

## Finding Words of Lament and Hope

### Topic

Tisha B'Av, Challenge and Response, Torah

### Grade Level(s)

6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>

### Big Ideas

Structure can help people reflect on their despair and realign their feelings to hope for the future.

### Learning Targets

Learners will:

1. Understand how the content and structure of *Eicha* help people understand the trauma people felt after destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and Jerusalem
2. Use the poetic structure of *Eicha* to work through feelings of loss and sadness
3. Find a path towards hope through creativity

### Relevant Vocabulary

ט' בְּאָב ( <i>Tisha b'Av</i> )	The Ninth of the Month of Av (a fast day)
בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ ( <i>Beit Hamikdash</i> )	The Holy Temple in Jerusalem
אֵיכָה ( <i>Eicha</i> )	The Book of Lamentations (literally: <i>How</i> or <i>Alas</i> )
מְגִלָּה / מְגִלּוֹת ( <i>Megillah / Megillot</i> )	Scroll / Scrolls
תַּנְ"ךְ ( <i>Tanakh</i> )	The Hebrew Bible
תְּהִלִּים ( <i>Tehillim</i> )	The Book of Psalms
מִשְׁלֵי ( <i>Mishlei</i> )	The Book of Proverbs

### Materials / Technology Needed

- Writing implements and paper or devices with a writing platform
- *Tanakh*, standalone *Eicha* book/sheet, and/or [link to Eichah in Hebrew](#)
- Images of cities destroyed. Some examples include:
  - [Ancient Jerusalem](#)
  - [Syria \(2016\)](#)
  - [Sarajevo \(1996\)](#)
  - [London \(1940\)](#)
- [Poll Everywhere](#) (free for up to 25 people) (optional)

### Background

Commemorating the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, Tisha b'Av (the Ninth of Av) is traditionally considered to be the saddest day on the Jewish calendar.\* It is a fast day on which customs of mourning are observed. One of the centerpieces of the day is the reading of *Eicha* on the night that *Tisha b'Av* begins (keeping in mind that Jewish days begin at night).

\*Other great tragedies have occurred on or around this date as well, thus giving the day a greater level of sadness. However, the destruction of the First and Second *Beit Hamikdash* is the driving primary focus of the day.

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*Eicha* is one of the five *megillot* that are included in the *Tanakh*. It consists of five chapters, the first four of which are *aleph-bet* acrostics. The first, second, and fourth chapters follow a strict 22-verse acrostic verse structure that begins with the author/narrator calling out with the word “אֵיכָה” while the third chapter is a triple acrostic (i.e. *aleph, aleph, aleph, bet, bet, bet, gimel, gimel, gimel*, etc.). Finally, the fifth chapter is not an acrostic but still contains 22 verses.

Meanwhile the content of *Eicha* begins with utter dejection and hopelessness at the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and Jerusalem. The writer laments that God has caused such a terrible calamity to the Jewish people. By the end, though, the tone is one of looking to God for salvation and asking God to remember God’s people. Through these words, the author not only demonstrates his own feelings of loss but also endeavors to give words to others who might not be able to describe how they are feeling in the aftermath of the destruction. (Note that, while the events in *Eicha* describe the destruction of Jerusalem along with the First *Beit Hamikdash* in 586 BCE, *Tisha B’Av* also commemorates the later destruction of Jerusalem and the Second *Beit Hamikdash* in 70 CE.)

How to reconcile the seemingly contradictory form and function of this *megillah* has been a question for many years. One possible understanding is that the form and function act in concert to remind the reader of both aspects of the destruction (see Elie Assis, [“The Alphabetic Acrostic in the Book of Lamentations”](#)). The acrostic structure forces the reader to look beyond the sheer dejection that permeates the first two chapters of the work. By the end, the reader is looking with hope to future salvation, at which point the poetic acrostic structure is abandoned in order that the emotional longing for the future salvation can take hold.

### Description of Activities

1. Learners write acrostic poems. Let learners know that their poems will be shared but that they can keep their identity private if they do not want their identity shared.
  - a. If this activity is being done for *Tisha b’Av*, show learners an image of a destroyed city. Learners write about how residents of the city might have felt after the destruction of their homes. This can be done in the first person if learners choose to do so.
  - b. If this activity is being done in response to a current event in the world, learners write about their reactions to that event.
2. Read a few of the poems out loud. Learners may choose to read their own poems out loud if they feel comfortable doing so.

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3. Discuss:
  - a. How does writing in this way help you to understand the event that you are writing about?
  - b. How does hearing someone else's poem help you to deal with your own experiences?
  - c. Tech Option: Conduct the discussion through an app such as Poll Everywhere. This option also allows learners to express themselves anonymously if they are more comfortable doing so.
4. Explain that the biblical book of *Eicha* was written in response to the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and Jerusalem. It has five chapters, the first four of which are written as acrostics in response (see Background for details). It is read during the beginning night of *Tisha b'Av*, which is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar.
  - a. If using technology, show the Hebrew acrostic on screens.
  - b. If using physical books or sheets, learners open to the appropriate page and observe the *aleph-bet-gimel* structure of the chapters.
5. Explain that *Eicha* concludes with a non-acrostic call out to God for salvation.
6. Following the model of *Eicha*, learners use a less structured writing approach to look to the future. This could be in the form of a prayer, list of hopes, etc.
  - a. If this is a follow-up to their writing on *Tisha b'Av* this could also be about how people might be able to find hope after a difficult experience.
  - b. Note that, if this is a follow-up to their writing about a current event in the world, it might be particularly difficult for learners to find hope.
7. Learners share their writings if they are comfortable doing so.
8. Ask:
  - a. Why might writing about traumatic events in a structured format help someone to deal with the events?
  - b. Why might writing about the future in a less-structured format help someone to find hope?
  - c. How does sharing one's thoughts help the writer? The reader/listener?
  - d. How can one look forward to a hopeful future when the world seems broken?

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## *Finding Words of Lament and Hope*

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### Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

#### ***For learners who need more assistance***

- Instead of writing poems, learners represent their feelings through the artistic medium in which they are most comfortable.

#### ***For learners who need extension opportunities***

- Learners explore other Hebrew acrostics (e.g. *Tehillim* 25, *Tehillim* 145, *Mishlei* 31:10 – 31) and interpret how this poetic structure brings out the meaning of other texts.