Defend your position to your partner
- b) Imagine that a donor has offered to fund one of the six causes listed between the two of you. Together you must decide which cause gets the funds.

Come back together as a larger group. Consider some of the following questions:

- What was that activity like?
- What from today's session were you able to put into play when both sharing with and listening to your partner?
- Did your partner share things you agreed with and/or disagreed with?
- How can you use one-on-one “coffee hang” conversations both at camp and beyond to end baseless help and build pluralist Jewish dialogue and community?

### **CLOSING: (5 minutes)**

Ask participants to go around the room and share their main takeaways from today's session (can include how they might bring this kind of programming/insight back to camp).

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR BRINGING IT BACK TO CAMP:**

- There are multiple ways to use this session both in its entirety and/or as separate activities.
- Some of the ways this program/session can be used include (and are not limited to):
  - Teaching about pluralism and Tisha B'Av.
  - Teaching about ending baseless hate at large.
  - Teaching about pluralism at large.
  - Preparing staff and/or campers who are leading Tisha B'Av programming to have a stronger sense about what they are putting together.