

Kabul/Jerusalem: A Text Study for Tisha B'Av 2022

This August, as Jews observe Tisha b'Av, the day on which we commemorate the destruction of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem and the beginning of Jewish exile and diaspora, Afghans around the world will be marking one year since the fall of Kabul. We don't know yet what the future holds for Afghanistan and its capital, but we know that for tens of thousands of displaced Afghans the events of August 2021 were the beginning of a new and difficult chapter in their lives. This text study juxtaposes texts from *Eicha* (the Hebrew name for the book of Lamentations), with its graphic descriptions of a conquered Jerusalem, with stories and images from Kabul as it fell to the Taliban.

Following the text study, this resource includes an English-language 6th chapter of Lamentations, written to express our mourning and despair at the contemporary refugee crisis — this year for the first time there are more than **100 million** displaced people on Earth. It is designed to be read in *Eicha* trop following the communal reading of *Eicha* on Tisha b'Av. It can also be used as part of the text study or studied independently.



A family sits on the side to shelter from the sun at the East Gate of the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. Aug. 25, 2021. (Marcus Yam/Los Angeles Times)

Discussion prompts:

Look closely at the people in the photograph.

Questions for Information: What are they wearing? What objects are they holding? In which direction are they looking? What is their body posture or position? What other details do you notice?

Questions for Interpretation: What relationships can you see or imagine between the people in the photograph? What do their facial expressions and body language communicate about how they are feeling? What stories can you tell about the moments before or after this picture was taken?

Lamentations 1:3

(3) Judah has gone into exile
Because of misery and harsh oppression;
When she settled among the nations,
She found no rest;
All her pursuers overtook her
In the narrow places.

איכה א':ג'

(ג) גַּלְתָּהּ יְהוּדָה מֵעֲנִי וּמְרַב עֲבָדָה הִיא יְשָׁבָה
בְּגוֹלִים לֹא מְצָאָה מְנוּחַ כָּל־רֹדְפֶיהָ הַשִּׁיגוּהָ בֵּין
הַמְצָרִים: {ס}

- What in this verse from Lamentations is specific to a particular historical moment? What is (or could be) universal?
- (How) does reading this verse after looking at the photo shift your understanding of the text and/or the photo?

After each set of quotes, use the following prompts for further discussion:

- What is the central image, idea, or impression you are left with after reading each source?
- What connections do you see between these texts?
- (How) does drawing connections between the texts shift or deepen your understanding of either, or both, of them?

As the Taliban closed in on Kabul and Abdul and his family awaited safe passage from Afghanistan to the United States, they had to move frequently, never staying in one place for more than a day. “They were supposed to kidnap my son,” said Abdul... “For two and a half months, I did not see my dad. I did not see my brothers, my sister, and everything.”

Sources: Apartment List, HIAS Blog: [After Months on the Run, Afghan Family Finds Safety in New Home](#)

Lamentations 5:5

We are hotly pursued;
Exhausted, we are given no rest.

איכה ה':ה'

עַל צוֹאֲרֵנוּ נִרְדָּפְנוּ יָגַעְנוּ (לֹא) [וְלֹא] הִוְנַח לָנוּ:

Some children arrived with no shoes on their feet, no diapers, with literally nothing. I saw a young girl around 4-years-old who had arrived barefoot having her feet treated because the skin had been torn by the hot, sharp rocks at the base, her first steps on free soil literally burning her soles.

Andrea Gagne, HIAS Blog, [Dispatch: Welcoming Afghans Who Made It to the U.S. | HIAS](#)

Lamentations 2:11

My eyes are spent with tears,
My heart is in tumult,
My being melts away
Over the ruin of my poor people,
As babes and sucklings languish
In the squares of the city.

איכה ב':י"א

כָּלוּ בְדַמְעוֹת עֵינַי חֲמַרְמְרוּ מְעֵי נִשְׁפָּה לְאֶרֶץ כְּבֹדִי
עַל־שָׂבַר בַּת־עַמִּי בְּעֶטֶף עוֹלָל וַיִּוָּנֶק בְּרַחֲבוֹת
קִרְיָהּ: {ס}

“Do you know where the president [of Afghanistan] is?” asked Atmar, who had arrived just as the choppers were taking off.

“The president went home,” Bek answered.

“No. He ran away.”

“I don’t believe it. I just saw him.”

“Look,” Atmar said, pulling out the passport with the seal of the republic on the cover. “He’s gone.”

Matthieu Aikins, "Inside the Fall of Kabul," *NY Times Magazine*, December 12, 2021

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/10/magazine/fall-of-kabul-afghanistan.html>

Lamentations 2:9

Her gates have sunk into the ground,
He has smashed her bars to bits;
Her king and her leaders are in exile,
Instruction is no more;
Her prophets, too, receive
No vision from the LORD.

איכה ב':ט'

טָבְעוּ בְּאֶרֶץ שְׁעָרֶיהָ אֲבָד וְשַׁבַּר בְּרִיחֶיהָ מִלְכָּה
וְשָׂרֶיהָ בְּגוֹיִם אֵין תּוֹרָה גַם־נְבִיאֶיהָ לֹא־מָצְאוּ קוֹזֶן
מִיְהוָה: {ס}

Lamentations 6 - an additional chapter

As we observe Tisha b'Av and commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem that led to the exile of the Jewish people for centuries to come, we are acutely aware that we find ourselves in the midst of the worst refugee crisis in recorded history, with more than **100 million** people displaced worldwide.

This text, written by Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer, is a modern addition to the book of Lamentations – a 6th chapter – meant to express our mourning over the contemporary refugee and asylum crises and to acknowledge and lament our country's failing too many of those who have turned to us.

Please note that, because the text is in English rather than Hebrew, some of the trop will appear backwards.

Eicha – Alas! A country once built on the promise of liberty and justice for all
now isolates herself from the cries of those seeking safety on her shores.

Built by the hands of refugees and immigrants, she
chips away at the right to asylum,
dispensing with founding principles so
essential as her DNA.

Forgotten are the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

Gone is the dream of protection in the face of violence and persecution.

“Her enemies are now the masters” (1:5).

Inhumane executive orders barring Muslims and refugees.

Jarringly separating parents from children.

Keeping out compassion and decency, a wall in their place.

Lady Liberty weeps at her shuttered gates.

Mixed multitudes we were when we left *Mitzrayim*, the narrow place;

now, the world narrows around the 100 million displaced people around the globe. Only God's voice can be heard bellowing calls to welcome,

protect, and love the stranger –

partners in continued redemption we are no longer.

Quiet in the face of moral depravity are her citizens,

reinforced by hateful rhetoric spewed from seats of power.

Self-evident truths –

that human beings are created equal, endowed by their Creator

with certain unalienable rights –

undone by cowardice, malice, and greed.

Verily, we know where God dwells amidst this suffering –

God is in the eyes of those fleeing for their lives.

Why, then, have we forsaken the Divine call

to love the stranger as we would love ourselves –

xenophobia instead taking root in our souls?

You are the hero for whom you are searching:

Zion cannot be returned to if we do not first turn to those calling our names.