

Breaking Bread and Building Bonds: Meaningful Meals for Cabin Community

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SUMMARY: In this session we will learn how to maximize our time at meals through memory making, cabin bonding, and story sharing for a stronger cabin, unit, and camp community.

GOALS:

At the end of our time together, you will be able to:

- Create a plan for mealtime with your campers and fellow staff
- Describe the benefits of communal eating, including the sacred obligation to be satisfied by your meal

AUDIENCE: This program is intended for cabin counselors, but the skills and activities are applicable for all ages.

TIMING: 75 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Songs and Blessings for Food ([link](#)) - 1/person
- 20 place settings for mealtime (plate, cup, fork, spoon, knife and napkin)
- 2 empty pitchers
- Tablecloths
- Flower vases
- Scissors
- Index cards
- Markers or crayons

SET-UP: To set the tone and stage for where the magic happens, we should gather in the dining hall (if possible) and gather around a dining table.

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:05 – *Introductions, setting group norms*
- 00:05-00:10 – *Story of Jewish Eating in Three Acts*
- 00:10-00:20 – *Eat: Self-care and Group Responsibility*
- 00:20-00:50 – *Be Satisfied: Activities for Adding Meaning*
- 00:50-00:65 – *Bless: Brich Rachamana (table dance) and/or Cup Game*
- 00:65-00:75 – *Final Thoughts and Questions*

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:05 – Introductions, setting group norms

Lead introduces session topic and leads group in a round of introductions (name, pronouns, camp, favorite camp meal)

00:05-00:10 – Story of Jewish Eating in Three Acts

Leader: You shall eat, be satisfied and bless (Deuteronomy 8:10). These three simple words set the stage for Jewish eating throughout time. And at camp, these three words will help you understand

What is your role at mealtimes?

00:10-00:20 – Eat: Self-care and Group Responsibility

One of a counselor's most important roles at mealtimes is to feed and hydrate yourself. The days are long, and meals are often short. In addition to your own physical needs, you are responsible for making sure that your campers are eating well and hydrating. This can be a lot. So, it can be useful to establish a mealtime buddy check system.

- How might campers help other campers make sure to eat well?
 - Buddy Check! – Campers check each other's plate for at least three different colors (condiments don't count!).
 - Other ideas from the group?
- How might campers help each other stay hydrated?
 - *L'chaim!* A Toast! – Campers and counselors at the table can quiet the group for a toast to one another, to the glorious weather, to the kitchen staff, to their sibling cabin, and share a "*L'chaim*" with refreshing water.
 - Other ideas from the group?

Remember – don't take food you aren't going to eat. This is wasteful. It's okay to take new things to try, but don't take a plate full. When we stay hydrated, we also tend not to eat with our eyes (making a giant plate of food that will go half-uneaten).

00:20-00:50 – Be Satisfied: Activities for Adding Meaning

Satisfaction comes in two forms during our meals – the way we enjoy our food and the company we keep while eating. Let's start with enjoying our food.

First, we must do what we can to help our body enjoy our food. The human body, when eating, wants to focus its energy on chewing, swallowing, and the early stages of digestion. It does not want to get up and down constantly. It does not want large bites of food that have barely been chewed. It does not want to eat as quickly as possible. If we do these things, we should not be surprised when we have upset stomachs or have trouble maintaining our energy throughout the day.

Second, we can use mealtimes to really feel a sense of satisfaction, joy, and belonging to those with whom we break bread. Here we will spend the bulk of our time trying a few different activities for cabin bonding at mealtime.

00:25-00:30

- **This or That?** This simple game requires no pre-planning and is a simple way to get your campers talking by asking them to choose between two things: either this or that or neither, but not both. Examples: Cake or ice cream? Beach or mountains? Sunrise or sunset? Breakfast or dinner? Bear or wolf? Time travel or space travel?
 - Without introducing any criteria by which the decision should be made, you are creating an easy flow of conversation with very low stakes.
 - It can also be a way to take the temperature on how things are going at camp. Comparing programs or activities (Capture the flag or bunk night?); places in camp (Lakeside or cabin?); or times at camp (Morning flag or Shabbat walk?). Their answers may be revealing and an invitation for follow-up or just a way to let them blow off steam.
- *Dvar Acher/A Different Thing (To Do):* An alternative to “This or That?” for mealtime is the classic “Roses and Thorns”, sometimes lovingly called “Oys and Joys,” where each person is given time to share one thing that made them happy (Rose) and one thing that disappointed them (Thorn). You can extend the metaphor to introduce other pieces of information that you want to get from your campers. We use the following in our house:
 - Roses – Something good that happened to you
 - Thorns – Something bad that happened to you
 - Gardener – Someone who helped or supported you
 - Bud – Something you’re looking forward to

00:30-00:40

- **Pass the Pitcher!** Pre-write one notecard for each member of the cabin and put the cards into an empty, dry pitcher. Each card should have a different question on it that the person who draws it should answer. These should not be yes/no questions or a written version of “This or That?” Rather, these questions should be the kind that get a person talking about what they like and how they see the world. Questions are distributed by “passing the pitcher.” Questions like:
 - If you could travel as often as you like to and live in only five cities for the rest of your life, but could not go anywhere else, where would you choose?
 - What period of history do you think would be cool to explore?
 - If you could be famous for one thing, what would you want to be famous for?
 - If you could change one thing about camp, what would you change?
- *Dvar Acher/A Different Thing (To Do):* If you’ve already got index cards and a marker for each camper, you ask them each to write their name in the center of a card and pass the card to their right. When they receive a card with someone else’s name on it, they should write one nice thing for that person to read. It can be a complement. A note of gratitude. An inside joke. A drawing. Whatever it is, it must be positive. And everyone should write on every card they receive except their own. You can choose to use this before the meal starts or an activity throughout the meal. Cards can be passed at their own pace (older campers) or all passed when the counselor calls “Switch!”

00:40-00:50

- **Make it Wendy!** My mom is named Wendy Allenberg and every table she sets is beautiful, warm, and welcoming. She makes her guests feel like they are important to her through the effort she puts into making the table design feel deliberate. Let’s take the time to imagine how

we can make our tables at mealtime welcoming to show that we care about our campers having a good meal.

- We will divide up into two smaller groups and each group will be given ten place settings and a collection of supplies with which they can decorate, label, and or make an activity for the cabin to share during the meal. Each team will have five minutes to plan and set their table.
- After five minutes, each team will present its tablescape and meal plan to the other table.

00:50-00:65 – Bless: *Brich Rachamana* (table dance) and/or Cup Game

Many of the camps at Cornerstone offer blessings before and/or after each meal. In some places, these blessings can vary by the day of the week, the setting of the meal, or who is “leading” the meal. Regardless of your camp’s chosen ways to observe this final part of the meal – your campers can be invited to express gratitude for their meal. Let’s learn a classical Jewish alternative to the longer blessing at the end of meals (*Birkat Ha-Mazon*), often referred to as “*Brich Rachamana*,” set to music and table dance by Noah Aronson.

[Learn Noah Aronson’s [Brich Rachamana](#) with [table dance](#) (time permitting).]

[If you like the table dance, give this [advanced cup dance](#) a try.]

00:65-00:75 – Final Thoughts and Questions

The important thing is to recognize that meals are the only camp “program” that happens three times a day, every day.

That means three times a day you can build stronger bonds and create more engaged and thoughtful human beings.

Don’t let the power of mealtimes get bulldozed by canned music on the speakers. Turn the volume down (or off!) and turn up the connections between one another.

B’tay’avon! Bon Appetit! Eat and be well!

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

Each of these activities can be customized on the fly or prepared in advance, with elaborate decorations or no materials at all, at a campout or Shabbat feast.