

Reliving Yirmiyahu's Experience: An Experiential Tisha B'Av Program

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Megillat Eicha is an incredibly powerful piece of Tanach. According to Chazal (*Moed Katan* 26a) it is the voice of Yirmiyahu, which we hear crying out to God. His poetic words truly paint a picture of someone overcome by pain and suffering—someone who feels so lost due to the destruction he sees happening in Yerushalayim.

Being that Tisha B'Av happens during the summer months, most students do not have the opportunity to learn Megillat Eicha in depth the way they do other parts of Tanach. Education in the camp setting surrounding Tisha B'Av is usually taught in a very experiential way. Often an emotional experience is created in order to put campers into the appropriate mindset. The focus typically surrounds the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash or the Shoah. The following script pulls directly from the text of Eicha. The pain and suffering that Yirmiyahu describes is pain that has manifested in different ways over the generations. This program is designed to help break down the story told in Eicha, and can be used in any setting—camps, synagogues, or at home with one's family.

Instructions:

Before reading each perek (chapter) of Eicha, the reader should pause for the script to be read out loud or acted out. This can be done by a few different people or by one person throughout.

At the conclusion, one can lead a facilitated conversation for the participants with the questions provided at the end of the script.

First Chapter

Can anyone hear me? Is there anyone left who cares about me? Silence, yes silence is all that I hear! Why? Because I am all alone! How people used to fill my streets, streets that were once

happy and filled with love. Now, I Jerusalem who was once a beautiful city, filled with people, joy, and God, am all alone. I am like a widow! I have nothing. I have lost all of my splendor and grace. People I used to call my friends are now my enemies. When my people fell into the hands of enemies, no one stood up to help me. Can you imagine how that feels?

God, can You hear me? Does this mean anything to You? Is it nothing to You, all that passes by You? Do You see my pain? But You did this to me, You did this to me God because You were angry at me! You sent fire into my bones, You set out a net for me to trip and fall into. You God, you made me this way. And because of this I cry, and my tears won't stop falling. I cry for You God because You are far from me. God, You are the one that I should turn to for comfort, but I no longer can.

God, I am in great distress over our distance, everything about this hurts, my heart aches for You because when it comes down to it, it was me who turned my back on You. I rebelled and my enemies are laughing at me. Please God, I beg of You, please relieve me of this great pain, my heart, my heart can't bear this pain.

Second Chapter

Take a look around. Can you see what is going on here? The elders are sitting on the ground like mourners. They aren't speaking, they've covered their heads with dust and ashes as they sit in sackcloth! Our holy Temple is gone!

God, can You hear me? It's Yirmiyahu. My eyes can barely see because of the constant flow of tears falling from them. My whole body hurts from my sadness. And the children of Yerushalayim, they call out to their mothers asking for food, asking for simple things like grain, and yet their mothers have no answer. Our children walk the streets faint because of how hungry they are.

Our enemies only say hurtful things about You, God. They say that you have no pity, and that You, God, are the one that has caused our adversaries to rise up against us.

I ask You God, to think about whom you have done this to. Young and old people are hungry, dying. No one has food to eat. You, You God, have brought this upon us. No one can escape Your anger God.

Third Chapter

I, Yirmiyahu, stand before you a broken man. I am the man who has seen the affliction that God causes when he is angry. He has turned against me, He has turned away from me. Even when I cry out in prayer, He does not hear my prayers. He has made me empty.

I don't even know what the word peace means anymore. I am like the bull's-eye awaiting the sting of an arrow. I am filled with bitterness. I am like the ashes of the earth. And yet I still have hope, dreams and wishes that God's unending love has not fully ceased and that there is still compassion for me, and all of Israel.

I believe with all of my heart that God is good to those who wait for Him, to those whose soul seeks Him out. There is in fact merit in man feeling the yoke of God, sitting alone contemplating

where God is. God cannot stay away forever! We may be in pain now, but He will certainly have love and compassion for us—after all He does not willingly afflict his children, Klal Yisrael.

We should think about that which we've done. We must turn back to God. Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in the heavens. Let us apologize for our wrongdoings, until this point it's as though there is a cloud blocking our prayers from reaching God. But we must break that wall down. I cannot stop praying and crying until God looks down on me and accepts my *tefilot* (prayers). Please God, please listen to me. You have heard the voices of my enemies; You have heard what they've said about me. Turn your heart against them God, destroy them; please God, save me from their evil.

Fourth Chapter

God, things have gone from bad to worse! Children are so thirsty, their tongues stick to the roof of their mouths. When they ask for bread, no one gives them even a crumb! We used to have holy people living here in Yerushalayim. Our *nezirim* were once pure, as pure as the white of snow, whiter than milk. Now they are blacker than coal, no one even recognizes them on the street.

I say this out of desperation; those who were killed by sword were better off than those who have died from hunger. And the number of those dying from hunger is rising. Even worse, people are going crazy from their hunger pains. I can barely say the words to describe what is going on here. Mothers have eaten their own children out of desperation. These women were once compassionate mothers! You have accomplished Your mission God, it is obvious how angry You are with us. God, You set fire to Zion, and it has devoured the foundation of our once beautiful Jerusalem.

Our enemies hunt us, it is no longer safe to walk the streets of Jerusalem. Our enemies are faster than vultures, swooping in on their prey. Certainly our enemies are rejoicing at our fate.

Fifth Chapter

God—please do not forget what has happened to us! Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers; people we don't even recognize have taken our homes. We have become like orphans, no mothers, no fathers. We have nothing!

People who were once servants now rule us and won't let us go! We risk our lives for small bites of bread just to survive. Our skin is as hot as the walls of an oven due to our hunger.

The princes, who once used to sit upon beautiful thrones, are no longer alive to rule. No one respects the elders of our community anymore. The elders who used to sit at the gates of the city are nowhere to be found. The beautiful music that was once played by young men is gone, not even a note can be heard.

Our hearts no longer recognize the feeling of joy, our feet no longer know how to dance. All we do is mourn. Har Zion, once a holy, holy mountain, is now desolate, a place where only foxes roam looking for food.

You God, You are forever, Your throne rules from generation to generation. And yet, God, it seems that You have forgotten us. Why do You ignore us for so long?! Turn us to You Hashem and we will be turned. Please, I beg of You, bring us back to the days of old! You have rejected us, You are angry with us, You are against us, it's as clear as sunlight.

But I beg of You Hashem, turn us back to You and we shall be turned! Help bring us back to the days of old!

Questions for a facilitated conversation after Megillat Eicha

1. What type of imagery did Yirmiyahu use to describe that which he was seeing and experiencing?
2. Where else have we seen this type of imagery and suffering in Jewish history?
3. Why did Yirmiyahu choose to be so graphic when speaking with God? Surely God was seeing the suffering?
4. How do you envision Yirmiyahu speaking to God?
5. Do you think Yirmiyahu was justified in the way he spoke to God? Have you ever had an experience where all you wanted to do was yell out to God? How did you handle that situation?