

Session Title:	Not Just a Dull Day without Food: Going Deeper with Your Tisha B'Av Programming
Name of Instructor:	Seth Wax
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Texts Utilized:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lyrics to <i>Ball N' Chain</i> by Big Mama Thornton ● <i>Whatever life we get is bonus</i> by Miles Levin ● Lamentations 1:1-19
Materials Needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Copies of Text Handouts ● Blank paper and pens ● CD player ● CD with track of Ball N' Chain by Big Mama Thornton
Location Needs:	Medium-sized room
<p>Introduction Time: 5 minutes</p> <p>- Chairs should be set up in a circle. Offer an introduction that addresses the following: Each Jewish holiday is associated not only with a certain historical event or memory, but also with a theme. Yom Kippur can be seen as being about forgiveness, Hanukkah about finding light within the darkness, Tu B'Shevat about growth and birth, and Pesach about freedom. Tisha B'Av, a holiday that is often a difficult day to program at camp, is about the loss of an entire structure of social and religious life – the Temple in Jerusalem and expulsion from Israel – that can feel alien to most staff and campers. But when considered as a holiday about what it means to be a human being, Tisha B'Av becomes a holiday that forces us to confront the loss and sadness of our lives. What does it mean when we are let down? When we lose what is most important to us? When it feels like our world is falling apart and we don't know how to respond? In this session, we will explore some of those themes and reflect on enhancing Tisha B'Av programming at our camps, as well as how we respond to others' suffering at camp.</p> <p>- Participants will then go around the circle, sharing their names and camps.</p> <p>Step-by-Step Session Description</p> <p>Three Experiences on Relating to the Suffering of Others (45 minutes total)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first half of the session includes three activities in which participants will read and listen to written, musical, and poetic reactions to suffering. Passages will be read either individually or in a large group, and participants will be asked either to sit in chairs or on the floor, with shoes on or off, during each passage. - After each reading or musical selection, ask participants to reflect on their reactions to the selection and will be given specific prompt questions. Distribute paper and pencils to participants 	

before the activities begin.

1. Listening to the Blues (15 minutes)

- Ask participants to sit in their chairs and to listen to Big Mama Thornton's Ball N' Chain. Distribute copies of the lyrics (see Text Handout 1).
- Direct participants to imagine that the singer is in the room with them, communicating with them as if they are in the same room.
- Afterward, ask participants to respond in writing to the following questions:
 - After listening to her song, how would you say Big Mama feels?
 - How do *you* feel right now having listened to her?
 - How would you respond to her?

2. Reading a cancer patient's reflection (15 minutes)

- Ask participants to sit on the floor and then give them copies of a blog entry (see Text Handout 2) written by Miles Levin, a young man who blogged extensively about his experience with a rare form of pediatric cancer and who died in 2007, a few weeks before his 19th birthday.
- Ask participants to read the passage silently and to imagine that the writer is in the room with them as they read, just as when they were listening to the blues piece.
- Afterward, ask participants to respond in writing to the following questions:
 - After reading his blog entry, how would you say Miles feels?
 - How do you feel right now having heard his words?
 - How would you respond to him?

3. Listening to selections from *Megillat Eicha* (15 minutes)

- Ask participants to remain on the floor and remove their shoes as they listen to a volunteer read from the first chapter of Eicha/Lamentations.
- Direct participants to imagine that the speaker of the text is in the room with them as they listen, just as in the previous activities.
- Afterward, ask participants to respond in writing to the following questions:
 - After listening to this lament, how would you say the speaker feels?
 - How do you feel right now having heard these words?
 - How would you respond?

Debriefing (25 minutes)

- Given the building intensity of these activities, participants will be given the space to process their reactions to them. Initially, invite participants to share their general reactions. Soon thereafter, ask participants to speak about their emotional reactions to each piece, as well as to draw connections between them and their experiences in their own lives and at camp.
- Suggest that in this activity, participants have been responding to suffering in a way they may not have realized. By simply listening and being present, not trying to change anything or turning away from the suffering, they have been bearing witness and allowed the subjects to express themselves authentically.

- Draw out a number of points for the following for discussion:
 - o What do we do with the expressions of pain we have listened to? What are our immediate reactions to them?
 - o Do we want to try to make it all better? How do we feel when we can't?
 - o What can we do if we can't fix the pain and suffering that we were bearing witness to?
 - o How was it different listen to the blues, read the blog entry silently, and then listen to *Eicha* in English?
 - o How do you understand the blues differently now? How do you understand *Eicha* differently now? How is *Eicha* like the blues?
 - o How did sitting on the floor and not wearing shoes affect your mindset as you read or listened to these passages? Are these traditional practices useful for reading *Eicha* at your camp?

Bringing it Back to Camp

Total Time: 20 minutes

- Turn the discussion toward application at camp. Two topics will be explored:
- The first will be on how the experience and discussion on bearing witness to suffering and not “doing” anything about it can affect how participants will respond to suffering when they encounter it at camp with campers and staff (e.g. death in camper's family, break-up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, etc.). Prompt with questions that explore:
 - o How participants respond, as staff, to suffering at camp. Do they try to make things better? Do you try to make things better right away, before they have sufficiently witnessed or understood the suffering of the camper or staff person? How could you do that?
 - o How loss is dealt with at camp.
 - o Responding appropriately to campers when they share experiences of loss with them and knowing when to notify a supervisor.
- The group will then explore how to take the insights we have explored in the session to enhance or modify Tisha B'Av programming at their camps.
 - o How can you take this to your bunk? Your staff? Your camp? Would you want to?
 - o What does your camp already do that can be adapted to enable campers and staff to deal with issues of suffering?
 - o What new programming ideas are coming to you, based on this session? Prompt with the following:
 - An art activity whose theme is about coping with sadness.
 - Ask campers to share a sad song, story, or poem that they connect with. Talk about why they connect to it, how it may comfort them, etc.
 - Listen to music or watch an age-appropriate movie that deals with suffering or loss.

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Text Handout 1
“Ball N’ Chain” by Big Mama Thornton

Sitting by my window,
Big Mama is sitting down, looking at the rain.
Sitting by my window baby,
Oh whoa, I was looking out at the rain.
You know something struck me, honey,
clamped onto me like a ball and chain.

I said, Oh baby!
Why you want to do these old mean things to me?
I said, Oh my honey!
Why, why did you want to do these old mean things to me?
Because I know I love you, baby.
And I’m so sick and tired of being in misery.
Oh Lord, play your song, baby.

Don’t my love for you hold on like a ball and chain?
Oh baby, our love holds on like a ball and chain.
You know I don’t need no home, honey.
But Big Mama don’t want to go insane.

Listen, listen, listen, listen!
I said, Oh baby!
Why everything have to happen to me?
I said, Oh baby!
Why everything got to happen to me?

I know my love gonna last forever.
Listen, whoa, whoa, yeah. For returns he.
Ball and chain turn me loose.

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Text Handout 2

“Whatever life we get is bonus” by Miles Levin

Looking through my living room window, I suspect being outside would feel wonderful, but I really wouldn't know. As I write this from my bed, my entire body feels saturated in a sticky, toxic nausea, with chemotherapy pumping through my 18-year-old veins. Like Michael Jackson's moonwalk, chemotherapy has this strange way of moving a person another step towards life and death at the same time.

Twenty-three months ago, I was diagnosed with stage IV rhabdomyosarcoma, a rare pediatric muscle cancer affecting only 350 children a year. With odds like that, and with a 20 percent chance of survival, I can only deduce two possibilities about the universe: God's plan is evident in every little shifting of the breeze, or it's totally random. I don't see how there could be much middle ground.

I remember my first chemo round, staring at the ceiling and trying not to cry. The agony was stunning. I've long since learned to go ahead and cry. How could this have happened? Yet as with anything that happens, it happens, and then suddenly you find it has happened, and more things keep continuing to happen. Chemotherapy has instilled in me a visceral understanding that all bad things will pass in time ... but that all good things will too.

I set out on a 19-month course of treatment, chronicling the journey on an online blog. Little did I know that my little Web site intended to keep extended family and friends informed would find readers all across the country and even the world, including such countries as Japan, Australia, Germany, Brazil. My journey became *our* journey, with treatment finishing last December. For a brief, hopeful month in January, it appeared to have been successful. My scans were clear. But, as is so common with cancer, there were still sub-detectable rogue cells lurking in distant corners of my body. Within weeks, they swarmed forth again and my body was infested once more.

A recurrence of my kind of cancer has been hitherto incurable, although I still cling to a slim ray of hope. But in all likelihood, I am in the last few months of my short life. Unlike many cancer patients, I don't have much anger. The way I see it, we're not entitled to one breath of air. We did nothing to earn it, so whatever we get is bonus. I might be more than a little disappointed with the hand I've been dealt, but this is what it is. Thinking about what it could be is pointless. It ought to be different, that's for sure, but it ain't. A moment spent moping is a moment wasted.

I accept what is to come, but I cannot rid myself of a deep mourning for all those experiences -- college, marriage, children, and grandchildren -- that will probably never be mine to celebrate. What solace I do find is in the knowledge that I have done everything I can to transmute this terribleness into something positive by showing as many people as I can how to endure it with a smile.

I don't believe you can ask for any more, but if I could ask for something, it would be to be able to go outside into the glorious spring air, feeling healthy and blissfully clueless as to how lucky I was for it, if only just for an hour.

[-\(http://edition.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/anderson.cooper.360/blog/2007/05/whatever-life-we-get-is-bonus.html\)](http://edition.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/anderson.cooper.360/blog/2007/05/whatever-life-we-get-is-bonus.html)

Not Just a Dull Day without Food

Text Handout 3

Eicha (Lamentations) 1:1-19 (JPS Translation)

1 How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!

2 She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; she hath none to comfort her among all her lovers; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

3 Judah is gone into exile because of affliction, and because of great servitude; she dwelleth among the nations, she findeth no rest; all her pursuers overtook her within the straits.

4 The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn assembly; all her gates are desolate, her priests sigh; her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is in bitterness.

5 Her adversaries are become the head, her enemies are at ease; for the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her young children are gone into captivity before the adversary.

6 And gone is from the daughter of Zion all her splendour; her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer.

7 Jerusalem remembereth in the days of her affliction and of her anguish all her treasures that she had from the days of old; now that her people fall by the hand of the adversary, and none doth help her, the adversaries have seen her, they have mocked at her desolations.

8 Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is become as one unclean; all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness; she herself also sigheth, and turneth backward.

9 Her filthiness was in her skirts, she was not mindful of her end; therefore is she come down wonderfully, she hath no comforter. 'Behold, O Lord, my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself.'

10 The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her treasures; for she hath seen that the heathen are entered into her sanctuary, concerning whom Thou didst command that they should not enter into Thy congregation.

11 All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for food to refresh the soul. 'See, O Lord, and behold, how abject I am become.'

12 'Let it not come unto you, all ye that pass by! Behold, and see if there be any pain like unto my pain, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger.'

13 From on high hath He sent fire into my bones, and it prevaieth against them; He hath spread a net for my feet, He hath turned me back; He hath made me desolate and faint all the day.

14 The yoke of my transgressions is impressed by His hand; they are knit together, they are come up upon my neck; He hath made my strength to fail; the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, against whom I am not able to stand.

15 The Lord hath set at nought all my mighty men in the midst of me; He hath called a solemn assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord hath trodden as in a winepress the virgin the daughter of Judah.'

Not Just a Dull Day without Food
Text Handout 3, continued
***Eicha* (Lamentations) 1:1-19 (JPS Translation)**

16 'For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water; because the comforter is far from me, even he that should refresh my soul; my children are desolate, because the enemy hath prevailed.'

17 Zion spreadeth forth her hands; there is none to comfort her; the Lord hath commanded concerning Jacob, that they that are round about him should be his adversaries; Jerusalem is among them as one unclean.

18 'The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against His word; hear, I pray you, all ye peoples, and behold my pain: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.

19 I called for my lovers, but they deceived me; my priests and mine elders perished in the city, while they sought them food to refresh their souls.