

WITHIN THE BORDERS

A Text Study & Discussion Guide on the Border Crisis

The Three Weeks between the 17th of Tammuz (when Jerusalem's walls were breached by the Romans) and Tisha B'Av (the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem) are a time of mourning called *Bein ha-Metzarim* - "Between the Straits" or, literally, "Within the Borders." This period commemorates our exile, leading us to collectively mourn for the plight of our refugee ancestors. If Jews only use this time to reconnect with our own long history of persecution, however, we are missing a profound lesson. We reconnect to our own memories of oppression so 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."

As you prepare your camp programming in the weeks leading up to Tisha B'Av, we know many camps are looking to connect the lessons of our history with current events. The refugee crisis is a continually evolving situation, and we recommend reading the most up-to-date information on detention and abuse of immigrants at the US border before this discussion. To supplement that information and provide a Jewish lens to help facilitate discussions around the topic, we offer the resources and discussion questions below to reflect on the modern immigrant experience in the spirit of the Three Weeks and in the context of today's events.

EMPATHIZING WITH THE STRANGER

1. Lamentations 5:3

We have become orphans, fatherless;
our mothers are like widows.

תּוֹמִים הָיִינוּ וְאֵין אָב אִמְתֵּינוּ כְּאִלְמָנוֹת;

2. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Loving the Stranger* (2008)

It is terrifying in retrospect to grasp how seriously the Torah took the phenomenon of xenophobia, hatred of the stranger. It is as if the Torah were saying with the utmost clarity: reason is insufficient. Sympathy is inadequate. Only the force of history and memory is strong enough to form a counterweight to hate.

Why should you not hate the stranger? – asks the Torah. Because you once stood where he stands now. You know the heart of the stranger because you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt. If you are human, so is he. If he is less than human, so are you. You must fight the hatred in your heart as I once fought the greatest ruler and the strongest empire in the ancient world on your behalf. I made you into the world's archetypal strangers so that you would fight for the rights of strangers – for your own and those of others, wherever they are, whoever they are, whatever the color of their skin or the nature of their culture, because though they are not in your image – says G-d – they are nonetheless in Mine. There is only one reply strong enough to answer the question: Why should I not hate the stranger? Because the stranger is me.

3. Emma Lazarus, *The New Colossus**

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"



*Lazarus, inspired by her Jewish heritage and her experiences with refugees, wrote the sonnet in 1883 to raise money for the construction of a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. In 1903, words from the sonnet were inscribed on a plaque on the pedestal.

DISCUSSION

- 1) We read Lamentations on Tisha B'Av. What is the connection between this idea of being a widow or an orphan and being marginalized as a stranger?
- 2) How does the call to care for a stranger connect to what it means to be Jewish?
- 3) How does the call to care for a stranger connect to what it means to be American? If you are not from the US, how do you relate to this?
- 4) Are there other people who we might want to include in this category of people who are being marginalized?

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY?

1. Exodus 22:20-23

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.

If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me,

and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

וְגַר לֹא-תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ: כִּי-גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
כָּל-אֶלְמָנָה וְיָתוּם לֹא תַעֲנוּן
אִם-עָנָה תַעֲנֶנָּה אִתּוֹ כִּי אִם-צָעַק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע
צָעַקְתּוּ
וְחָרָה אַפִּי וְהִרְגַתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּחָרֵב וְהָיוּ נְשֵׁיכֶם אֶלְמָנוֹת
וּבְנֵיכֶם יָתוּמִים

2. Ibn Ezra on Exodus 22:23

After it says, "Do not oppress" in the plural the language changes to be singular..., for anyone who sees a person oppressing an orphan or a widow and does not come to their aid, they will also be considered oppressors.

ואחר שאמר לא תענון לשון רבים אמר אם... תענה, כי כל רואה אדם שהוא מענה יתום ואלמנה ולא יעזרם, גם הוא יחשב מענה:

3. Rabbi A.J. Heschel

In a free society, some are guilty; all are responsible.

DISCUSSION

- 1) What is our responsibility – as Jews – to those who are being detained?
- 2) What is our responsibility – as Americans – to those who are being detained? If you are not from the US, what is your responsibility?
- 3) What is our responsibility – as human beings – to those who are being detained?

WHAT ACTION WILL WE TAKE?

1. Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak up for those without voice, for the right of all the unwanted. Speak up, pronounce a just verdict, champion the poor and the needy.

פְּתַח-פִּי לְאֵלִים אֶל-דָּוִן כָּל-בְּנֵי חִלּוּף:
פְּתַח-פִּי שְׁפֹט-צַדִּיק וְדִין עֲנִי וְאֶבְיֹן

2. Yevamot 87b

Silence is akin to acquiescence.

שתיקה כהודאה דמיא

3. Arik Einstein, excerpt from the lyrics to Ani V'Ata

You and I will try from the beginning

It will be tough for us, no matter, it's not too bad

Others have said it before me

But it doesn't matter -

You and I we'll change the world

אָנִי וְאַתָּה נִנְסָה מִהַתְחָלָה,
יְהִיָּה לָנוּ רַע, אֵין דְּבָר, זֶה לֹא נוֹרָא,
אָמְרוּ אֶת זֶה קוֹדֵם לְפָנַי,
זֶה לֹא מִשְׁנָה - אָנִי וְאַתָּה נִשְׁנָה אֶת הָעוֹלָם.

DISCUSSION

- 1) What actions can we take at camp or home to give voice to those who do not have a voice?
- 2) What actions can we take at camp or home to stop the abuse?
- 3) Are you and I enough to change the world? Who else might we partner with to be a champion for a stranger?

For additional resources, please contact Rabbi Avi Orlow at avi@jewishcamp.org.