

A Guide To Jewish Practice - Facilitator's Guide

Nathan Weiner

Shabbat and Holidays – Minor Holidays (vol. 2, pp. 660-682)

Essential Question: What are the history and meaning of *Tisha B'Av*?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

- Recognize that *Tisha B'Av* takes place in the summer, on the ninth of the Hebrew month of Av
- Name some of the historical moments assigned to *Tisha B'Av*
- Think critically about contemporary questions through the lens of *Tisha B'Av*

Special Lesson Notes: Before the lesson, contact participants and ask them to bring an internet-capable device, such as a smartphone, laptop, or tablet.

Materials Needed: Internet connection; projector and screen; a laptop, smartphone or tablet for each participant; each participant needs a Facebook account; a private Facebook group entitled “*Tisha B'Av* Discussion Group,” or another name of your choosing.

Set Induction: (10 minutes) Welcome participants. Explain that today we will learn about the holiday of *Tisha B'Av*, a holiday that takes place in the summer on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, commemorating the destruction of the 2nd Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E., as well as other tragedies in Jewish history. Together, we will explore some of the history of the day, its observance and its historical significance, and we will ponder some potential contemporary applications. Explain that we will use Facebook to have our discussion, and will create a contemporary “*Daf Gemara*,” or page of Talmud. In the Talmud, the *Amora'im*, or sages of the time (codified in about 600 C.E.) had multigenerational discussions of the works of the earlier *Tana'im*, or sages of the period of the Mishna (codified in about 200 C.E.). We will use the modality of a page of Talmud since it is the dominant form that developed after the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem, the event that *Tisha B'Av* was originally understood as commemorating. Further, *Tisha B'Av* is established in the Talmud.

Exploring the Text:

1. (30 minutes) Break participants into *hevrutot*. Invite participants to take *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Volume 2 – Shabbat and Holidays* and find a private location with internet access in the building. Tell participants to load the Facebook discussion group on their internet-enabled devices. Explain that using pages 660-683, you will provide a number of discussion prompts on the page, and that participants are welcome to respond to your prompts, to create their own discussion prompts, or to respond to the comments of other participants. Ongoing discussion is welcomed and encouraged.

Some prompts you can use are:

A: On page 660, Rabbi Jacob Staub writes, “Prior to 1967, viewing Jewish history as a vale of tears felt satisfying and identity forming for me.” Do you feel similarly? Why/why not? Is this view productive?

B: On page 661, Rabbi Jacob Staub writes, “Are there institutions in contemporary Jewish life today whose loss is unimaginable? The rabbinate? Synagogues? The State of Israel?” What do you think?

C: On *Tisha B'Av*, we mourn the destruction of the 2nd Temple, and traditional Jewish liturgy prays for a rebuilding of Jerusalem. How do you feel about that? Why?

D: In what ways can *Tisha B'Av* be used to address contemporary issues?

E: On page 664, Rabbi Linda Potemkin writes, “...This annual container invites us to remember and grow from these historical tragedies without becoming stuck in ongoing grief or mourning. A vessel for grief becomes a vessel for healing and for transformation.” Do you agree? How can this be applied to other aspects of your life?

F: Any other topic you find appropriate from pages 660-683.

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Invite participants back to the large group. Project the Facebook page on a big screen. Discuss responses, expand on comments, seek clarity, etc....

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Shabbat and Holidays – Minor Holidays (vol. 2, pp. 683-690)

Essential Question: What is *Yom Hashoah V'hag'vura*, and why is it celebrated on the 27th of Nisan?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

2. Articulate reasons why remembering the Holocaust is important
3. Identify the questions surrounding the selection of a date for *Yom Hashoah*

Materials Needed: Ability to show a video from the internet.

Set Induction: (10 minutes) Watch the video entitled “Why We Remember the Holocaust,” made by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FbxnWrBaDw> . After watching the video, allow for a moment of silence to process what the group just watched.

Exploring the Text:

- (15 minutes) Explain that today we will continue to hone our skills at a practice called focused listening. Throughout the course of today's session, we will discuss remembering the Holocaust as we learn about *Yom Hashoah V'hag'vura*. Break participants into *hevrotot*. Explain that each person in each pair will have three minutes to share about their connection to the Holocaust. Some examples of discussion topics can include: Did you lose any family in the Holocaust, either as a result of genocide, or as a soldier? Did anyone in your family serve in the military during WWII? Have you ever marked *Yom Hashoah*? If so, how? Did you find it meaningful? Why/why not? Do you think remembering the Holocaust is important? If so, why? The listener must only listen and must refrain from responding. Nonverbal responses are welcomed, including touch, smiles, and so on.... The process is as follows:

- One partner speaks.
- Consoler is quiet during these three minutes. Consoler then has two minutes to reflect back what he or she heard the mourner say.
- Switch roles.

(10 minutes) Invite a participant to read aloud the main text from page 683 to the top of page 685, and from page 688 to the middle of page 689. Then have a brief discussion about the pros and cons of the different options for establishing a date for Holocaust remembrance. Ask participants to share their thoughts on the various options.

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Invite participants to stand in a circle, and ask each participant to share one thought that comes to mind after learning about *Yom Hashoah*. It can be a reflection, a question, a commitment to social justice, etc. After each participant has had a chance to share, recite the Mourner's Kaddish together.

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Shabbat and Holidays – Minor Holidays (vol. 2, pp. 690-695)

Essential Question: What are *Yom Hazikaron* and *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, and how are they recognized in Israel?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

- Define *Yom Hazikaron* as the Israeli day of remembrance for fallen soldiers, and *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* as Israeli Independence Day
- Identify potential reasoning for marking these two days consecutively

Materials Needed: Ability to display videos from the internet, copies of Psalm 30 in Hebrew and English (pages 174-175 in *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*);

Set Induction: (15 minutes) Watch two videos back to back, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z06pPfKf4lo> on Israeli military service and *Yom Hazikaron*, and a few minutes of <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfRHUfoImeI>, which shows snapshots of *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* celebrations in Israel. After viewing the videos, ensure that participants know that these two days occur consecutively; the end of *Yom Hazikaron* is the beginning of *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*. Ask participants: why do you think these two days are arranged this way? (There responses might include statements like: It is intentional to affect the consciousness of Israelis so that they connect service and freedom; there is historical or textual precedent; events in history made it a coincidence; etc...)

Exploring the Text:

1. (15 minutes) Break participants into *hevrotot* and distribute copies of Psalm 30. Invite each *hevruta* to read Psalm 30 together and identify verses that speak to the aligning of *Yom Hazikaron* and *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* as consecutive days. After 10 minutes, bring participants back to the large group and discuss what they found (verses 6 and 12). Facilitate a brief discussion about whether participants find the alignment of the holidays as consecutive days useful. Why/why not?
2. (10 minutes) Invite a participant to read aloud the main text on pp. 690-691 and the comment by Barbara Penzner at the bottom of page 690 about *Yom Hazikaron*. As a group, compare Israel's marking of *Yom Hazikaron* to America's marking of Memorial Day. Are there similarities? What are the differences? Why do you think this is the case?

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Explain that there is no set ritual for *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, and that many groups have differing traditions. Invite participants to use their imagination or the text (pp. 692-695) to discover and share with the group a way of marking *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* that they find personally meaningful.

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Shabbat and Holidays – Minor Holidays (vol. 2, pp. 695-700)

Essential Question: What is the historical significance of minor fast days, and how can they be reconstructed for deeper contemporary meanings?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

- Name many of the minor fast days on the Jewish calendar
- Become expert about one minor fast day

Special Lesson Notes: Before the lesson, contact participants and ask them to bring an internet-capable device, such as a smartphone, laptop, or tablet.

Materials Needed: Poster board, markers, other miscellaneous art supplies, scrap paper, pens/pencils

Set Induction: (15 minutes) Explain that fasting has religious significance for many faiths. Ask your participants to think about what religious significance they think a fast may have. (such as repentance, purification, commandedness, collective memory, etc...) and then to share their thoughts with the group. In addition to the major fasts of Yom Kippur and *Tisha B'Av*, Jewish tradition has multiple minor fasts. Among them are the 10th of Tevet, the 17th of Tammuz, *Tzom Gedalya* (3 Tishrei), *Ta'anit Esther* (immediately preceding Purim), and the Fast of the Firstborn (the day preceding Pesach).

Exploring the Text:

3. (25 minutes) Divide participants into 5 equal groups. Distribute one piece of poster board, markers, the other miscellaneous art supplies, scrap paper, and pens/pencils to each group. Assign each group a minor fast day. Instruct each group to read the text of *A Guide to Jewish Practice – Volume 2: Shabbat and Holidays* pp. 695-700, to learn what they can about their assigned minor fast. Participants are also invited to research it in greater depth using their internet-enabled devices. After learning about the minor fast day, participants will create a poster teaching the other participants about their minor fast. The poster should include the name of the minor fast, its traditional observance, at least one scriptural reference, any more recently assigned meanings, and creative options (either from their research or their imaginations) for honoring it.

Wrapping It Up: (15-20 minutes) Participants present their posters, teaching each other about their minor fasts.

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Shabbat and Holidays – Minor Holidays (vol. 2, pp. 701-704)

Essential Question: What is the history of *Tu Bishvat*, and what are some examples of applying its themes to better the world?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

- Explain some of the history and evolution of *Tu Bishvat*
- Recognize the uniting characteristics of *Tu Bishvat* sederim
- Think of ways in which the themes of *Tu Bishvat* can add deeper meaning to their lives

Materials Needed: Ability to play the song “*Hashkedia Porahat*”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TF7pakPNMb0>;

2 copies each of various *Tu Bishvat* sederim:

Hazon <http://www.hazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2013-Tu-BShvat-Haggadah.pdf> ,

Jewish Women's Center of Pittsburgh <http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/tu-bshvat-seder> ,

Aish HaTorah Kabalistic Seder <http://www.aish.com/h/15sh/ho/48965616.html> ,

Coalition on the Environment in Jewish Life (COEJL) <http://www.coejl.org/resources/tu-bshvat-a-basic-introduction/>,

Workman's Circle

http://circleboston.org/sites/www.circleboston.org/files/Tu%20B'Shvat%202013a_0.pdf,

Any others

Set Induction: (5 minutes) Before beginning the lesson, print out two copies of each of the suggested *Tu Bishvat* sederim above. Place them around the room. In the background, have the *Tu Bishvat* song “*Hashkedia Porahat*” playing. As participants enter, invite them to walk around the room and examine the various sederim. Once they examine the sederim, ask each participant to stand or sit by one that appears interesting.

Exploring the Text:

4. (20 minutes) Divide participants into groups by their chosen *Tu Bishvat* seder. Then ask each group to read the text of *A Guide to Jewish Practice, Volume 2 – Shabbat and Holidays* pp. 701-704, paying special attention to page 703, and to explore the connection to their chosen sederim. Explain that each seder takes a different approach to applying *Tu Bishvat* to contemporary issues. Ask participants to use the materials provided and explore how each seder does this.
5. (10 minutes) Once each group has completed reading and discussing its chosen seder, ask your participants to discuss two questions:
 - a. What could be added to the chosen seder to more deeply explore the issues it presents?
 - b. What other issues can be addressed using the themes of *Tu Bishvat*?

Wrapping It Up: (5 minutes) Invite each group to share what they discussed with the larger group.

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Shabbat and Holidays – Minor Holidays (vol. 2, pp. 704-708)

Essential Question: What is *Rosh Hodesh*, and what are some of its contemporary meanings?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

- Explain the history of *Rosh Hodesh*
- Articulate some of its contemporary meanings
- Describe a *Kiddush Levana* ceremony

Materials Needed: Bibles, copies of the article, “Women and Rosh Hodesh,” copies of *Kol HaNeshamah: Shirim Uvrahot*, pages 122-129

Set Induction: (15 minutes) Distribute Bibles to participants and ask them to turn to Exodus chapter 11. Explain that in this chapter, the Israelites are still enslaved in Egypt. The first 9 plagues are complete, leaving only the 10th plague, the slaying of the first born, to take place. The chapter concludes with a warning from God to Moses that despite these tragedies, Pharaoh's heart will be hardened, and he will not willingly let the Israelites go. Chapter 12 then opens with these two verses: “And God spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: 'This month shall be the beginning of months to you; it shall be the first month of the year to you.’” (Exodus 12:1-2.) Next, the Passover sacrifice is established, followed by the 10th plague and the subsequent exodus from Egypt. Break participants in *hevrutot* and invite them to think about what may have been God's intention in Exodus 12:1-2. Why note this here? Why not discuss after the Israelites have been freed? (possible answers: As slaves, we did not control our own calendar; by gaining control of our own time, we might have the confidence to leave Egypt; control of time is critical to a sense of independence, etc...) Explain that the sages of the Mishnah later developed a system of interviewing witnesses to determine the new month, thus leaving the establishment of the new month, and the Jewish calendar, in human hands.

Exploring the Text:

6. (10 minutes) *Rosh Hodesh* has served many functions and has taken on multiple meanings. To understand more of the history and application of *Rosh Hodesh* ritual, invite a participant to read aloud the main text about *Rosh Hodesh* in *A Guide to Jewish Practice Volume 2: Shabbat and Holidays*, pp.704-708.
7. (15 minutes) Distribute copies of the article, “Women and Rosh Hodesh,” found here: <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/women-and-rosh-chodesh/>. Break participants into *hevrutot* and invite each pair to read the article. Also distribute copies of *Kol HaNeshamah: Shirim Uvrahot*, pages 122-129. After reading about the connections between women and *Rosh Hodesh* and about the *Kiddush Levana* ceremony, instruct participants to write a new women's prayer for a *Kiddush Levana*.

Wrapping It Up: (5 minutes) Groups share their prayers.