Global Day of Jewish Learning
Curriculum: Heroes and Villains, Saints and Fools

NOV.16.14
www.theglobalday.org
A Project of the Aleph Society
“Grandchildren are the crown of their elders, and the glory of children is their parents.”

– Proverbs 17:6

In honor of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren: their lives burnish the glory of those who perished in the Shoah.

For my parents, Benjamin and Charlotte Gottesfeld z"l, these children are the greatest reward...

- Chana Hanina
- Galia Hanina
- Sarah Rose Warren
- Joseph Nathan Warren

Children of Shira and Steve Stein
- Simcha Meir
- Tamara Yocheved
- Eliyahu Aryeh
- Eitan Yosef
- Rayne
- Talia

Children of Aliza and Zev Ganz
- Shmuel Yoel
- Atara Rina
- Daniel Yomtov
- Yosef

Children of Tamar and Josh Heller
- Yakira Eliyana
- Gabriella Talia
- Yehuda Meir
- Sarah Avigayil

Children of Laura and Adam Hanina
- Samuel Azriel
- Charlotte Eliora

And in tribute to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, whose work has opened the doors of Jewish learning to our generation and those to come.

– Fanya Gottesfeld Heller
Overview ................................................................................................................................. iv–ix

FOR ADULT PARTICIPANTS

1. Abraham: Journey into the Unknown
We meet Abraham as he embarks on a journey. The command “go forth” presents him with numerous challenges and opportunities. What does it mean to go forth? Why is the destination unknown? This session explores what Abraham’s journey reveals about his character and how it inspires us to stride boldly into the unknown.

   Facilitator’s Guide ...................................................... 1
   Sourcesheet for Participants ..................................... 7

2. Balaam: To Bless or To Curse
Balaam is known as a villain—a prophet hired to curse the Children of Israel in the desert. There is more to his story, however, and the complexity leads us to significant questions about power, ability and how we choose to act. In this session we explore Balaam’s motivations and prophetic ability to understand how one can use—or misuse—one’s talents.

   Facilitator’s Guide .................................................... 10
   Sourcesheet for Participants .................................... 17

3. Deborah: Victory in the Hands of a Woman
Deborah was a prophetess, judge and national leader during the first settlement of Canaan; her story illuminates the role of women in ancient Israel. This session explores power in both the public sphere of the battlefield and the private sphere of the tent, and how our understanding of Deborah’s role in society can inform how we view leadership today.

   Facilitator’s Guide .................................................... 21
   Sourcesheet for Participants .................................... 27

4. Eve: Separation and Wholeness in the Garden of Eden
Explore the creation of human beings through the story of Eve and how she came about through an act of splitting. This session will look at how the first people became independent, separate beings with conflicting desires, and the resulting quest for wholeness.

   Facilitator’s Guide .................................................... 31
   Sourcesheet for Participants .................................... 40

5. Moses: The Birth of a Leader
We all know Moses as the ultimate leader, but what about the story of Moses before he became the great figure of history? The circumstances of Moses’s birth, his childhood environment and his actions as a young man are all described in the Bible, too. What impact did these formative years have on his character? In this session we will discuss essential traits of leadership and what contributes to the development of a leader.

   Facilitator’s Guide .................................................... 46
   Sourcesheet for Participants .................................... 52

6. The People of Sodom: The Making of an Evil Society
When God confides in Abraham that He is going to destroy Sodom, He does not explain Sodom’s transgressions. What kind of society was Sodom? What were their values? Why should their behavior be avoided? This session asks why it is so important for Abraham and his descendants—us—to know about the People of Sodom, their philosophy and, ultimately, their downfall.

   Facilitator’s Guide .................................................... 56
   Sourcesheet for Participants .................................... 63

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS

Esther and Moses: Not All Heroes Wear Capes (Middle School)
How do you know who is a hero? In this class, students will meet Esther and Moses to find out what makes a true hero.

   Facilitator’s Guide .................................................... 67
   Sourcesheet for Students ......................................... 72

Abraham: The Trailblazer (Elementary School)
Meet Abraham, Judaism’s first explorer. Students will work together to learn about Abraham and his adventurous spirit.

   Facilitator’s Guide .................................................... 74
   Sourcesheet for Students ......................................... 78

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD:

PJ LIBRARY PROGRAMMING UNITS

Ometz Lev—Courage Family Programs ................................................................. 79

   Noah’s Bed
   The Sabbath Lion

Supplemental Reading—Introduction to Biblical Images .............................................. 102
Preface

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz has laid down a challenge to Jews everywhere: “to take a step ahead in Jewish learning and commitment.”

The Global Day of Jewish Learning is the collective response—a most successful one—with 420 communities in 36 countries participating in 2013.

Initiated in 2010 to celebrate the completion of Rabbi Steinsaltz’s monumental translation and commentary on the Talmud, the Global Day has quickly become an internationally recognized annual event. As the study of Torah is one of the few things that the entirety of our people can share, the Global Day is a day for all Jews to celebrate and cherish.

The Global Day is the work of many hands, internationally and in communities large and small. We appreciate the work being done on the ground to organize events in synagogues, JCCs, Hillels, Federations, and other community organizations all around the world. The success of the Global Day is due to all of your collective efforts. Thank you.

The Aleph Society, which spearheads the Global Day of Jewish Learning, is an affiliate of the Shefa Institute, which promotes the work of Rabbi Steinsaltz. We are grateful to Rabbi Menachem Even-Israel, Shefa’s Executive Director, for his guidance and creativity.

Several agencies and individuals were instrumental in the planning and outreach for the Global Day. Our deepest thanks go to our key international partner, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and our organizing partners, the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. We are excited to again have JAFI’s Partnership2Gether join us as a community partner. We are grateful to our 20+ supporting partners, including the rabbinic bodies of all the denominations, for promoting the Global Day to their constituencies. This is truly a collaborative effort.

Thank you to Rabbi Yitzchak Blau, Danny Drachsler, Rachel Friedman, Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, Devorah Katz and Aliza Sperling for contributing pieces to this curriculum. And a special thank you to Devorah Katz for the dedication she brought to her role as Curriculum Editor. We greatly appreciate our special partnership with PJ Library and its work to prepare this year’s early childhood family programming unit: Ometz Lev—Courage.

We wish you a wonderful day of learning on Sunday, November 16th and hope that the study of “Heroes and Villains, Saints and Fools” will offer us new insights into biblical characters and ourselves.

Margy-Ruth Davis and Karen Sponder
The Aleph Society
The Aleph Society’s Mission & Ventures

The Aleph Society was founded in 1990 to further Rabbi Steinsaltz’s mission of “Let My People Know.” The Rabbi’s network of publishing ventures, scholarly work and schools span the globe. After completing a 45 volume Hebrew translation and commentary on the Talmud, he oversees translations of this masterwork into English, French, Russian and Spanish. He has written more than sixty other books that have been translated into a dozen languages. Over 1,000 youngsters—from kindergarten to those in post-army advanced studies—study in his Israeli institutions. All of the Rabbi’s affiliate organizations are under the umbrella of the Shefa Institute; its website, www.hashefa.com, offers a wealth of digital classes and lectures by the Rabbi and his colleagues.

The American-based Aleph Society sponsors informal education programs that reach a world-wide audience. The Global Day of Jewish Learning, now in its fifth year, is celebrated in over 400 communities, from Singapore to San Francisco and from Dallas to Djerba. Many, many thousands of Jews join together to study the same foundational texts and to be inspired to “take a step ahead,” as Rabbi Steinsaltz has challenged us. (www.theglobalday.org)

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz is internationally regarded as one of the greatest rabbis of this century and the last. As described in Newsweek, “Jewish lore is filled with tales of formidable rabbis. Probably none living today can compare in genius and influence to Adin Steinsaltz, whose extraordinary gifts as scholar, teacher, scientist, writer, mystic and social critic have attracted disciples from all factions of society.”

He is the first person since the medieval sage Rashi to have completed a full translation and commentary on the Babylonian Talmud. This historic achievement was commemorated in 2010 by the inaugural Global Day of Jewish Learning. The debut volumes of the Steinsaltz English edition of the Koren Talmud Bavli garnered a 2012 National Jewish Book Award.

Other honors include Israel’s inaugural Israeli Presidential Award of Distinction, the Israel Prize and the French Order of Arts and Literature. Renowned as an original and open-minded thinker, Rabbi Steinsaltz is the author of over 60 books and has lectured and taught in hundreds of communities around the world. Rabbi Steinsaltz is widely known throughout the world as an extraordinary champion of Jewish literacy.
Introduction for Facilitators & Educators

The theme of Heroes and Villains, Saints and Fools offers important material for any Jew to explore. At the same time, we do not expect every Global Day participant to feel the same way about these ideas. Therefore, facilitators are challenged to approach the text with nuanced perspectives and to lead a pluralistic conversation, allowing participants to express their ideas. How can a facilitator manage this?

- Opening the text for conversation, rather than offering an authoritative interpretation
- Allowing for different ideas to co-exist in the classroom, including different understandings about biblical characters
- Encouraging all involved to keep an open mind and allow themselves to be challenged by the ideas in the room and on the page
- Encouraging participants to learn from each other

The facilitator will also benefit from:

- Asking questions of participants, opening up questions for conversation; after reading a text, asking participants for “reactions” and “questions”
- Stepping back and calling on participants, rather than continually offering ideas
- Allowing silence, letting people sit with ideas and mull over their thoughts
- Ensuring that those in the room know each other’s names and use them; attributing ideas to those who first raise them

Leading Global Day conversations requires a balance between facilitation and teaching. Those leading these conversations “facilitate” when they make room for participants to speak their minds and ensure that the conversation has order. Teaching is also necessary. Through the Global Day, we hope that participants develop a commitment to and interest in Jewish texts, as well as an understanding that such texts are relevant to us today. We hope that they see that Jewish text-based conversations can enrich community work, that any of us can access texts—that they are not so intimidating—and that Jewish study links each of us to the Jewish people as a whole. Facilitators are responsible for conveying these ideas to participants.

Facilitators can convey these ideas in a variety of ways:

- Facilitators can begin conversations by asking: Has anyone studied texts like this before? What is it like? What are our associations with Jewish text study? What would it mean to study more? Facilitators can also close conversations in this way, helping participants to debrief the experience and to validate each other’s positive experiences or concerns.
- Particularly if the group has relatively little experience studying Jewish texts, the facilitator can say directly: Studying Jewish texts is not so scary!
- Facilitators should feel comfortable sharing their own experiences with text study.
- If the group includes community agency leaders, or individuals who are leaders in their own synagogues, the facilitator might lead a conversation about how each person might introduce more text study into their different organizations.

Facilitators should keep in mind these educational goals, asking participants questions and challenging them in ways that will help them think about these ideas. The hope is that these goals will be realized and that the Talmud and Jewish texts will have gained thousands of students as a result of this great day.
Editor’s Note: Terminology and Translation
Throughout the curriculum we refer to God as “He.” We transliterate certain Hebrew words. Please feel free to adapt these and any other terminology to that which is most fitting for your community.

Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of the Bible are from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh.

The Sessions
To delve into the theme and to help participants see both biblical characters and Jewish texts as relevant to their lives, the sessions address significant questions related to Heroes and Villians, Saints and Fools.

Each class reviews primary ideas in different areas, and the classes complement each other.

We have chosen texts that will challenge participants, raising key questions and helping us to develop a richer understanding of biblical characters, in ways that were relevant to the rabbis and will be relevant to us today. Each class contains a variety of texts that shed light on the theme—including texts from the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Medieval and Modern commentators, and Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz.

Session format:
• Facilitators’ guides contain background information, texts, conversation questions and directions to help you structure and frame each class.
• Sourcesheets for the participants immediately follow the facilitator’s guide in each unit.
• A breakdown of the classes’ timing is provided to facilitators. While we outline 60 minutes for the adult sessions, we expect the facilitator to have the flexibility to abridge or lengthen these classes based on time allotted and/or the participants’ interest.

As you put together your outline for the conversation that you will lead, keep in mind:
• Don’t feel compelled to use each text and activity. Rather, use what makes sense and feels natural to you.
• Connect one text to the other. Often, the hardest part of these conversations is making the links between texts. Before leading the conversation, create a mental outline of how one text leads to the next, and of the points you are trying to make in teaching and leading.
• Feel free to share some of your own ideas and personal stories. Bringing yourself into the conversation helps participants see you as a genuine role model.
• Don’t be afraid to share your own questions about the texts. By sharing our questions, we assure students that one can live a rich Jewish life even with—and maybe only with—questions.

These texts have been chosen for their relevance to human experience, but in the end, the true purpose of the day is to increase students’ familiarity with and appreciation for Jewish text study and biblical characters, their role in Jewish tradition, and their role in our lives. Each text is rich with nuance, and a serious reckoning with the text will certainly yield new perspectives and meaning.
Beyond a text-by-text class discussion, here are some alternative formats you might consider:

- Have the students prepare together in pairs, discussing the texts with questions you provide. Give them 20 to 30 minutes to prepare the sources and then bring them back together to share their insights. Often you will find that they say they didn’t have enough time to review all the sources (this is a good thing!).

- Divide the class into small groups and assign a source or two to each group. Give each group 10 to 15 minutes to work together and then reconvene the entire class and ask each group to share their insights.

- Divide the class into small groups and have the entire class learn one or two sources (depending on the length) for 5 to 7 minutes. Then bring them back for a debriefing which will also be five minutes at most. Do that for all the sources, leaving time for a five to seven minute summary at the end.

**Video Classes**

In addition to this curriculum, there will be two video classes by Rabbi Steinsaltz that will be available for download/online viewing. Each class will be approximately 15 minutes long. The topics are:

- Why study biblical characters? (Discussion questions will be provided.)
- Balaam: How to reconcile being a flawed person with possessing great gifts? (Will pair well with the session Balaam: To Bless or To Curse)

The videos will be available in September in the Toolbox section of the Global Day website.

**24x24**

24x24 is the Global Day’s live broadcast of Jewish learning from around the world—using Google Hangouts On Air and YouTube. Learn from renowned Jewish educators, rabbis and artists and ask questions in real time. Bring a speaker from around the world to your Global Day programming.

Visit www.theglobalday.org/24x24 to learn more and check out the latest list of speakers and topics.

**Using the Curriculum Guidebook for All Levels**

**Beginning Adult Learners**

- Study Moses: The Birth of a Leader, as this session is intended to be especially helpful for beginning learners.

- Base a session on Rabbi Steinsaltz’s Introduction to Biblical Images (in the Supplemental Reading section). You might want to split the paragraphs up among participants—give a few paragraphs to each participant. After they read and parse the paragraphs, go around the room and create a summary of the chapter from participants’ feedback.

- Use the following discussion questions:

  1. How do you think Rabbi Steinsaltz would answer the question, “Why study biblical characters?”
  2. According to Rabbi Steinsaltz, what are some consequences of the Bible’s “objective and distant” style?
  3. Can there be meaning in studying biblical characters even if one doesn’t believe in God?
  4. The stories of biblical characters reflect an ancient context. How are they relevant for us today?

- Close either session by asking participants about their experience of text study, debriefing and helping participants look forward to studying again.
Middle School Students
We are pleased to offer again this year a unit for middle school students (grades 6–8). This unit includes activities to help these students explore the definition of a hero. Middle school students vary by age and educational needs, so this unit will need to be tailored to best fit the group of participating students.

Elementary School Students
We are pleased to offer again this year a unit for elementary school students (grades 1–5). This unit includes activities to help these students explore the character of Abraham. Elementary school students vary greatly by age and educational needs, so this unit will need to be tailored to best fit the group of participating students.
Written by: Danny Drachsler

Introduction (3 minutes)

The Bible introduces us to Abraham as someone who is about to begin a journey. God's first commandment to Abraham is “Go forth!” (Genesis 12:1). This initial encounter and the beginning of the journey have intrigued and inspired Jewish biblical commentators for centuries. By exploring some of our sages’ questions and some of their answers, we will consider what this short passage might reveal about the character of Abraham. We will look at how it has shaped Jewish values, such as opposing corrupt ideas and striding boldly into the unknown.

Part One: The Biblical Text (10 minutes)

- Ask your participants to form groups of two or three for the chevruta style of learning. Chevruta, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.

- Ask your chevruta pairs to read Text #1 together and discuss the questions below.

- Note that Abraham was previously known as Abram—you can point this out if necessary.


1 The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, and your birthplace, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” 4 Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan 6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.
Abraham: Journey into the Unknown

Ask:

1. List three questions that this text raises for you.
2. Focusing on verse 1:
   - What might be an explanation for the unusual phrasing *lech-lecha*, variously translated as “go forth”, “go-you-forth” or “go for yourself”? Why?
   - What insight might we gain from considering the listing of three levels of departure—“from your land, and your birthplace, and your father's house”? Why are they presented in this order?

Genesis 12:1–6 introduces the command for Abraham to depart and the beginning of his departure. As the discussion continues, keep in mind the questions raised by the first verse:

- What does it mean to go forth?
- In what ways is the departure challenging?
- Why is the destination unknown?

Part Two: Departure (20 minutes)

In Genesis 12:2 we see that Abraham is promised blessings and rewards if he leaves his familiar surroundings. But why can’t Abraham accomplish whatever God wants of him where he currently is? Why is a departure necessary?

Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Weiser, known as Malbim, was a rabbi in Ukraine in the 19th century. He suggests that God wanted Abraham to make more than a merely physical departure.

Text #2: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 12:1.

Malbim הבריאת יב

The LORD said to Abram ‘Go forth from your land...’ [God] told him that the purpose of his departure was to separate him from corrupt ways and ideas... And God commanded him that along with his physical departure there would be a philosophical departure, in order to separate from the way of his land, which was of an evil temperament, and from the ways of the people of his birthplace, and also from the love of his father's house... Therefore, the text says *lekh lekha* (to yourself)—he should “go into himself” to separate his ways from all of these.

Ask:

1. According to Malbim, why does God want Abraham to leave his land, birthplace, and father's house?
2. If, as Malbim proposes, God wants Abraham to separate from “corrupt ways and ideas,” why must Abraham physically separate himself, as well? Why could he not accomplish a “philosophical departure” without a geographical one?
3. How do you respond when encountering “corrupt ways and ideas,” or when you are confronted by a value system with which you disagree?
Malbim emphasizes the philosophical nature of Abraham’s departure. Abraham is to commit to a certain set of beliefs and values, and separate himself from a different worldview. The significance of this intellectual challenge resonates with us today.

Whether Abraham’s departure was to be solely physical, or also philosophical as the Malbim suggests, why does the text present the three places he is to leave (land, birthplace, father’s house) in this order?

Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz lived in Ukraine from 1550–1619, and is known by the title of his most famous work, Kli Yakar. He suggests an answer to this question.


It seems that God moved Abraham from one matter to another the way one trains a child, for perhaps it would be difficult for him to accept everything at once. He therefore prepared three steps... for initially God had asked him to leave his land, and this was a small request, since one does not derive greater benefit from one’s own land than other lands ... And then, He distracted him from his entire homeland, to prevent his connection to the people of his homeland, and his reliance on them... And once [Abraham] was persuaded of this as well, [God] was concerned that his soul would cling to the house of his father, for there he had the added financial benefit, for home and possessions are inherited from parents.

Ask:

1. According to Kli Yakar, why are the three places Abraham was to leave—land, town, father’s house—presented in this order?
2. What does God think Abraham will be concerned about? What does this highlight about the nature of his departure?
3. What insight does this offer into the relationship between God and Abraham?

Kli Yakar suggests that, as a child is taught, Abraham is gradually introduced to each level of departure. From this comment we perceive a nurturing relationship between God and Abraham. Kli Yakar also focuses on the material sacrifice Abraham must make, emphasizing the physical nature of his departure as he prepares to abandon his familial inheritance.

Part Three: Destination Unknown (10 minutes)

The commandment is not only that Abraham must leave a place. He is to go somewhere else—but the destination is not specified. All the text says (in Genesis 12:1) is, “to the land that I will show you.” Why would the destination be kept a secret?
Rashi, an 11th century French scholar and rabbi, and Malbim offer different explanations.

Reads Texts #4 and #5 aloud.

Text #4: Rashi. Commentary on Genesis 12:2.

To the land that I will show you: He (God) did not reveal the land to him (Abram) immediately, in order to make it dear in his eyes...

Text #5: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 12:1.

And He said, to the land I will show you, for this was part of the test—for it is easier for a person to leave his land if the destination is known...

Ask:

1. Rashi says that not knowing the destination will make it “dear” to Abraham. Why might that be? What would this indicate about the character of Abraham?
2. According to Malbim, what does Abraham prefer? To know the destination, or not to know?
3. What do we learn about Abraham from his willingness to go forth into the unknown?
4. Are you excited by the unknown or do you find uncertainty stressful? How does the example of Abraham give us guidance in dealing with the unknown?

Rashi imagines an Abraham eager to venture into the unknown, while Malbim proposes that Abraham would be reluctant to begin a journey without knowing the destination. In both of these sages’ views, Abraham courageously moves forward despite the uncertain future he faces. His example encourages us to be willing to leap—to take the first step of any journey—whether or not we have faith in our ability to reach the destination.

Part Four: Journey (15 minutes)

We’ve addressed questions concerning Abraham’s origin, as well as his destination. What about the part in between—the journey? The first and central commandment to Abraham is the curiously-phrased, lech-lecha, “לְכָּלַח” or “go forth”, “go-you-forth” or “go for yourself” (Genesis 12:1). What does this mean?
Leaving home is an important part of growth. …[T]his notion of home means, among other things, comfort—security, safety, even warmth. In many ways, symbolically, home means the womb.

You may say that home is almost the opposite of spiritual. Spiritual usually means a going out, not a staying home. There is a sense in which home is the opposite of pilgrimage, which means you are going out of home. When you go on a pilgrimage, or when you go on a spiritual search, isn’t it also fair to say that you are looking for a new or different type of home?

Home is, in one way, the safe ground, the family—warmth, softness, safety, shelter.

But there is another view of home, in which home is the end, not the beginning. You leave your present home, and you are searching for a new home.

The old home is dead for you. It is not enough for you now. When I leave home, it’s about search. The man with the thirst—what does he want? Where does he want to get? Now there are surely some searchers who leave home and want to become, spiritually speaking, gypsies. They are going on a perpetual search that never stops. When is the wandering of a gypsy done? When he dies. You are going to find new things, you are going to find new treasures, but you’re not going to stop. Spiritually speaking, there are lots of such people, perpetual wanderers who are going on a way that doesn’t have any kind of a stop. So there is the person who is searching for another home—a higher home, a better home, a more luxurious home. And then there is the person who would say, “For me staying is dying.”

Ask:

1. In your own words, how would you characterize the two types of people Rabbi Steinsaltz describes?
2. Which type of person was Abraham? Explain why you think so.
3. With which person in this text do you identify? Which is more important to you—the journey or the destination?

Rabbi Steinsaltz describes two types of searchers: those who seek in order to find a new home and those whose goal is to keep seeking. Yet he does not say one is preferable; his central point is that the search is important.

Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (the Gerrer Rebbe), a 19th century Polish rabbi, agrees that there is value in wandering. He writes in his book, Sefat Emet, about the value of being in motion. This book became so well known that the Gerrer Rebbe is often referred to simply as Sefat Emet.

“Get you out of your land”—a person should always keep walking. “To [that which] I will show you”—always some new attainment. This is why the person is called a walker. Whoever stands still is not renewed, for nature holds him fast. The angels above are beyond nature; they can be said to “stand” (Isaiah 6:2). But the person has to keep walking.

Ask:

1. Describe what Sefat Emet means by “a person should always keep walking.”
2. What do you think “whoever stands still is not renewed…” means?
3. How do you “keep walking?” Do Jewish cycles, rituals, and traditions provide opportunities for renewal? If so, how?

Sefat Emet proposes that progress itself is a value, stressing the importance of challenging ourselves and of never being complacent. He encourages us to make progress even though we may not reach the goal, “renewing” ourselves by engaging in a process of continual improvement.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Our study of the beginning of Abraham's journey into the unknown enables us to better understand the challenges of departure, whether that is from a physical, philosophical or spiritual place. As we pursue our own life journeys, will we be excited by the prospect of a journey, or will we have to overcome our fear of the unknown?
Part One: The Biblical Text


1 The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, and your birthplace, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” 4 Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan 6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

Part Two: Departure

Text #2: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 12:1.

The LORD said to Abram ‘Go forth from your land...’ [God] told him that the purpose of his departure was to separate him from corrupt ways and ideas... And God commanded him that along with his physical departure there would be a philosophical departure, in order to separate from the way of his land, which was of an evil temperament, and from the ways of the people of his birthplace, and also from the love of his father’s house... Therefore, the text says lekh lekha (to yourself)—he should “go into himself” to separate his ways from all of these.
It seems that God moved Abraham from one matter to another the way one trains a child, for perhaps it would be difficult for him to accept everything at once. He therefore prepared three steps... for initially God had asked him to leave his land, and this was a small request, since one does not derive greater benefit from one's own land than other lands... And then, He distracted him from his entire homeland, to prevent his connection to the people of his homeland, and his reliance on them... And once [Abraham] was persuaded of this as well, [God] was concerned that his soul would cling to the house of his father, for there he had the added financial benefit, for home and possessions are inherited from parents.

Part Three: Destination Unknown

Text #4: Rashi. Commentary on Genesis 12:2.

To the land that I will show you: He (God) did not reveal the land to him (Abram) immediately, in order to make it dear in his eyes...

Text #5: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 12:1.

And He said, to the land I will show you, for this was part of the test—for it is easier for a person to leave his land if the destination is known...
Part Four: Journey

Text #6: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “There are No Final Answers.” Parabola 1 November 2006.

Leaving home is an important part of growth. …[T]his notion of home means, among other things, comfort—security, safety, even warmth. In many ways, symbolically, home means the womb.

You may say that home is almost the opposite of spiritual. Spiritual usually means a going out, not a staying home. There is a sense in which home is the opposite of pilgrimage, which means you are going out of home. When you go on a pilgrimage, or when you go on a spiritual search, isn’t it also fair to say that you are looking for a new or different type of home?

Home is, in one way, the safe ground, the family—warmth, softness, safety, shelter.

But there is another view of home, in which home is the end, not the beginning. You leave your present home, and you are searching for a new home.

The old home is dead for you. It is not enough for you now. When I leave home, it’s about search. The man with the thirst—what does he want? Where does he want to get? Now there are surely some searchers who leave home and want to become, spiritually speaking, gypsies. They are going on a perpetual search that never stops. When is the wandering of a gypsy done? When he dies. You are going to find new things, you are going to find new treasures, but you’re not going to stop. Spiritually speaking, there are lots of such people, perpetual wanderers who are going on a way that doesn’t have any kind of a stop. So there is the person who is searching for another home—a higher home, a better home, a more luxurious home. And then there is the person who would say, “For me staying is dying.”


“Get you out of your land”—a person should always keep walking. “To [that which] I will show you”—always some new attainment. This is why the person is called a walker. Whoever stands still is not renewed, for nature holds him fast. The angels above are beyond nature; they can be said to “stand” (Isaiah 6:2). But the person has to keep walking.
Written by: Rabbi Yitzchak Blau

Introduction (10 minutes)

Begin by asking participants their assumptions about biblical prophets.

1. Which characters in the Bible are prophets? Who stands out as a memorable prophet?
2. What are the abilities and functions of prophets?
3. What are some character traits of prophets?
4. Do prophets always act for the good?

A prophet is someone with great power. He or she is different from the average person: God speaks to prophets, showing them the future or giving them a special message to bring to the people. Some well-known Israelite prophets at times appear to have flawed character traits, yet they always seem to act out of a motivation to benefit the Israelites. In this unit we’ll meet a prophet named Balaam, who is not an Israelite—which in and of itself may challenge your notion of prophecy—and who seems motivated to use his prophetic abilities to harm the Israelites. Our study of this complex character will challenge us to consider an important question: how do we use our talents?

Share this summary of the story of Balaam (Numbers 22–24).

Let me summarize the story of Balaam, which appears in Numbers Chapters 22–24.

Balak, King of Moab, is frightened by the approaching Israelite nation and he asks Balaam to curse them. Balaam informs Balak that he will only be able to do what God allows. Though God grudgingly permits Balaam to pursue this mission, He is angry with Balaam for going. On the way, an angel blocks Balaam’s path. His donkey perceives the presence of the angel while Balaam does not; an unusual dialogue with the donkey ensues. Balaam attempts to build altars and use different vantage points to curse the Israelites but he ultimately blesses them three times. After Balak, in effect, fires him, Balaam offers one final prophetic speech about the future of Israel.

Part One: Meeting Balaam (5 minutes)

Ask a participant to read Text #1 aloud.

Text #1: Numbers 22:1–14

מְנֵה פֶּרֶךָ אִדַּךְ:

(א) הִקְשֶׁה בֶּן יוֹסֵף אֶל שִּׁבְעָה בֶּן שִּׁבְעָה מֵאֲבוֹ בֵּיתוֹ לְרָעָה.
(ב) נִדְרֶה כֶּלֶם בֶּן פֶּרֶךָ אֶל כְּלֶם אִשֶּׁר שָׂמַע בֵּיתוֹ לְרָעָה.
(ג) נִדְרֶה מִלְאָכָה חָמַס לֵאמָר כִּי רָעָה אֲדֹנָי מִלְאָכָה מִקְפֶּלֶח בֵּיתוֹ שֶׂרֶפֶל שֵׁלֵד.
(ד) לְאִישׁ מִלְאָכָה אֲדֹנָי מִלְאָכָה לְאִישׁ מִלְאָכָה חָמַס לֵאמָר כִּי שֵׁלֵד בֵּיתוֹ מִלְאָכָה אֲדֹנָי מִלְאָכָה כִּי שֵׁלֵד בֵּיתוֹ מִלְאָכָה כִּי שֵׁלֵד בֵּיתוֹ מִלְאָכָה כִּי שֵׁלֵד בֵּיתוֹ מִלְאָכָה.
The Israelites then marched on and encamped in the steppes of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. Moab was alarmed because that people was so numerous. Moab dreaded the Israelites, and Moab said to the elders of Midian, “Now this horde will lick clean all that is about us as an ox licks up the grass of the field.” Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, in the land of his kinsfolk, to invite him, saying, “There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view, and it is settled next to me. Come then, put a curse upon this people for me, since they are too numerous for me; perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them off. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian, versed in divination, set out. They came to Balaam and gave him Balak’s message. Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s dignitaries, “Go back to your own country, for the LORD will not let me go with you.” The Moabite dignitaries left, and they came to Balak and said, “Balaam refused to come with us.”

1. Describe Balaam and what Balak wants him to do.
2. What is your first impression of Balaam’s talent as a prophet?
Part Two: An Unlikely Comparison—Moses and Balaam (5 minutes)

Let us look briefly at a famous text about Moses, and a related commentary on Deuteronomy in the Sifre Devarim (a 4th century rabbinic work).

Ask a participant to read aloud Texts #2 and #3.

Text #2: Deuteronomy 34:10

儆勒ם הלוד ירה

אל כה בא ווד בנים ראמה כלשה אשין ציו ני וה כים אל פונים.

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the LORD singled out, face to face.

Text #3: Sifre Devarim 357:10

ספורי דבריה פרסקה שנות.

בישראל לא כה ואל יحرفתי העלם כה וארכו זו זי בדǮנ ברוע.

In Israel none arose but one did among the nations and this is Balaam ben Beor.

Ask:

1. What about these texts surprises you?
2. What do these texts suggest about the talent level of Balaam?

Both Moses and Balaam are considered to be prophets of the same caliber. The impression given here is that Balaam is a prophet of impeccable standing.

Part Three: Talent for Sale? (20 minutes)

Ask participants to form groups of two or three for the chevruta style of learning. Chevruta, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.

Ask chevruta pairs to read Text #4 together and discuss the question which follows.
Text #4: Numbers 22:15–19

15 Then Balak sent other dignitaries, more numerous and distinguished than the first. 16 They came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak son of Zippor: Please do not refuse to come with me. 17 I will reward you richly and I will do anything you ask of me. Only come and damn this people for me.” 18 Balaam replied to Balak's officials, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the command of the LORD my God. 19 So you, too, stay here overnight, and let me find out what else the LORD may say to me.”

Ask:

1. Given Balaam’s response to the dignitaries, how would you describe his relationship with God?

Balaam seems to be so committed to God that there would be nothing, not even a house full of silver and gold, that could entice him to go against the word of God.

In contrast to reading these verses as showing Balaam's subservience to God, the next two texts propose alternative readings. Text #5, by R. Joseph Bekhor Shor (a 12th century French commentator and poet), sees Balaam as opening a negotiation with the dignitaries. Text #6, from Deuteronomy, also implies Balaam's greed.

Ask your chevruta pairs to read Texts #5 and #6.


This is the way of those who desire bribes. In a crafty fashion they state a bribery amount, as Efron said, “A land worth four hundred silver shekels” [Genesis 23:14], and thus gave a monetary amount. Abraham heard, understood, and gave it to him. So too here [in Numbers 22:18], he [Balaam] intended to fix an amount for the bribe so that he would increase his profit.

Note: Bekhor Shor's comment refers to Genesis 23, in which Efron negotiates a price for the sale of his land to Abraham, who wishes to bury Sarah there.
Text #6: Deuteronomy 23:4-6

4 No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the LORD; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the LORD, 5 because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you.— 6 But the LORD your God refused to heed Balaam; instead, the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, for the LORD your God loves you.

Bring the full group together and ask:

1. Do these texts change your opinion of Balaam? How and why?
2. What are examples of people selling their talents in our modern society? When is this behavior praiseworthy and when might this be worthy of condemnation?

Part Four: Same Action, Different Intentions (10 minutes)

Let's continue with Balaam on his journey and see how one aspect of the story is interpreted in the Talmud.

Read Text #7.


20 That night God came to Balaam and said to him, “If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do.” 21 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. 22 But God was incensed at his going; so an angel of the LORD placed himself in his way as an adversary...
Ask:

1. What do the first two verses of this text convey about Balaam?
2. How might the concluding verse challenge your previous interpretation?
3. Why was God angry with Balaam for going? Hadn’t he just told him to go?

Read Text #8.


The verse says about Balaam “And Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey,” (Numbers 22:21). A Sage taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar: Love nullifies the fence of distinction, and this is learned from Avraham, as the verse says: “And Avraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,” (Genesis 22:3). He himself did this and he did not wait for his servants. Similarly hate nullifies the fence of distinction, as the verse says: “And Balaam rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,” (Numbers 22:21).

Ask:

1. How would you summarize the message of this text?
2. According to this text, how are love and hate similar?

Part Five: Using Your Talents (5 minutes)

Balaam can be viewed as an individual with great prophetic ability, as well as someone who acts based on greed and hatred. How can we understand Balaam’s use—or misuse—of his talents? A comment by Rabbi Steinsaltz will serve as a springboard for our discussion of this question.

Ask a participant to read Text #9.

Text #9: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. My Rebbe.

In Judaism, *ruach hakodesh* is the ability to know things in the present or the future, through a personal bond with the world of the spiritual. Sometimes Jews and non-Jews, even nonbelievers, are given a form of *ruach hakodesh* as a gift; in secular terms we might call it ESP. The biblical Balaam was surely not a nice person. His arrogance is quite apparent, his bias against the Israelites and for the Moabites is evident—but he nevertheless possessed a connection to the holy spirit. Jews consider his prophecies to be at a very high level, and they are even included in the daily prayer.
Balaam: To Bless or To Curse

Ask:

1. What message is Rabbi Steinsaltz trying to impart?
2. Why would God grant prophecy to an evil person?
3. Or why would God incline a great prophet toward evil? Of Balaam, Balak says, “He whom you bless is blessed indeed” (Numbers 22:6). If that were true, would it mean Balaam does good, in addition to evil? If so, how would that affect your opinion of Balaam?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

In the end, Balaam heads out to curse the Children of Israel. God does not allow the curses to leave Balaam’s mouth and instead changes Balaam’s words into blessings; thus Balaam blesses the Children of Israel three times. One of the blessings is now part of morning prayers (Mah Tovu begins with Numbers 24:5—“How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel”).

Ask:

1. Does this end result alter your opinion? How important are Balaam’s intentions?
2. Are you surprised to learn that a prayer that is said daily comes from someone intent on cursing the Children of Israel? Why do you think it was chosen as part of the daily prayer service?
3. What messages can we take away from this story?
The Israelites then marched on and encamped in the steppes of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. Moab was alarmed because that people was so numerous. Moab dreaded the Israelites, and Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick clean all that is about us as an ox licks up the grass of the field." Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor in Pethor, which is by the Euphrates, in the land of his kinsfolk, to invite him, saying, "There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view, and it is settled next to me. Come then, put a curse upon this people for me, since they are too numerous for me; perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed." The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian, versed in divination, set out. They came to Balaam and gave him Balak’s message. He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I shall reply to you as the LORD may instruct me." So the Moabite dignitaries stayed with Balaam. God came to Balaam and said, "What do these people want of you?"
Balaam said to God, “Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: 11 Here is a people that came out from Egypt and hides the earth from view. Come now and curse them for me; perhaps I can engage them in battle and drive them off.” 12 But God said to Balaam, “Do not go with them. You must not curse that people, for they are blessed.” 13 Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s dignitaries, “Go back to your own country, for the LORD will not let me go with you.” 14 The Moabite dignitaries left, and they came to Balak and said, “Balaam refused to come with us.”

Part Two: An Unlikely Comparison—Moses and Balaam

Text #2: Deuteronomy 34:10

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the LORD singled out, face to face.

Text #3: Sifre Devarim 357:10

In Israel none arose but one did among the nations and this is Balaam.

Part Three: Talent for Sale?

Text #4: Numbers 22:15–19

The Global Day of Jewish Learning
November 16, 2014
www.theglobalday.org

Balaam: To Bless or To Curse
15 Then Balak sent other dignitaries, more numerous and distinguished than the first. 16 They came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak son of Zippor: Please do not refuse to come with me. 17 I will reward you richly and I will do anything you ask of me. Only come and damn this people for me.” 18 Balaam replied to Balak’s officials, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the command of the LORD my God. 19 So you, too, stay here overnight, and let me find out what else the LORD may say to me.”


This is the way of those who desire bribes. In a crafty fashion they state a bribery amount, as Efron said, “A land worth four hundred silver shekels” [Genesis 23:14], and thus gave a monetary amount. Abraham heard, understood, and gave it to him. So too here [in Numbers 22:18], he [Balaam] intended to fix an amount for the bribe so that he would increase his profit.

Text #6: Deuteronomy 23:4–6

4 No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the LORD; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the LORD, 5 because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you. — 6 But the LORD your God refused to heed Balaam; instead, the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, for the LORD your God loves you.
Part Four: Same Action, Different Intentions


20 That night God came to Balaam and said to him, “If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do.” 21 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. 22 But God was incensed at his going; so an angel of the LORD placed himself in his way as an adversary...


The verse says about Balaam “And Balaam rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,” (Numbers 22:21). A Sage taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar: Love nullifies the fence of distinction, and this is learned from Avraham, as the verse says: “And Avraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,” (Genesis 22:3). He himself did this and he did not wait for his servants. Similarly hate nullifies the fence of distinction, as the verse says: “And Balaam rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,” (Numbers 22:21).

Part Five: Using Your Talents

Text #9: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. My Rebbe.

In Judaism, ruach hakodesh is the ability to know things in the present or the future, through a personal bond with the world of the spiritual. Sometimes Jews and non-Jews, even nonbelievers, are given a form of ruach hakodesh as a gift; in secular terms we might call it ESP. The biblical Balaam was surely not a nice person. His arrogance is quite apparent, his bias against the Israelites and for the Moabites is evident—but he nevertheless possessed a connection to the holy spirit. Jews consider his prophecies to be at a very high level, and they are even included in the daily prayer.
Introduction (5 minutes)

Share this summary of the story of Deborah (Judges 4–5).

The story of the biblical prophetess Deborah appears in Judges Chapters 4 and 5. The account of a victory by a coalition of northern Israelite tribes over a Canaanite army is recorded in narrative (4:1–24) and poetic forms (5:1–31). This victory ended the wars of conquest that were begun in the time of Joshua. In both the narrative and poetic versions, special attention is given to the prowess of two women: Deborah, a prophetess and judge in the region of Ephraim; and Yael, a non-Israelite tent dweller of the Kenite tribe. Deborah calls the Israelite commander Barak to war and helps him recruit the Israelite tribes to battle; Yael, by ruse, kills the Canaanite commander, Sisera, when he flees the battlefield in defeat.

Introduce the session.

In today's session, we will explore the character of Deborah and her significance as a leader, through the lens of biblical, rabbinic and more contemporary Jewish texts.

Part One: Deborah—Her Character and Career (10 minutes)

We meet Deborah in Judges 4:4-5.

Read Text #1 aloud in the full group.


4 Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, was a prophetess; she judged Israel at that time. 5 She used to sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would come to her for judgments.

Ask:

1. How is Deborah described? What aspects of Deborah are highlighted? Do you sense any tensions in these descriptions?
2. Why do you think we only meet Deborah in the middle of her life and career? She is an Israelite woman, judge and prophetess. Is there anything unusual about this?
Part Two: Gender in Battle (18 minutes)

Deborah is the only female judge in the Bible. It is unusual for a woman to summon a man in biblical times. When Deborah summons Barak to lead the Israelite forces against the Canaanite troops led by Sisera, Barak’s consent is conditional.

➤ Ask your participants to form groups of two or three for the chevruta style of learning. Chevruta, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.

➤ Ask your chevruta pairs to read Texts #2 and #3 together and discuss the questions which follow.

Text #2: Judges 4:6–9

6 She summoned Barak son of Abinoam, of Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded: Go, march up to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun. 7 And I will draw Sisera, Jabin’s army commander, with his chariots and his troops, toward you up to the Wadi Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hands.” 8 But Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; if not, I will not go.” 9 “Very well, I will go with you,” she answered. “However, there will be no glory for you in the course you are taking, for then the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.

➤ Ask:

1. Why does Barak refuse to lead the Israelite army unless Deborah joins him?
2. Why do you think Deborah feels the need to point out her gender?
3. Do you think Barak’s reply makes him a stronger or weaker leader? Why?
Consider the suggestion of the 14th century Portuguese philosopher and scholar, Don Isaac Abravanel.

**Text #3: Abravanel. Commentary on Judges 4:8.**

And this is the reason that he said to Deborah that she should go with him, in order to strengthen Israel’s heart when they see the prophetess who commanded it together with him, that they should thereby believe that it was the word of God that causes them to act thus and it is not something he made up.

**Ask:**
1. According to Abravanel, what is the value in Deborah heading out to battle with Barak? Who will benefit from it?
2. Given Abravanel’s explanation, do you agree or disagree with Barak’s strategy?

With Barak and Deborah on the battlefield, both the martial and religious elements of the Israelites’ conquering forces are represented. Abravanel suggests that together Barak and Deborah present a formidable team.

Consider the comments of Radak - Rabbi David Kimhi, a 12th century scholar from Provence, France.

**Read Text #4 aloud to the full group.**

**Text #4: Radak. Commentary on Judges 4:9.**

**Into the hands of a woman**—there are those who understand this as a reference to Yael, into whose hands Sisera was delivered and that this statement was made through prophecy. This does not, however, fit the context of the verse which states “however, it will not be your glory.” Rather, this is the explanation: If I go with you, it will not be your glory, for the salvation shall come through me, and they will say that in the hands of Deborah, God will deliver Sisera...

**Ask:**
1. According to Radak, who is the woman being referred to in Deborah’s statement to Barak?
2. What might be Deborah’s motivation in pointing out that, if she were to go with him, the glory of victory will not be his, but hers? Does her response offer any insight into her personality and character? Would you come to a different conclusion about Deborah’s character if she were referring to Yael?
In an ironic twist, given that the prophetess Deborah is on the battlefield, Israel's ultimate military victory is achieved not on the battlefield but through the encounter between Yael and Sisera in a tent. Yael is introduced as “wife of Heber, the Kenite” (Judges 4:17). Heber was an ally of the king Sisera served. This explains why Sisera would think Heber’s tent was a good place to hide.

Read Text #5 aloud.

Text #5: Judges 4:17-22

17 Sisera, meanwhile, had fled on foot to the tent of Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was friendship between King Jabin of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. 18 Yael came out to greet Sisera and said to him, “Come in, my lord, come in here, do not be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. 19 He said to her, “Please let me have some water; I am thirsty.” She opened a skin of milk and gave him some to drink; and she covered him again. 20 He said to her, “Stand at the entrance of the tent. If anybody comes and asks you if there is anybody here, say ‘No.’” 21 Then Yael wife of Heber took a tent pin and grasped the mallet. When he was fast asleep from exhaustion, she approached him stealthily and drove the pin through his temple till it went down to the ground. Thus he died. 22 Now Barak appeared in pursuit of Sisera. Yael went out to greet him and said, “Come, I will show you the man you are looking for.” He went inside with her, and there Sisera was lying dead, with the pin in his temple.

Ask:

1. How would you describe Yael’s treatment of Sisera in verses 18–21? How does it meet and/or defy gender expectations?
2. Compare the encounter of Yael and Barak in verse 22 to that of Deborah and Barak (in Text #2). In each case, who is strong and who is weak?
3. Is the Bible making a social comment on the role of gender in ancient cultures? If so, what is the comment?
Part Four: Image of Motherhood in the Song of Deborah (12 minutes)

The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) is a poetic recounting of the story. The preface to the poem names Deborah and Barak as the singers of the song. Within the poem, two women are referred to as “mother”. One is the prophetess herself and the other is the mother of the Canaanite commander, Sisera.

» Read Texts #6 and #7 aloud.

Text #6: Judges 5:7

Deliverance ceased,  
Ceased in Israel,  
Till you arose, O Deborah,  
Arose, O mother, in Israel!

Text #7: Judges 5:28-30

Through the window peered Sisera’s mother,  
Behind the lattice she whined:  
“Why is his chariot so long in coming?  
Why so late the clatter of his wheels?”  
The wisest of her ladies give answer;  
She, too, replies to herself:  
“They must be dividing the spoil they have found:  
A damsel or two for each man,  
Spoil of dyed cloths for Sisera,  
Spoil of embroidered cloths,  
A couple of embroidered cloths  
Round every neck as spoil.”
Deborah: Victory in the Hands of a Woman

Ask:

1. Does Deborah's role fit the typical image of a biblical mother? Why or why not? In what ways is she a mother?
2. While the Bible calls Deborah a mother, it does not share with us if Deborah has any children. Do you think that detail is significant? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the Song of Deborah concludes with a description of the mother of Sisera waiting in vain for his return?

Let's consider what Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz says:

Ask a participant to read Text #8 aloud.


Another markedly feminine aspect of the song is seen in its conclusion. There is no description of the fallen, of bodies torn or mangled by war, but it is psychologically extremely cruel…This is explicitly the reckoning of one woman with another…Deborah graphically depicted the expectation of Sisera’s mother and her waiting, watching, and preparing for his victorious coming, not yet knowing of his death and downfall. Irony and harsh mockery are often to be found in prophecy but usually in a straightforward and explicit way. Here we have not the bluntness of an ax but the fineness of a needle.

Ask:

1. Based on your reading of Text #7, do you agree or disagree with this description of Deborah’s leadership?
2. What interests you about the connection between Deborah (“Mother, in Israel”) and Sisera’s mother?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Deborah’s epic role in Israelite history is highlighted by the fact that her story is recorded in the Bible in poetry and prose. Like Moses in the era of the exodus, Deborah is a prophetess, judge and national leader in the era of the settlement of Canaan. The story of Deborah, both in narrative and song, pays special attention to the role of women in ancient Israel. Deborah correctly predicts that victory will be attributed to a woman—whether herself or Yael—if she joins the war effort.

The story of Deborah challenges us to appreciate that human history can be moved forward through various players both women and men, both judges and women of the tent, both in the public sphere of the battlefield and the private sphere of the tent.

Ask:

1. What are some views in your community about appropriate leadership behavior?
2. Are these influenced by gender roles? How?
Part One: Deborah—Her Character and Career

Text #1: Judges 4:4-5. English translation adapted from JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh.

4 Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, was a prophetess; she judged Israel at that time. 5 She used to sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would come to her for judgments.

Part Two: Gender in Battle

Text #2: Judges 4:6–9

6 She summoned Barak son of Abinoam, of Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded: Go, march up to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun. 7 And I will draw Sisera, Jabin’s army commander, with his chariots and his troops, toward you up to the Wadi Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hands.” 8 But Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; if not, I will not go.” 9 “Very well, I will go with you,” she answered. “However, there will be no glory for you in the course you are taking, for then the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.
And this is the reason that he said to Deborah that she should go with him, in order to strengthen Israel’s heart when they see the prophetess who commanded it together with him, that they should thereby believe that it was the word of God that causes them to act thus and it is not something he made up.


ד”ר על寺庙א ד”ת

ככ ביר אשתו - "יהם שלמר כהירה ידה תלע פה אתיה. אפרה הוה אשתה נבוכ הלעני הסופר אסף כי לא היהת

תפארת אלו פורשו כ Asheville אשתה התפארת כי עלי היה התשפה יflammatory כי ביום המלך לא תצא

סדורא..."

Into the hands of a woman—there are those who understand this as a reference to Yael, into whose hands Sisera was delivered and that this statement was made through prophecy. This does not, however, fit the context of the verse which states “however, it will not be your glory.” Rather, this is the explanation: If I go with you, it will not be your glory, for the salvation shall come through me, and they will say that in the hands of Deborah, God will deliver Sisera...

Part 3: Yael—Woman of the Tent

Text #5: Judges 4:17–22

שופטתא ד”ת-המק

(יז) הקראנא דבעגייא אל אהל צל עשה חרב הנני כשיולא יני מMocks חלודה ומינך ביד חרב משוקית:
(יה) החנה על קנה_fence ציקרא ותפארת אליה ציידת חלודה. אל עי אורות ציקרא חלודה ומינך ביד חרב משוקית:
(יה) ליאוריא אליה מושקית. את עמי פי עמהיא חפתה את ליאוריא חלודה ומינך ביד חרב משוקית:
(כ) ליאוריא אליה חמה תקווה. את עמי פי עמהיא חפתה את ליאוריא חלודה ומינך ביד חרב משוקית:
(כ) חפתה על לקית חמשת חמשת נקעת אלי אליהם חלודה ומינך ביד חרב משוקית את מתקח ברזתיה ומנחה:
(כב) חפתה על לקית חמשת חמשת נקעת אלי אליהם חלודה ומינך ביד חרב משוקית את מתקח ברזתיה ומנחה:

שיקרא כלפ מה תקווה ברזתיה.
17 Sisera, meanwhile, had fled on foot to the tent of Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was friendship between King Jabin of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. 18 Yael came out to greet Sisera and said to him, “Come in, my lord, come in here, do not be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. 19 He said to her, “Please let me have some water; I am thirsty.” She opened a skin of milk and gave him some to drink; and she covered him again. 20 He said to her, “Stand at the entrance of the tent. If anybody comes and asks you if there is anybody here, say ‘No.’” 21 Then Yael wife of Heber took a tent pin and grasped the mallet. When he was fast asleep from exhaustion, she approached him stealthily and drove the pin through his temple till it went down to the ground. Thus he died. 22 Now Barak appeared in pursuit of Sisera. Yael went out to greet him and said, “Come, I will show you the man you are looking for.” He went inside with her, and there Sisera was lying dead, with the pin in his temple.

Part Four: Image of Motherhood in the Song of Deborah

Text #6: Judges 5:7

שופטים ה', ח-ט

וקהל פורש כנ灰尘א תלת על שלמה דבורה ישלמה כנ灰尘א

Deliverance ceased,  
Ceased in Israel,  
Till you arose, O Deborah,  
Arose, O mother, in Israel!

Text #7: Judges 5:28–30

שופטים ה', ח-ט

כון כדוד חמלד לקנחשב תהא אנ脈רא כנ特斯במד ויהיה שמש רכבה לברא משה אליי פושר פוקרבים:  
כון תכמת שזריתת המטה ויא היה אדי לשני א prática ח-ט:  
ל) לא יגבעו החלק לשל על רהמה מעבר ממיר על שלם כנ灰尘א ל XK Xריי רכבה שעלהroupe רהמה להזירו  
ילך:

SourCeSHeeT Deobrah: Victory in the Hands of a Woman
Through the window peered Sisera’s mother,
Behind the lattice she whined:
“Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why so late the clatter of his wheels?”

The wisest of her ladies give answer;
She, too, replies to herself:
“They must be dividing the spoil they have found:
A damsel or two for each man,
Spoil of dyed cloths for Sisera,
Spoil of embroidered cloths,
A couple of embroidered cloths
Round every neck as spoil.”


Another markedly feminine aspect of the song is seen in its conclusion. There is no description of the fallen, of bodies torn or mangled by war, but it is psychologically extremely cruel...This is explicitly the reckoning of one woman with another...Deborah graphically depicted the expectation of Sisera’s mother and her waiting, watching, and preparing for his victorious coming, not yet knowing of his death and downfall. Irony and harsh mockery are often to be found in prophecy but usually in a straightforward and explicit way. Here we have not the bluntness of an ax but the fineness of a needle.
Written by: Aliza Sperling

Introduction (5 minutes)

» Ask participants what words come to mind when they think about Eve. Some of the words will probably be negative. You may wish to list the following words on a whiteboard or paper and ask participants if they have heard Eve described in this way: mother, temptress, seductress, sinner, gardener, helpmate.

Let’s set aside our prior understandings of Eve. Together we can look at the texts with fresh eyes to get a new understanding of her, Adam, and the Garden of Eden.

Part One: The Creation of Man and Woman (20 minutes)

We begin with the story of the Creation of Man and Woman. Actually, there are two differing accounts of creation that appear in the book of Genesis. In Chapter 1, a man and a woman are created at the same time (“male and female He created them”). In Chapter 2, a woman is created from a part of a man’s body. Traditional commentators struggle with this contradiction, which we will explore in the following sources.

Text #1: Genesis 1:26–27

26 And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” 27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. 

The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. 

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree in the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.” 

The LORD God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” 

And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. 

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took of one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. 

And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man.

Then the man said, “This one at last is bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, For from man was she taken.”

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.
The following discussion explores the implications of the creation of a woman through separation, and the resulting goal of reunification and oneness.

**Ask:**

1. What are the differences between the two accounts of the creation of woman?
2. Why is it “not good for man to be alone”?
3. Describe the process of the creation of Woman in Chapter 2. Why do you think Woman was created through a process of separation from Man?
4. Why does Man (Ish) call this new creature Woman (Isha)?
5. According to verse 24, what is the ultimate goal for man and woman? Is that goal in accord with your personal understanding of Man and Woman’s ultimate goal? Society’s? How is it similar or different?

**Ask your participants to form groups of two or three for the chevruta style of learning. Chevruta, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.

**Ask your chevruta pairs to read Text #3 and discuss the questions that follow.**

Genesis Rabbah is a systematic commentary on Genesis, estimated to be from the 5th century.

**Text #3: Genesis Rabbah 8:1.** English translation adapted from Soncino Press edition.

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar said: When the Holy One Blessed Be He, created Adam, [God] created him a hermaphrodite (having both male and female characteristics), for it is said, “male and female He created them” [Genesis 5:2]. Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachman said: God created Adam double-faced, then [God] split him and made him of two backs, one back on this side and one back on the other side.

**Ask:**

1. How does this midrash resolve the contradiction between the accounts of the creation of woman in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2?
2. What were man and woman missing when they were created as one being with two faces? What did they gain by becoming separated? What did they lose?
3. Was it important for Man and Woman to be created as one being at first? Why?
4. What is the significance of their separation? How could you understand this separation as more than a physical division? How does this cast verse 24 in a different light?
Ask a participant to read Text #4 aloud.


The idea of creation as separation recurs both in the Scriptures themselves, and, afterward, throughout Jewish literature. Hence, the upshot is that the relationship between men and women in all times and places has the character of the quest for something lost, to use the Talmudic expression. Male and female are essentially parts of a single whole, originally created as one being; but for various reasons—principally the establishment of a different, more complex, and perhaps deeper kind of connection between the two—the whole body is divided. The two half bodies are constantly in search of one another and find no fulfillment until they are rejoined, in a new and different entity.

Ask:

1. Do you agree that wholeness after division is “different, more complex, and perhaps deeper” than a wholeness that has never been ruptured? How can that be?
2. What are some of the dangers inherent in this new state of affairs—existing as two halves of a formerly whole entity?

Part Two: Eating from the Tree (25 minutes)

In Part Two, we will explore the tensions created by this division, and the challenges that stand in the way of Man and Woman reuniting as “one flesh.”

In Genesis Chapter 3, the story of the creation of human beings continues as they become independent, separate beings with desires that can conflict with those of others. Woman begins to grapple with these tensions when the snake presents her with a tempting offer. Eve and Adam start to realize the difficulties of achieving oneness in a world of separation and conflicting desires.

Text #5: Genesis 3:1–7
Ask a participant to read Text #4 aloud.

Text #4: rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Biblical Images. The idea of creation as separation recurs both in the Scriptures themselves, and, afterward, throughout Jewish literature. Hence, the upshot is that the relationship between men and women in all times and places has the character of the quest for something lost, to use the Talmudic expression. Male and female are essentially parts of a single whole, originally created as one being; but for various reasons—principally the establishment of a different, more complex, and perhaps deeper kind of connection between the two—the whole body is divided. The two half bodies are constantly in search of one another and find no fulfillment until they are rejoined, in a new and different entity.

Ask:

1. What are some words you would use to describe the woman in this section?
2. Why do you think the woman ate from the tree?
3. Why did the woman give the fruit to the man?
4. How are the woman's actions usually portrayed in our culture?
5. Look closely at the text. Do you think the Torah views this act as positive or negative? Why?

Peter Pitzele (21st century, United States) is one of the founders of Bibliodrama—an interpretive, role-playing approach to close textual study of the Bible.

In the following Bibliodrama, participants are asked to play the roles of Eve and Snake and imagine their conversation. Ask for two volunteers to act out this modern midrash. Alternatively, if it is more appropriate for your group, the dialogue can be read in chevruta pairs. In either case, address the questions which follow in the full group.

This exercise should prompt your group to think more deeply about Eve's choice to eat from the tree. Note that we are told that it is not good for man to be alone, and therefore Woman is created; now Woman eats from the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

Text #6: Peter Pitzele. Our Fathers’ Wells.

Snake: Must be pretty boring in this garden.
Eve: No, not really. And besides I have Adam.
Snake: Yes, right, Adam. . . By the way, where is Adam?
Eve: Oh, I don’t know . . . off somewhere.
Snake: Talking to God?
Eve: Yes; quite possibly, talking to God. They talk often.
Snake: God ever talk to you?
Eve: No. Adam tells me everything.
Snake: Everything?
Eve: Of course. Adam and I are one. What he knows I know. What he feels I feel. His God is my God.
Snake: You are very trusting.
Eve: This is the garden. What’s not to trust?
Snake: You are quite right. Everything here is to be trusted. Me, for instance.
Eve: I trust you.
Snake: And you can talk to me.
Eve: Yes, you are the only other creature I can actually speak with. How amazing.
Snake: I am like Adam in that way. I am also like God, for God, too, speaks.
Eve: Are you a God?
Snake: I know what God knows.
Eve: Really?
Snake: I know about this tree, for example.
Eve: We are not supposed to touch that tree; we’ll die if we do.
Snake: Do I look dead to you?
Eve: No. Not at all. You’re quite alive.
Snake: You like my scales, I see; you like the way they flash.
Eve: Really quite amazing and beautiful.
Snake: And this tree? Quite beautiful also, no?
Eve: Yes.
Snake: This is the tree, Eve.
Eve: I know.
Snake: Ah, you know . . . but you do not really know. Someday, Eve, you will taste the fruit of this tree.
Eve: No, never.
Snake: Never...ah, Eve, what a long time is never. No, my only friend, you will come back here many times, and each time you come you will linger a little longer. For when you have explored every aspect of the garden and every pleasure with Adam, only this tree will remain a mystery. In time it will seem to you the garden is a prison and Adam not a helpmate but an inmate with you.
Eve: Why me? Why not Adam?
Snake: Because, Eve, you have a hunger for power and wisdom. It’s the hunger of the denied.
Eve: I don’t understand.
Snake: You have been told you were created from Adam’s rib, right? Well, count his ribs. He has the same number as you. Yet he and his God have made up this fib about the rib. Why? Adam talks to God, but God doesn’t talk to you. Why? I tell you, Eve, a time will come when all this fibbing and ribbing will begin to rub you the wrong way.
Eve: Never.
Snake: When that time comes, you will feel desire. Your own desire for wisdom and knowledge, for truth. It will be different from your desire for Adam. It will become a desire for this fruit, and for the fruit of this fruit which is understanding. You will want what I have.
Eve: Never.
Snake: You will want to act. You will want your freedom.
Eve: Never.
Snake: Never is a long time, Eve. Too long for a creature who can dream. Too long to dream without acting. One day, in that endless never, you will act.

Ask:

1. According to this piece, what would motivate Eve to eat from the tree?
2. How does Snake play on Eve’s separateness to convince her to eat from the tree?
3. Does this Biblidrama change your opinion about Eve’s actions?
4. If you were Eve, what would you have done?
They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”

Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”

The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”

And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!”

The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.”

Then the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you did this, More cursed shall you be Than all cattle And all the wild beasts: On your belly shall you crawl And dirt shall you eat All the days of your life. I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your offspring and hers; They shall strike at your head, And you shall strike at their heel.”

And to the woman He said, “I will make most severe Your pangs in childbearing; In pain shall you bear children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.”

To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ Cursed be the ground because of you; By toil shall you eat of it All the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But your food shall be the grasses of the field; By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground—For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust shall you return.”

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.
This part of the discussion focuses on Adam and Eve’s denial of responsibility, and their attempts to blame others.

**Ask:**

1. What do Adam and Eve do when God confronts them? Why?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Adam and Eve at this point? Have they succeeded in becoming “one flesh”?
3. Why does Adam give the woman the new name of Eve (Chava)? How does this reflect his growing understanding of her as a separate being?

Some commentators read the story of eating from the tree as a natural progression in the process of becoming human, acquiring desire, self-awareness and free choice, and not a sin at all. However, once Man and Woman eat from the tree and understand themselves as separate beings, they have an opportunity to “cleave to one another and become one flesh.” Yet Man and Woman do the exact opposite: They deny responsibility for their actions and instead cast blame on others. In this way, they squander the tremendous potential that becoming separate and eating from the tree has given them. They could have used their free will to assume responsibility for their own actions and their partner’s welfare; instead they choose to protect their own individual interests.

Read Texts #8 and #9.

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (1194–1270), known as Ramban or Nachmanides, was a scholar, rabbi, philosopher, physician, kabbalist, and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Catalonia, Spain.

**Text #8: Ramban. Commentary on Genesis 3:12.**

"The woman you put at my side": In other words, “The woman that You gave me as a helpmate, she gave me from the tree, and I figured anything she says to me would be for my benefit and help…” The Sages call this ‘ingratitude’… for [Adam] responded to Him [God], “It is You who caused me this stumbling block, for You have given me a woman as a helpmate and she advised me to sin.”

Noam Zion, a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute, and his co-authors collaborated on “A Help Mate?” which was published in Jerusalem in 2000. In Text #9 they expound on Ramban’s comment.
According to another approach the serious sin was not the eating from the tree of knowledge—indeed, everyone transgresses from time to time—but, rather, the shirking of responsibility and shifting the blame on another. The man blames the woman, who in turn blames the snake...: “The serpent seduced me, then I ate” is not yet a confession of her guilt. Yet she neither blames the Man—who did not object to eating—nor God. She, at least, limits her excuses.

Ask:

1. Both the man and the woman shirk their responsibilities, yet they defend themselves in different ways. How do their responses indicate the different ways each one understands him/herself as a separate, independent being?

2. Why do you think the woman does not blame the man or God?

Part Three: Implications for Today (10 minutes)

In Genesis Chapter 2, man and woman are physically separated. In Genesis Chapter 3, they achieve an understanding of themselves as separate beings with separate desires and self-interests. Their challenge is to “cleave to each other” and become “one flesh” despite their differences. However, they fail to do so, instead blaming each other for transgressing God’s command. It remains for later Biblical characters—and for generations to come—to try to achieve wholeness and oneness despite different self-interests and desires.

Give your participants a chance to reflect. Ask them to answer the following questions in writing or in chevruta.

Ask:

1. What essential human conflicts does the story of the Garden of Eden portray?
2. Does this story give us any insights into the nature of desire and self-interest? How can we apply those to create “oneness” in our relationships with each other and the world?

Ask participants to share some responses with the group.
Part One: The Creation of Man and Woman

Text #1: Genesis 1:26–27

26 And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” 27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Text #2: Genesis 2:7–8, 15–25

26 And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” 27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed…

The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree in the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.” The LORD God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took of one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken.” Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.


Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar said: When the Holy One Blessed Be He, created Adam, [God] created him a hermaphrodite (having both male and female characteristics), for it is said, “male and female He created them” [Genesis 5:2]. Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachman said: God created Adam double-faced, then [God] split him and made him of two backs, one back on this side and one back on the other side.


The idea of creation as separation recurs both in the Scriptures themselves, and, afterward, throughout Jewish literature. Hence, the upshot is that the relationship between men and women in all times and places has the character of the quest for something lost, to use the Talmudic expression. Male and female are essentially parts of a single whole, originally created as one being; but for various reasons—principally the establishment of a different, more complex, and perhaps deeper kind of connection between the two—the whole body is divided. The two half bodies are constantly in search of one another and find no fulfillment until they are rejoined, in a new and different entity.
Text #5: Genesis 3:1–7

1 Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?” 2 The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. 3 It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.’ 4 And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die, 5 but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.” 6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

Text #6: Peter Pitzele. Our Fathers’ Wells.

Snake: Must be pretty boring in this garden.
Eve: No, not really. And besides I have Adam.
Snake: Yes, right, Adam. . .By the way, where is Adam?
Eve: Oh, I don’t know. . .off somewhere.
Snake: Talking to God?
Eve: Yes; quite possibly, talking to God. They talk often.
Snake: God ever talk to you?
Eve: No. Adam tells me everything.
Snake: Everything?
Eve: Of course. Adam and I are one. What he knows I know. What he feels I feel. His God is my God.
Snake: You are very trusting.
Eve: This is the garden. What’s not to trust?
Snake: You are quite right. Everything here is to be trusted. Me, for instance.
Eve: I trust you.
Snake: And you can talk to me.
Eve: Yes, you are the only other creature I can actually speak with. How amazing.
Snake: I am like Adam in that way. I am also like God, for God, too speaks.
Eve: Are you a God?
Snake: I know what God knows.
Eve: Really?
Snake: I know about this tree, for example.
Eve: We are not supposed to touch that tree; we’ll die if we do.
Snake: Do I look dead to you?
Eve: No. Not at all. You’re quite alive.
Snake: You like my scales, I see; you like the way they flash.
Eve: Really quite amazing and beautiful.
Snake: And this tree? Quite beautiful also, no?
Eve: Yes.
Snake: This is the tree, Eve.
Eve: I know.
Snake: Ah, you know…but you do not really know. Someday, Eve, you will taste the fruit of this tree.
Eve: No, never.
Snake: Never…ah, Eve, what a long time is never. No, my only friend, you will come back here many times, and each
time you come you will linger a little longer. For when you have explored every aspect of the garden and every pleasure
with Adam, only this tree will remain a mystery. In time it will seem to you the garden is a prison and Adam not a
helpmate but an inmate with you.
Eve: Why me? Why not Adam?
Snake: Because, Eve, you have a hunger for power and wisdom. It’s the hunger of the denied.
Eve: I don’t understand.
Snake: You have been told you were created from Adam’s rib, right? Well, count his ribs. He has the same number as
you. Yet he and his God have made up this fib about the rib. Why? Adam talks to God, but God doesn’t talk to you.
Why? I tell you, Eve, a time will come when all this fibbing and ribbing will begin to rub you the wrong way.
Eve: Never.
Snake: When that time comes, you will feel desire. Your own desire for wisdom and knowledge, for truth. It will
be different from your desire for Adam. It will become a desire for this fruit, and for the fruit of this fruit which is
understanding. You will want what I have.
Eve: Never.
Snake: You will want to act. You will want your freedom.
Eve: Never.
Snake: Never is a long time, Eve. Too long for a creature who can dream. Too long to dream without acting. One day, in
that endless never, you will act.
8 They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” 11 Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” 13 And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.” 14 Then the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you did this, More cursed shall you be Than all cattle And all the wild beasts: On your belly shall you crawl And dirt shall you eat All the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your offspring and hers’ They shall strike at your head, And you shall strike at their heel.” 16 And to the woman He said, “I will make most sever Your pangs in childbearing; In pain shall you bear children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” 17 To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ Cursed be the ground because of you; By toil shall you eat of it All the days of your life: 18 Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But your food shall be the grasses of the field; 19 By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground—For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust shall you return.” 20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. 21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.
Text #8: Ramban. Commentary on Genesis 3:12.

"וְלָקַחְתָּ שָׁם לְאָדָם אֶתְוַאָה בְּכָסֹדָה נַתְּתָה אֶתְוַאָה לְלִבּוֹ, הַיּוֹ דֶּנֶּה לְפָנָי, הַיּוֹ דֶּנֶּה לְפָנָי, הַיּוֹ דֶּנֶּה לְפָנָי, הַיּוֹ דֶּנֶּה לְפָנָי...

"The woman you put at my side": In other words, "The woman that You gave me as a helpmate, she gave me from the tree, and I figured anything she says to me would be for my benefit and help...The Sages call this ‘ingratitude’...for [Adam] responded to Him [God], “It is You who caused me this stumbling block, for You have given me a woman as a helpmate and she advised me to sin.”


[According to another approach the serious sin was not the eating from the tree of knowledge—indeed, everyone transgresses from time to time—but, rather, the shirking of responsibility and shifting the blame on another. The man blames the woman, who in turn blames the snake...: “The serpent seduced me, then I ate” is not yet a confession of her guilt. Yet she neither blames the Man—who did not object to eating—nor God. She, at least, limits her excuses.
Introduction (5 minutes)

The Jewish people are inspired by the biblical and rabbinic texts that describe our ancestors—the challenges that they faced and the choices that they made. Looking at biblical narratives offers us some models of heroic behavior and challenges us to think about our notions of heroes and leaders.

Moses is considered the greatest leader in the history of the Jewish people. The Bible illustrates his leadership capabilities in numerous episodes. What were the circumstances which contributed to his becoming a great leader? Was he simply born that way?

This unit will examine the early life of Moses and raise some questions for us to explore:

1. What shapes the development of a leader?
2. What is the essence of a leader?

Part One: The Birth of Moses (20 minutes)

Ask your participants to form groups of two or three for the chevruta style of learning. Chevruta, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.

Ask your chevruta pairs to read the next four texts together. Each describes aspects of the birth of Moses.

Ask them to discuss with their chevruta and make notes on the answers to these questions as they read:

1. How does the text represent Moses’s parents?
2. How does the text describe the circumstances of Moses’s birth?
3. Why would the text portray Moses’s origins in this way?

Text #1: Exodus 2:1–10

Moses: The Birth of a Leader

Written by: Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot

Shemot 2:1-10

וַיֹּאמֶר נַעֲרֵי הָעָרָה לָהֶם לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָנָיו לְאָn

The Global Day of Jewish Learning

November 17, 2013

www.theglobalday.com
A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, “This must be a Hebrew child.” Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?” And Pharaoh’s daughter answered, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, “I drew him out of the water.”

Text #2: Exodus 6:20

A man whose name was Amram, one of the nobler sort of the Hebrews, was afraid for his whole nation, lest it should fail, by the want of young men to be brought up hereafter, and was very uneasy at it, his wife being then with child, and he knew not what to do. Hereupon he betook himself to pray to God; and entreated Him to have compassion on those men who had nowise transgressed the laws of His worship, and to afford them deliverance from the miseries they at that time endured, and to render abortive their enemies’ hopes of the destruction of their nation. Accordingly God had mercy on him, and was moved by his supplication. He stood by him in his sleep, and exhorted him not to despair of His future favors. He said further, that He did not forget their piety towards Him, and would always reward them for it, as He had formerly granted His favor to their forefathers, and made them increase from a few to so great a multitude... Know therefore, said He, that I shall provide for you all in common what is for your good, and particularly for thyself what shall make thee famous; for that child, out of dread of whose nativity the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to destruction, shall be this child of thine, and shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him: and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians. His memory shall be famous while the world lasts; and this not only among the Hebrews, but foreigners also.

Text #3 was written by Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in the 1st century.
Moses: The Birth of a Leader

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Sotah 12a. Bolding added for emphasis by curriculum author.

“A man from the house of Levi went….” Where did he go? Rav Yehudah bar Zevina said: “He followed his daughter’s advice.” It was taught: “Amram was the leader of the generation. Once wicked Pharaoh made the decree that all boys should be thrown into the Nile, [Amram] said: ‘We are striving for nothing!’ He then divorced his wife. Every man followed him and divorced their wives. His daughter said to him: ‘Father, your decree is worse than Pharaoh’s. Pharaoh’s decree applies only to boys, but yours applies to boys and girls. Pharaoh’s decree extends only to this world, but yours extends to this world and the world to come. The wicked Pharaoh’s decree might or might not be acted upon [in any given situation], but you are a righteous person so your decree will take effect, as it says (Job 22:28): “You will decree and it will be fulfilled.”’ [Amram] went and brought back his wife. All the men brought back their wives as well...

Discuss the following questions as a full group:

1. Consider each text. Does it portray Moses as being of noble or humble origins?
2. Which account is most appealing to you? Why?
3. Do you think our society and/or our Jewish community more highly regards a leader born of humble origins or one born of “righteous” or “noble” parentage?

Part Two: Early “Leadership”—3 Episodes of Taking Action (15 minutes)

Following Moses’s birth, he was raised as a prince in the Egyptian royal palace. As Josephus comments, Moses is indeed “brought up in a surprising way”—the future leader of the Hebrew slaves is raised in the house of their oppressor.

Discuss with your chevruta:

1. What is the significance of Moses’s being brought up in the royal palace?
The great medieval Biblical commentator, philosopher and scholar, R. Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th century, Spain) suggests a fascinating response to this question.

**Text #5: Ibn Ezra. Commentary on Exodus 2:3.**

The thoughts of God are deep; who can perceive His secret? To Him alone the plot is clear. Perhaps God caused it to come about that Moshe would grow up in the royal palace, that his soul might be habituated to be on the highest level, not lowly and accustomed to being in a house of slaves. For do we not see that he kills the Egyptian for performing an act of unjust violence? And he saves the Midianite daughters from the shepherds, for they (the shepherds) perform unjust violence in watering their flocks from the water drawn by them (the daughters of Re’uel).

And moreover: had he grown up among his brethren, such that they had known him since his youth, they would not be in awe of him, for they would consider him as one of them.

Ibn Ezra suggests that Moses’s position in the royal palace exposed him to “highest level” ideals, such as that “unjust violence” is reprehensible.

**Ask:**

1. According to Ibn Ezra, if Moses had been brought up a slave he would not have been able to lead the people from slavery. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Does someone need to have shared experiences with the group he or she wishes to lead? In your opinion, who makes a better leader—an outsider or an insider? Why?

As the story of Moses continues in Exodus Chapter 2, Moses goes out amongst his brothers and sees their suffering. This leads into three separate episodes in which Moses takes center stage. These three episodes are described in the following text.

**Read Text #6 and discuss the questions with your chevruta.**
11 Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. 12 He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When we went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting: so he said to the offender, “Why do you strike your fellow?” 14 He retorted, “Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known! 15 When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well. 16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock; 17 but shepherds came and drove them off. Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock.

Discuss in chevruta:

1. Summarize these three different episodes. What are their differences and similarities?
2. The incidents described in these verses are the only pieces of information that we are given in the Bible about Moses’s youth and adolescence. Before them, he is a child in the very heart of the Egyptian corridors of power. After them, he will marry and receive the revelation of God at the burning bush in Exodus Chapter 3, inaugurating him as a prophet and messenger of God and redeemer of the Jewish people. As formative events, then, what do these incidents reveal about the character of Moses?

Part Three: Essential Traits of Leaders (15 minutes)

What is the essence of a leader?

Let’s consider two texts that explore this issue. The first is from the commentary of Nechama Leibowitz (a 20th century Israeli Bible scholar) on the sources we just saw in Exodus (2:11–17). The second, by Rabbi Steinsaltz, addresses leadership more broadly.

Moses intervened on three occasions to save the victim from the aggressor. Each of these represents an archetype. First he intervenes in a clash between a Jew and a non-Jew, second between two Jews and third between two non-Jews. In all three cases Moses championed the just cause...Had we been told only of the first clash, we might have doubted the unselfishness of his motives. Perhaps he had been activated by a sense of solidarity with his own people, hatred for the stronger oppressing his people rather than pure justice. Had we been faced with the second example...perhaps he was revolted by the disgrace of watching internal strife amongst his own folk, activated by national pride...Came the third clash where both parties were outsiders, neither brothers nor neighbors. His sense of justice and fair play was exclusively involved.

Discuss in the full group:

1. What trait does Nechama Leibowitz see as unifying the three episodes?
2. What other traits do these episodes highlight?
3. Are these traits desirable qualities for a leader to have? Why or why not?

Text #8: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Who will be our rabbis?” *Times of Israel* 27 December 2013.

What, then, is a true Jewish leader? The Torah (Numbers 1:15) calls the leaders “the heads of the thousands of Israel.” This defines their essence. The Torah is thus telling us that a true leader is like a head. The head is the part of the body that knows what is happening in all of the other organs, and feels the pain of each and every one of them. Similarly, the leader is supposed to sense the problems and feel the pains of everyone.

Ask:

1. What does Rabbi Steinsaltz see as the most essential traits of a leader?
2. Does Moses embody those traits? If so, how? If not, how would you describe his essential leadership trait?
3. Why do you think Moses is considered to be one of Judaism’s greatest leaders?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

The circumstances of Moses’s birth, his childhood environment, and his actions as a young man all contribute to the portrait of the character of Moses and inform our thinking about the origins and essential traits of leadership.

Ask:

1. How has learning about the birth and youth of Moses impacted your thinking regarding our questions—what shapes the development of a leader? What is the essence of a leader?
2. How do these differing perspectives on leadership affect who we honor, dignify, and look to as heroes or leaders in our lives today?
Part One: Birth of Moses

Text #1: Exodus 2:1–10

1 A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. 4 And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him. 5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. 6 When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, “This must be a Hebrew child.” 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?” 8 And Pharaoh’s daughter answered, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 9 And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay you wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, “I drew him out of the water.”

Text #2: Exodus 6:20

Amram took to wife his father’s sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the span of Amram’s life was 137 years.

A man whose name was Amram, one of the nobler sort of the Hebrews, was afraid for his whole nation, lest it should fail, by the want of young men to be brought up hereafter, and was very uneasy at it, his wife being then with child, and he knew not what to do. Hereupon he betook himself to pray to God; and entreated Him to have compassion on those men who had nowise transgressed the laws of His worship, and to afford them deliverance from the miseries they at that time endured, and to render abortive their enemies’ hopes of the destruction of their nation. Accordingly God had mercy on him, and was moved by his supplication. He stood by him in his sleep, and exhorted him not to despair of His future favors. He said further, that He did not forget their piety towards Him, and would always reward them for it, as He had formerly granted His favor to their forefathers, and made them increase from a few to so great a multitude...

Know therefore, said He, that I shall provide for you all in common what is for your good, and particularly for thyself what shall make thee famous; for that child, out of dread of whose nativity the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to destruction, shall be this child of thine, and shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him: and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians. His memory shall be famous while the world lasts; and this not only among the Hebrews, but foreigners also.

Babylonian Talmud Sotah 12a. Bolding added for emphasis by curriculum author.

“A man from the house of Levi went...” Where did he go? Rav Yehudah bar Zevina said: “He followed his daughter’s advice.” It was taught: “Amram was the leader of the generation.” Once wicked Pharaoh made the decree that all boys should be thrown into the Nile, [Amram] said: ‘We are striving for nothing!’ He then divorced his wife. Every man followed him and divorced their wives. His daughter said to him: ‘Father, your decree is worse than Pharaoh’s. Pharaoh’s decree applies only to boys, but yours applies to boys and girls. Pharaoh’s decree extends only to this world, but yours extends to this world and the world to come. The wicked Pharaoh’s decree might or might not be acted upon [in any given situation], but you are a righteous person so your decree will take effect, as it says (Job 22:28): “You will decree and it will be fulfilled.”’ [Amram] went and brought back his wife. All the men brought back their wives as well...
Part Two: Early “Leadership”—3 Episodes of Taking Action


The thoughts of God are deep; who can perceive His secret? To Him alone the plot is clear. Perhaps God caused it to come about that Moshe would grow up in the royal palace, that his soul might be habituated to be on the highest level, not lowly and accustomed to being in a house of slaves. For do we not see that he kills the Egyptian for performing an act of unjust violence? And he saves the Midianite daughters from the shepherds, for they (the shepherds) perform unjust violence in watering their flocks from the water drawn by them (the daughters of Re’uel).

And moreover: had he grown up among his brethren, such that they had known him since his youth, they would not be in awe of him, for they would consider him as one of them.

Text #6: Exodus 2:11–17

11 Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. 12 He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When we went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting: so he said to the offender, “Why do you strike your fellow?” 14 He retorted, “Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known! 15 When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well. 16 Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock; 17 but shepherds came and drove them off. Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock.
Part Three: Essential Traits of Leaders


Moses intervened on three occasions to save the victim from the aggressor. Each of these represents an archetype. First he intervenes in a clash between a Jew and a non-Jew, second between two Jews and third between two non-Jews. In all three cases Moses championed the just cause…Had we been told only of the first clash, we might have doubted the unselfishness of his motives. Perhaps he had been activated by a sense of solidarity with his own people, hatred for the stronger oppressing his people rather than pure justice. Had we been faced with the second example…perhaps he was revolted by the disgrace of watching internal strife amongst his own folk, activated by national pride…Came the third clash where both parties were outsiders, neither brothers nor neighbors. His sense of justice and fair play was exclusively involved.

Text #8: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Who will be our rabbis?” *Times of Israel* 27 December 2013.

What, then, is a true Jewish leader? The Torah (Numbers 1:15) calls the leaders “the heads of the thousands of Israel.” This defines their essence. The Torah is thus telling us that a true leader is like a head. The head is the part of the body that knows what is happening in all of the other organs, and feels the pain of each and every one of them. Similarly, the leader is supposed to sense the problems and feel the pains of everyone.
Facilitator’s Note: This class can be taught as either a 60-minute or 90-minute session, depending on your time limitations. For a 60-minute class, omit Texts #4 and #6. For a 90-minute class, include the texts and allow more time for discussion.

Introduction (5 minutes)

Share this summary of the story of the People of Sodom (Genesis Chapters 13, 18–19).

In Genesis 13, Lot, Abraham’s nephew, goes to live in the city of Sodom. The People of Sodom are described as “very wicked sinners against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13) though we are not privy to their specific transgressions.

The People of Sodom are next mentioned in Chapter 18, where God decides to tell Abraham what God will do with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. While it is not clear what their sin is, an “outcry” compels God to act. When Abraham hears of Sodom’s fate, he enters into prayer asking God to save the people if a quorum of righteous people is found in the cities.

It is only in Genesis 19, after God decides to destroy Sodom, that we see two angels come to Lot’s house in Sodom on the eve of the destruction. The People of Sodom demand Lot send the angels out, “that we may be intimate with them” (Genesis 19:5). Lot offers his daughters instead. But the two angels convince Lot to take his family and leave the city, in order that they not be destroyed with it; they leave. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed with “sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24).

Introduce the session.

Lack of hospitality and sexual impropriety are oft-cited as the “sin of Sodom”, yet the text never clearly states their sin. We will examine biblical and rabbinic texts that suggest explanations for God’s decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. What do these texts teach us about the People of Sodom?

In this session, we will encounter the People of Sodom. We will reflect on why it is so important for Abraham and his descendants to know about the People of Sodom, their philosophy and their ultimate downfall. We will further consider how Jewish law safeguards us from their value system.

Part One: God Tells Abraham About Sodom (7 minutes)

Ask your participants to form groups of two or three for the chevruta style of learning. Chevruta, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.

Ask your chevruta pairs to read Text #1 together and discuss the questions that follow.
Text #1: Genesis 13:13, 18:17–21

Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.

Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? 19 For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right (tzedakah u’mishpat), in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” Then the LORD said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! 21 I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note.”

Ask:

1. What was the sin of Sodom? Can you find any clues in the text?
2. Why is it important for Abraham to know what is going to happen to Sodom? How do you understand God’s rationale for informing Abraham?
3. What must Abraham teach his descendants about this incident?

What does God want Abraham to understand about tzedakah u’mishpat? What does tzedakah mean? It’s more than charity; it’s going beyond the letter of the law (mishpat) to protect the vulnerable. It was this quality of tzedakah—defined in this context and not in its current meaning—that inspired many rabbinic commentaries and midrashim.

The text shows that God wants Abraham to “keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right (tzedakah u’mishpat)” and implies that Abraham must understand the sin of Sodom and its punishment in order to accomplish this.
Part Two: The Wickedness of Sodom (20 minutes)

The following sources offer explanations of the sin of Sodom and the “cries” that ascended to God as a result of its evils.

mıştır אלף השון

**Text #2: Ezekiel 16:49–50**

49 Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy. 50 In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw.

Text #3 was written by Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, a 1st–2nd century commentator. He is frequently cited as Rabbi Eliezer in the Mishnah and Talmud.

**Text #3: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. Midrash Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 25. Translated by Nechama Leibowitz, Studies in Bereshit.**

They issued a proclamation in Sodom, saying: Everyone who strengthens the hand of the poor and the needy with a loaf of bread shall be burnt by fire! Pelotit the daughter of Lot was wedded to one of the magnates of Sodom. She saw a certain very poor man in the street of the city and her soul was grieved on the account. What did she do? Every day when she went out to draw water she put in her pitcher all kinds of provisions from her house and she sustained the poor man. The men of Sodom said: How does this poor man live? When they ascertained the facts they brought her forth to be burnt by fire. She said: Sovereign of all worlds! Maintain my right and my cause at the hands of the men of Sodom! And her cry ascended before the throne...
of glory. In that hour the Holy One blessed be He said: “I will go down and see whether they have done alto-
gether according to her cry which is come unto me”—and if the men of Sodom have done according to the
cry of the young woman, I will turn her foundation upwards and the surface downward.

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109b. English translation [bolded] and commentary [unbolded] by
Rabbi Steinsaltz in the forthcoming volume of Koren Talmud Bavli.

There was there one girl that would take bread out to poor people in a pitcher so the people there would
not see her. The matter became known, they smeared her with honey and placed her on the wall of the
city. The wasps came and ate her. This is what the verse says: “And the Lord said, because the cry of
Sodom and Gomorra is great,” (Genesis 18: 20). Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: The word “great”
or Rabah alludes to matters of the girl (Rivah) who was killed due to this act of kindness. And due to this sin
they were punished.

Reflective Questions:
1. What themes emerge out of these descriptions of the wickedness of Sodom? What words would you use to
describe Sodom’s wickedness?
2. Why do you think the people of Sodom punish the compassionate so harshly?
3. According to these texts, what causes God to address the sins of Sodom? What is so important about these
individual stories? How do they refine the general description of the sin of Sodom as stated by Ezekiel?

Part Three: The Attitude of Sodom (28 minutes)

From the texts that we have just studied, Sodom appears to be an incredibly evil, oppressive society. We will now look
at the mishnah in Ethics of Our Fathers that describes the attitude of the People of Sodom.

The following mishnah may produce some discomfort in your participants, as most of us live in societies that
are rights-based and centered on the principle of “mine is mine and yours is yours.” How could this be the attitude of Sodom?

There are four attitudes in people: 1) One that says, “Mine is mine, and yours is yours.” This is a neutral type; some say this is a Sodom-type of attitude. 2) One that says, “Mine is yours and yours is mine,” is an unlearned person. 3) One that says, “Mine is yours and yours is yours,” is a pious person. 4) One that says, “Mine is mine, and yours is mine,” is a wicked person.

Ask:

1. Which of these four attitudes best characterizes the society in which you live? Give examples.
2. Does the statement “Mine is mine and yours is yours” strike you as an evil statement? Or would you characterize it as neutral and reasonable? Does it surprise you that this is the attitude associated with the people of Sodom? Why?
3. Does this make our society wicked?

Rabbi Judah Loew was a 16th century scholar best known as Maharal. In his book *Netivot Olam*, Maharal describes the progression from an attitude of “mine is mine and yours is yours” to the violence and oppression that characterized Sodom.

**Text #6: Maharal. *Netivot Olam*: Netiv G’milut Chasadim.**

"One who does not wish to act benevolently in any matter will come to be so strict until he ends up with theft and total violence. In the beginning he is strict and does not want to forego his rights [to his own property] and in the end when he sees anything that could possibly belong to him he takes it with force, and then when he becomes accustomed to this behavior he ends up [engaging in] complete violence [even when it does not belong to him at all]. For so we see with the people of Sodom for their character was to not forego their rights, as our rabbis said: “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours is the attitude of Sodom” [Ethics of Our Fathers 5:10]."

Ask:

1. According to Maharal, what is the inevitable progression from a “mine is mine” attitude to complete violence and oppression?
2. Do you agree with Maharal that “mine is mine” is a dangerous attitude for a society? Why?
3. How might this text offer insight into the sins of poor hospitality and sexual violence that Sodom is best-known for? Could these be symptoms of a deeper issue?

Maharal believes that the selfishness of “mine is mine” is a slippery slope from protecting one’s own self-interest to violence.

Rabbi Steinsaltz offers the following explanation of the attitude of Sodom and the implications of “mine is mine”.

---

THE GLOBAL DAY OF JEWISH LEARNING

November 16, 2014  www.theglobalday.org

“He who says ‘yours is mine and mine is mine’ is a wicked man; ‘yours is yours and mine is yours’ is a pious man; ‘mine is mine and yours is yours,’ this is the average, but there are those who say that it is a Sodomite rule [i.e., cruel].”

Tension therefore exists between the view according to the law, “mine is mine and yours is yours,” and blind adherence to the letter of the law in every event, which is “a Sodomite rule.”

There is an aggadic tradition that regards Sodom not necessarily as the center of wild and indiscriminate corruption but as a place in which the legislation was evil because of a combination of malice and excessive respect for the letter of the law.

If a man repents of an oral guarantee and goes back on his word, no court can force him to carry out his promise, but he is cursed: “He who punished the men of Sodom will punish those who do not keep their word.”

And, generally speaking, a man who insists on his legal right to deprive another of enjoyment when he himself has nothing to lose is accused of midat Sodom.

Ask:
1. In your own words, summarize Rabbi Steinsaltz’s characterization of Sodom’s attitude.
2. In your opinion, is strict adherence to the letter of the law cruel or admirable? Why?

Part Four: Jewish Law—Radically Different (10 minutes)

Yaakov ben Asher, who lived in Cologne, France and Toledo, Spain in the 13th and 14th centuries, is known by the title of his work, Tur. Moshe ben Chayim Alshish, who lived in Safed, (Israel) during the 16th century, is known by the title of his work, Torat Moshe.


A person should not ask, “How can I spare my money to give to poor people?” because he should know that the money is not his but rather a deposit with which to do the will of the depositor (God), which is to distribute some of it to the poor.

Do not think that you are giving to the poor from your own possession, or that I (God) despised the poor person by not giving him as I gave you. For he is My child, as you are, and his share is in your grain; and I have decided for your benefit to give him his share from your property.

Ask:

1. How would you characterize the social attitudes reflected in these texts?
2. How is the attitude reflected in these texts radically different from “mine is mine and yours is yours” (as described in Texts #2-4)?
3. How might a person act if he or she realizes that all his or her belongings are a “deposit” from God? What kind of society could we create if we treat our belongings as deposits, rather than our own property?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

We have reflected upon the oppression that can result when we act according to the principle of “mine is mine and yours is yours.” We have considered the case study of Sodom, and reflected on why it is so important for Abraham and his descendants to know about the downfall of Sodom and its philosophy. We have considered how Jewish law safeguards us from this orientation by reminding us that all belongs to God, and is not really “mine” or “yours.”

Ask:

1. What kind of society does God want Abraham to create?
2. In what ways has today’s Jewish community been successful in creating an ideal society? In what ways are we still working to build that society?

Abraham and his descendants need to know about Sodom when they construct their own system of justice. Sodom was built upon a system of absolute individual rights and a “mine is mine and yours is yours” attitude which ultimately lead to terrible acts of oppression and injustice. Abraham and his descendants must go beyond such a narrow orientation and construct a society built upon tzedakah u’mishpat (justice and righteousness)—looking beyond individual interests to help others.
Part One: God tells Abraham about Sodom

Text #1: Genesis 13:13; 18:17–21

13 Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.

17 Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? 19 For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right (tzedakah u’mishpat), in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” 20 Then the LORD said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! 21 I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note.”

Part Two: The Wickedness of Sodom

Text #2: Ezekiel 16:49–50

49 Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy. 50 In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw.
They issued a proclamation in Sodom, saying: Everyone who strengthens the hand of the poor and the needy with a loaf of bread shall be burnt by fire! Pelotit the daughter of Lot was wedded to one of the magnates of Sodom. She saw a certain very poor man in the street of the city and her soul was grieved on the account. What did she do? Every day when she went out to draw water she put in her pitcher all kinds of provisions from her house and she sustained the poor man. The men of Sodom said: How does this poor man live? When they ascertained the facts they brought her forth to be burnt by fire. She said: Sovereign of all worlds! Maintain my right and my cause at the hands of the men of Sodom! And her cry ascended before the throne of glory. In that hour the Holy One blessed be He said: “I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to her cry which is come unto me”—and if the men of Sodom have done according to the cry of the young woman, I will turn her foundation upwards and the surface downward.

|---|

They were a proclamation in Sodom, saying: Everyone who strengthens the hand of the poor and the needy with a loaf of bread shall be burnt by fire! Pelotit the daughter of Lot was wedded to one of the magnates of Sodom. She saw a certain very poor man in the street of the city and her soul was grieved on the account. What did she do? Every day when she went out to draw water she put in her pitcher all kinds of provisions from her house and she sustained the poor man. The men of Sodom said: How does this poor man live? When they ascertained the facts they brought her forth to be burnt by fire. She said: Sovereign of all worlds! Maintain my right and my cause at the hands of the men of Sodom! And her cry ascended before the throne of glory. In that hour the Holy One blessed be He said: “I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to her cry which is come unto me”—and if the men of Sodom have done according to the cry of the young woman, I will turn her foundation upwards and the surface downward.

|---|

There was a girl that would take bread out to poor people in a pitcher so the people there would not see her. The matter became known, they smeared her with honey and placed her on the wall of the city. The wasps came and ate her. This is what the verse says: “And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorra is great,” (Genesis 18: 20). Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: The word “great” or Rabah alludes to matters of the girl (Rivah) who was killed due to this act of kindness. And due to this sin they were punished.
There are four attitudes in people: 1) One that says, “Mine is mine, and yours is yours.” This is a neutral type; some say this is a Sodom-type of character. 2) One that says, “Mine is yours and yours is mine,” is an unlearned person. 3) One that says, “Mine is yours and yours is yours,” is a pious person. 4) One that says, “Mine is mine, and yours is mine,” is a wicked person.

One who does not wish to act benevolently in any matter will come to be so strict until he ends up with theft and total violence. In the beginning he is strict and does not want to forego his rights [to his own property] and in the end when he sees anything that could possibly belong to him he takes it with force, and then when he becomes accustomed to this behavior he ends up [engaging in] complete violence [even when it does not belong to him at all]. For so we see with the people of Sodom for their character was to not forego their rights, as our rabbis said: “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours is the attitude of Sodom” [Ethics of Our Fathers 5:10].

Tension therefore exists between the view according to the law, “mine is mine and yours is yours,” and blind adherence to the letter of the law in every event, which is “a Sodomite rule.”

There is an aggadic tradition that regards Sodom not necessarily as the center of wild and indiscriminate corruption but as a place in which the legislation was evil because of a combination of malice and excessive respect for the letter of the law.
If a man repents of an oral guarantee and goes back on his word, no court can force him to carry out his promise, but he is cursed: “He who punished the men of Sodom will punish those who do not keep their word.”

And, generally speaking, a man who insists on his legal right to deprive another of enjoyment when he himself has nothing to lose is accused of *midat Sodom*.

**Part Four: Jewish Law—Radically Different**


A person should not ask, “How can I spare my money to give to poor people?” because he should know that the money is not his but rather a deposit with which to do the will of the depositor (God), which is to distribute some of it to the poor.


Do not think that you are giving to the poor from your own possession, or that I (God) despised the poor person by not giving him as I gave you. For he is My child, as you are, and his share is in your grain; and I have decided for your benefit to give him his share from your property.
Introduction (2 minutes)

Often when we think about heroes, we add a cape. We give our heroes superpowers. Who are our heroes? Think of Superman, Spiderman or Wonder Woman—these are heroes. They can fly or climb tall buildings. They have cool cars or planes. They have all sorts of powers that we can only dream of.

But are these the only heroes out there? Sometimes we forget to look around us. There are heroes everywhere.

Today, we’re going to meet a few heroes. They are not typical heroes. In fact, some of their behavior might surprise you, yet we consider them among our greatest heroes.

Activity #1 (8 minutes)

Before we get started, let’s decide on what a hero is. Take a minute to write a definition of the word “hero.” If we were to open a dictionary and look up the word, what do you think we would find?

» Give your students a few minutes to work on their definitions. Ask them to share their definitions with the class. Write down the characteristics of a hero as they speak.

Now that we have all of these ideas up on the board, let’s consider what characteristics heroes need to have. Let’s come up with a list of five qualities that are essential to a hero.

» If needed, offer your students suggestions, such as brave, loyal, thoughtful, smart, and strong.

Part One: Meeting Queen Esther (10 minutes)

Let’s start by learning about Queen Esther.

» Ask your students to recount the story of Esther.

» As they are retelling the story, put the important points up on the board:
  ➢ Esther was an ordinary girl who ended up marrying King Achashverosh.
  ➢ Initially, Esther doesn’t tell Achashverosh that she is Jewish.
  ➢ Esther saves the Jewish people from Haman’s evil decree.

This is a wonderful story of bravery. Clearly, Esther must be one of our greatest heroes.

Let’s look at one piece of the story in depth.
Divide your students into groups of two or three.

Today we are going to learn in *chevruta* style. *Chevruta* is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you learn together.

When Moredecai learns of Haman’s plot to destroy the Jewish people, he asks Esther to speak to the king and ask for his help.

Ask students to read Text #1 together in *chevruta*.

**Text #1: Esther 4:10–17**

Esther told Hathach to take back to Mordecai the following reply: 11 “All the king’s courtiers and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any person, man or woman, enters the king’s presence in the inner court without having been summoned, there is but one law for him—that he be put to death. Only if the king extends the golden scepter to him may he live. Now I have not been summoned to visit the king for the last thirty days.” 12 When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, 13 Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace. 14 On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.” 15 Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: 16 “Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!” 17 So Mordecai went about (the city) and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Ask:

1. What is Esther’s response?
2. What would you have expected Esther’s response to be?

It is clear from our text that Esther is afraid. She is reluctant to step forward and approach her husband, King Achashverosh. Mordecai has to give her a pep talk, encouraging her to try to help save the Jewish people.
Esther and Moses: Not All Heroes Wear Capes

Ask:

1. Is it unusual for the hero of the story to feel scared?
2. How do you feel about Esther now? Do you think more or less of her?

Usually, heroes are depicted as very brave men and women who are unafraid of any obstacles in their paths. It seems a little out of place to learn that Esther was afraid to help the Jewish people.

Part Two: Meeting Moses (15 minutes)

It is widely believed that Moses was the greatest leader the Children of Israel ever had. In fact, we are told in Deuteronomy:

Text #2: Deuteronomy 34:10–12

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the Lord singled out, face to face, for the various signs and portents that the Lord sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.

Clearly, Moses is a wonderful leader. He brings ten plagues down on the people of Egypt and then he successfully leads the Jewish people out of Egypt. We are even told that there will never been another prophet like Moses. So it will be interesting and surprising to learn about the first time God approaches Moses to lead the Jewish people.

Text #3: Exodus 3:10–12

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?” And He said, “I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”
Esther and Moses: Not All Heroes Wear Capes

Ask:

1. What is God asking Moses to do?
2. What is Moses’s response?
3. Are you surprised? Why?

When Moses is asked to save the Jewish people and lead them out of Egypt, we expect a hero’s response. We expect Moses to say, “Sure! Of course! I can do it!” Instead, Moses seems to hesitate. He isn’t sure why he is being chosen to take the Jews out of Egypt. In fact, the first response he has to God is, “Why me?” That doesn’t sound very heroic.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (born in 1948), the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the [British] Commonwealth, offers this insight into Moses:


In Tanakh [the Bible] as a whole, the people who turn out to be the most worthy are the ones who deny they are worthy at all.

Ask:

1. What do you think Rabbi Sacks is saying here?
2. There are times when we all feel overwhelmed and just a bit scared. Maybe you were having a hard time in school? Maybe there was a sport or subject you were struggling with? When have you felt that you weren’t up to the task?

Both Esther and Moses initially were hesitant to accept the role of leader. Eventually, they both become two of our biggest heroes. Rabbi Sacks believes that the most worthy heroes that we find in the Bible are the ones who usually don’t believe they are heroes at all.

Ask:

1. What lesson can we learn from this?

Activity #2: Be a Hero! (10 minutes)

Dr. Seuss, in his book Oh, The Places You’ll Go!, has some very wise words that help inspire everyone to be their own hero.

Text #5: Dr. Seuss: Oh, The Places You’ll Go!

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You’re on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who’ll decide where to go...
Ask:

1. Think of a time when you were feeling a bit nervous. What helped you act bravely?

Have your students write a letter to either Moses or Esther. The letter should encourage either Moses or Esther to act bravely. Students can incorporate some of Dr. Seuss’s quote into their letter. They should talk about the situation Moses or Esther find himself or herself in and offer words of advice and encouragement.

Ask your students to share their letters with the class.

Conclusion (15 minutes)

Today we learned that even the bravest heroes and our most revered leaders are sometimes afraid. We looked at the lives of Queen Esther and Moses and discovered that even they had moments where they were unsure of what to do. It is reassuring to know that even the bravest heroes sometimes need a pep talk.

Activity #3: Make a True Hero

Based on what your students learned today and on the class discussion, challenge your students to draw their own superhero. Students can work in pairs to draw a True Hero, one that may have fears and concerns but works to overcome them.

Ask your students to share their drawings with the class.
Part One: Meeting Queen Esther

Text #1: Esther 4:10–17

10 Esther told Hathach to take back to Mordecai the following reply: 11 “All the king’s courtiers and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any person, man or woman, enters the king’s presence in the inner court without having been summoned, there is but one law for him—that he be put to death. Only if the king extends the golden scepter to him may he live. Now I have not been summoned to visit the king for the last thirty days.” 12 When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, 13 Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace. 14 On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.” 15 Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: 16 “Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!” 17 So Mordecai went about (the city) and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Part Two: Meeting Moses

Text #2: Deuteronomy 34:10–12

10 וַיֹּאמֶר לְיָהָב, אִשָּׁה, יְהוָה. 11 וַיֹּאמֶר בַּעֲרוֹן אֶל יְוֵּהָלָה, צְאִי לָךָּ וְלַעֲבֹד בָּאָרֶץ הַאֲבָקָר הָיָה, זָכִירֵי אֲבָקָרֵךְ, כִּי לֹא תַעֲשֵׂה לְךָ בְּרָאשִׁית הָעָם שָׁלוֹא. 12 וַיֹּאמֶר לְיָהָב, הַעֲבֹדָה תַּעֲשֶׂה לְיָהָב אֶל בֵּית יָהָה אֲבָקָרֵךְ, זָכִירֵי אֲבָקָרֵךְ, כִּי לֹא תַעֲשֵׂה לְךָ בְּרָאשִׁית הָעָם שָׁלוֹא.
Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the Lord singled out, face to face, 11 for the various signs and portents that the Lord sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, 12 and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.

**Text #3: Exodus 3:10–12**

> וַתְּחִלוּ לְהַעֲלֹת אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת. אִם רֹאֵשׁ מִשְׁלָחֵי אֶל הָאָדָמִים מִשְׁלָחֵי כֹּהֵן רֹאֵשׁ.

> שָׁמֵעַ בַּיּוֹם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.

> וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת. יִנָּאַסְרֵי הַיָּמִים וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> כָּל הַיָּמִים וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> יִנָּאַסְרֵי הַיָּמִים וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> כָּל הַיָּמִים וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> כָּל הַיָּמִים וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> כָּל הַיָּמִים וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> כָּל הַיָּמִים וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֵּסֶרֶת.

> וְיָרֵד אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אוֹתָם אֶל שָׁם עֲמֵנִי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאเ...
Written by: Devorah Katz

Resources you will need:
- paper
- markers or pens
- scissors
- tape

Introduction (5 minutes)

Congratulations! You have been chosen to go on an adventure. Not just any adventure, but an adventure for only the bravest of people. It will be a long journey. There could be danger at every turn. I hope you’re up for the challenge.

What does an adventurer look like? How would you describe an explorer?

- Ask your students to write down 5 adjectives that they would use to describe an adventurer. If you have a particularly artistic class, you can ask them to draw an adventurer. Have them share their words with the class, perhaps writing their adjectives on the board.

Today we are going to meet the first Jewish explorer: Abraham. Together, we are going to uncover Abraham’s journey to the land of Canaan.

Part One: Initial Information About the Journey (15 minutes)

- Divide your students into groups of two or three.

Today we are going to learn in chevruta style. Chevruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you learn together.

In this passage, we will see how God explains Abraham’s journey to him.

- Direct your students to read the passage out loud with their partner and discuss the questions below.
- Note the Abraham was previous known as Abram—you can point this out if necessary.


בראשית ב', א-ו:
וַאֲנָא נַשֵׂא לָאֵל אֲבָרֶךְ, לָךְ אֲבָרֶךְ יָאַרְתָּ אֵלֶּה שֵׁמוֹת לְאָבְרָם, אַבֶּרֶךְ, אַבֶּרֶךְ, אַבֶּרֶךְ.
בְּאוֹרַח אֱלֹהִים, לָךְ אֲבָרֶךְ, לָךְ אֲבָרֶךְ שֵׁם אֵלֶּה אֲבָרֶךְ.
הַאֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ. אַבֶּרֶךְ, אַבֶּרֶךְ, אַבֶּרֶךְ אֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ.
דְּוַיָּד אֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ דְּוַיָּד אֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ אֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ אֲבָרֶךְ אֲבָרֶךְ, אֲבָרֶךְ אֲבָרֶךְ.
בְּאוֹרַח אֱלֹהִים, לָךְ אֲבָרֶךְ בְּאוֹרַח אֱלֹהִים, לָךְ אֲבָרֶךְ בְּאוֹרַח אֱלֹהִים, לָךְ אֲבָרֶךְ.
1 The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, and your birthplace, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” 4 Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan 6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

Ask:

1. How old is the oldest person you know?
2. How old is Abraham when he leaves on his adventure?
3. Who does he bring with him?
4. Where is he going?
5. What does Abraham leave behind?

It is interesting to point out that Abraham is 75 years old when he leaves Haran. That’s not how we would typically describe an adventurer or explorer.

Ask:

1. What lesson can we learn from Abraham’s age as he undertook his journey?

Activity #1: Meet Fauja Singh (5 minutes)

Fauja Singh, also known as the Turbaned Tornado, was born in India in 1911. He ran his first marathon at the age of 89. Since then, Fauja has run in numerous marathons around the world. He retired from marathon-running at the age of 102. He once said, “The first 20 miles are not difficult. As for the last six miles, I run while talking to God.”

Ask:

1. What makes Fauja Singh unique?
2. Who are some unlikely adventurers that you know? Think of a friend or relative who has surprised you with his/her bravery or adventurous spirit.
3. What do you think Fauja means when he says, “I run while talking to God”?

Ask your students to share their answers with the class.
**Part Two: Saying Your Goodbyes** (10 minutes)

Imagine that you’re moving to a new city. Who do you say goodbye to? Your house? Your friends? Your school? What are the saddest goodbyes? Moving away is never easy. In Abraham’s case, the text (in Genesis 12:1) shows us just how hard it will be:

> וַיַּֽאֱמֹר הַיָּליִּים לַאֵֽבְרִים: הֵלָךְ לִפְנֵי הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא בָאָרֶץ אִם תִּקְרָאָה אֶל לָאָרֶץ אֱלֹהִים אַשְׁרֵי אֵלֹהִים.

The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, and your birthplace, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”

**Ask:**

1. Which three places does God tell Abraham to leave behind?
2. Why do you think God lists all three places?

It’s as though God wants to emphasize to Abraham just how hard it is to leave. God tells Abraham he’s leaving his country behind, his family behind and his home behind. All of this shows us just how challenging saying goodbyes can be.

Imagine that you are heading out on a trip.

**Ask:**

1. What are some of the things that you need to do before your family leaves?
2. What is exciting about a journey?

**Write their answers on the board. Examples of answers to question 1 might include buying a plane ticket, booking a hotel and deciding on an itinerary. Examples of answers to question 2 include getting to see new things, having new experiences and exploring something that was unknown to you.**

Now, imagine going on a journey but not knowing the destination. Imagine packing up, saying your goodbyes but having no idea where the journey would take you. That is exactly what Abraham does. He leaves on a journey that has no destination. God tells Abraham, “follow me to wherever it is that I choose to take you.” And Abraham agrees!

Rashi, a medieval French rabbi who has written commentary on the Bible, has an idea as to why God didn’t tell Abraham his destination.
Text #2: Rashi. Commentary on Genesis 12:2.

To the land that I will show you: He (God) did not reveal the land to him (Abraham) immediately, in order to make it dear in his eyes...

Ask:
1. What is Rashi’s point?
2. Do you agree or disagree? Is it harder to move without knowing the destination or more exciting and mysterious?

Activity #2: In your own words (10 minutes)

Imagine what Abraham must be feeling. He is leaving behind his whole life. He isn’t a young man. He is taking his wife, his nephew, and some of his possessions, but he is heading out into the unknown. Write a paragraph in Abraham’s voice, describing the emotions he must be feeling as he leaves his home, Haran.

Have your students work on their own or with a partner to write a paragraph. Have your students share their writing with the class.

Activity #3: Charting your own journey (10 minutes)

Ask a student to read text #3 aloud.

Text #3: Dr. Seuss. Oh, The Places You’ll Go!

You’re off to Great Places!
Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting,
So... get on your way!

Ask:
1. Where will your adventure take you?

Have each student cut out a footprint from a piece of paper. Have them write their adventure on their footprint.

Display their footprints around the room.

Summary (5 minutes)

Adventurers come in all shapes and sizes. One of the lessons Abraham teaches us is that you are never too old or too young to head out on an adventure. Abraham doesn’t even know where his journey will take him, but his faith in God and his adventurous spirit help him become the father of the Jewish people.
Part One: Initial Information About the Journey


1 The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, and your birthplace, and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” 4 Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan 6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

Part Two: Saying Your Goodbyes (10 minutes)

Text #2: Rashi. Commentary on Genesis 12:2.

To the land that I will show you: He (God) did not reveal the land to him (Abraham) immediately, in order to make it dear in his eyes...

Text #3: Dr. Seuss. Oh, The Places You’ll Go!

You’re off to Great Places!
Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting,
So... get on your way!
Teaching it to our children means also making them partners in what is so very important.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz

PJ Library Curriculum

Ometz Lev—Courage
Two Book-Based Family Programs:

Noah’s Bed
The Sabbath Lion
GOALS
A major goal of this program is to help children develop new strategies for coping with fear and to help families gain an understanding of the Jewish value of courage—ometz lev—literally, a strong heart. By focusing on the courage that Noah and his family needed while aboard the ark, the program also familiarizes families with the Biblical story of Noah, emphasizing ways in which this ancient story continues to hold meaning and relevance today.

Plan in Advance

Prepare for “Matching Animal Pairs” Activity

**MATERIALS NEEDED**
- Matching pairs of animals (sample templates at end of program)
- Copies of family questionnaire (see end of program)
- Pencils to enable participants to fill out their family questionnaire
- Popsicle sticks or tongue depressors

**ADVANCED PREPARATIONS**
- Use glue or a glue gun to attach a popsicle stick to the back of each animal.
- Optional—attach a copy of family questionnaire to the back of each animal.
- Place one of the pair animals in front of a chair at a table. Do not put an animal at every chair. The animals indicate where the entire family will sit; each animal designates seating for 2 or more people.
- Optional—to enable animals “to stand”, cut a slit in the bottom of a paper cup, invert the cup, and poke the animal’s stick into the cup.

This imaginative retelling of Noah’s ark focuses on Eber, Noah’s young (fictional) grandson, who assists Noah with the building and care of the ark. Once aboard the ark, Eber discovers that nighttime on the ark can be rather frightening. Scared by the darkness, the rumble of thunder and the howling of the wind, Eber quietly slips into his grandparents’ bed. Eber, however, is not the only one who seeks refuge in Noah’s bed. A host of other frightened animals sneak into the bed as well. As the bed grows more and more crowded, Noah becomes grumpier and grumpier until at last he demands that all of the animals (except Eber) return to their own beds to sleep.
Prepare “Animal Lotto” Game

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Lotto Game boards (templates at end of program)
- Scissors for cutting and preparing individual lotto picture cards
- Plastic ziploc bags for holding game boards, cards, and game instructions

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS
- Make copies of Animal Lotto game boards
- Cut up several copies of the game board into small, individual animal cards
- Pack 2 lotto game boards, 16 individual cards (that match the game board) plus a few extra cards, and game rules into a ziploc bag

Prepare Storytelling Props

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Blanket, preferably a colorful quilt
- Extra copy of the book

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS
- Cut out pictures of a few animal pairs
- Cut out images of Noah, Eber, and Grandma Nora

Prepare Courage Plaques (Door signs or Light-switch covers)

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Craft foam
- Glow-in-the-dark stickers
- Animal stickers
- Ometz Lev labels (see end of program)
- Glue sticks
- Tacky glue
- Double-sided tape
- Small strips of paper
- Pens
- Markers (optional)
ADVANCE PREPARATIONS

- **Light-switch cover**
  - Cut foam into 3.5”x5” rectangle
  - Cut out a small rectangular opening, approximately ¾”x1” (size of a light switch) in the middle of the foam square using scissors or a craft knife
  - Attach 2 pieces of double-sided tape to back of light switch cover
  - Cut a heart shape from a different colored piece of foam
  - Attach ometz lev label to heart using glue stick or tacky glue
  - Create a heart pocket—spread tacky glue on sides and bottom point of the heart, press the sides inward to form a slight bulge or pocket

- **Door plaque**
  - Cut out a 6”x3.5” rectangular piece of foam
  - Attach double-sided tape to back of plaque
  - Cut a heart shape from different colored piece of foam and follow instructions above to create a heart pocket

Introduce with activities

**Intro / Family Pairing**

**Intro Words**

Today we’re going to read a book about a man named Noah and his grandson, Eber. Noah is an important man who appears in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). The Torah tells us that God spoke to Noah and told him that a big rain storm would soon cover the earth. In order to keep his family and the animals of the world safe and dry, Noah followed God’s instructions and built an ark. Do you know what an ark is? (It’s a very large boat.) Once Noah finished the ark, God asked him to bring 2 of every type of animal onto the ark. The book that we’re going to read today, **Noah’s Bed**, describes how Noah’s grandson, Eber, helps his grandfather build and care for the animals aboard the ark. Eber loves being aboard the ark during the day, but at night he finds the ark very scary.

Before we begin our story and learn what Eber does when he’s feeling frightened at night, I’d like to see if you can act just like Eber acts at the beginning of our story. Can you help Noah gather the animals together? How many of each type of animal does Noah need? If I give you one animal, can you find its partner? Once you’ve located your matching animal, sit down and meet the family who is seated next to you. Please use the family questionnaire (on the back of your animal or in front of your seat at the table) to learn more about your table-mates.

**DIRECTIONS**

1. Distribute one animal per family.
2. Ask children to search on top of the tables and find the animal that matches the animal they are holding.
3. Ask families to sit in the seats that are near their matching animal.
4. Ask families to pair up with the family that is seated next to them (on their right side).
5. Families take turns asking questions, sharing answers, and jotting down notes on their family questionnaires.
Animal Lotto

Intro Words
Now that you’ve completed your questionnaire and found out a little about the family that’s sitting next to you, it’s time to play one more animal matching game. This game is called Animal Lotto. The big sheet is the game board, with pictures of many animals. In order to board the ark, the animals on your game board need to find a mate or partner. Pair up with the family sitting next to you and take turns flipping over cards to find matches. This game works best when played in pairs. There is an instruction card included with the Lotto set at your table. Have fun! Helpers will be coming around to answer any of your game questions.

DIRECTIONS
Follow directions on lotto instruction card.

Read the story

Hints for Sharing the Book

Props
Consider using props to tell the story. When working with a small group, the children can take turns hiding the animals under the quilt.

Introductory Remarks
Everyone did a wonderful job finding matching pairs of animals today. Like Eber, Noah’s grandson, you would have been a big help to Noah while he was building the ark. Noah’s Bed, the book that we’re going to read, describes what happened once Noah and all of the animals were aboard the ark. What do you think it was like on the ark? How might it have sounded on the ark? How might it have smelled? What was it like for the animals when the rain fell, the thunder rumbled, and the wind whooshed outside? Let’s read our book and find out what Eber and the animals did when they felt frightened aboard the ark.

Read the book

POST-READING OMETZ LEV—COURAGE DISCUSSION:

- Did Eber like being on the ark? What parts of the ark do you think he liked? What parts did he dislike?
- Eber felt frightened and scared at bedtime. What did he do that helped him feel better?
- Was going into his grandparents’ bed a good idea? What other solutions could he have tried?
- Eber was frightened of the storm and of the dark. Can you describe some things that frighten you? Earlier today, you interviewed your partners and found out about the things that scare them. What kinds of things are your partners afraid of?
It's not fun to feel scared. In Judaism we’re told that when we feel afraid we should try to have courage. The Hebrew word for courage is *ometz lev*, which means a strong heart.

How can a person strengthen his or her heart and begin to feel brave? What do you do when you feel scared? What helps to lessen your fears? (Describe a time when you were afraid. What did you do to help yourself feel better?)

Did you learn any good courage tips from your partner? Can you describe something that your partner told you that helped him or her feel less afraid?

### Follow Up activities and resources

#### Creating Courage Plaques

**Intro Words**

*Eber and the animals on the ark were frightened at bedtime. Sometimes bedtime can feel a little scary. Today we’re going to make something that you can hang in your room that might give you a little extra courage at bedtime. For this project you’ll need to decide whether you’d like to make a light switch cover or a sign to hang on your door. Because this project uses glow-in-the-dark stickers, your light switch cover or door plaque will give off a little extra light at bedtime. Perhaps this light will help you feel a little braver at bedtime.*

You’ll notice that each plaque and light switch cover contains a heart with some writing on it. Does anyone know what the writing says? It says “*ometz lev*” which means “strong heart”. Although it may look as if the heart is glued to the foam, it really isn’t. Each heart forms a little pocket—a pocket that’s just the right size for holding notes. In a few minutes, we’ll pass out some small strips of paper. On these papers I’d like you to write down some actions that you might want to try (or perhaps already do) in order to help your heart feel stronger when you’re afraid. At home, you can have fun adding notes to your heart pocket each time you discover new ways to calm your fears.

**DIRECTIONS**

1. Using stickers and markers, decorate plaques and door signs.
2. On the strips of paper, the children can write (or have their parents write for them) a strategy that they use for quieting fears.

#### Singing Songs

**Courage Songs**

One way to feel braver is to sing. Let’s all sing some songs together to boost our courage and strengthen our hearts! A selection of songs to boost courage can be found on the following page.

**Noah’s Ark Songs**

For the children who participate in this program who are very young, we’ve included a selection of more traditional Noah’s Ark songs.
Courage Songs

KOL HAOLAM KULO GESHER TSAR ME’OD

Kol Ha’olam kulo gesher tsar me’od, gesher tsar me’od, gesher tsar me’od.
Kol Ha’olam kulo gesher tsar me’od, gesher tsar me’od.
Veha’ikar, veha’ikar, lo lefached, lo lefached klal.
Veha’ikar, veha’ikar, lo lefached klal.

The whole world is a very narrow bridge, a very narrow bridge, a very narrow bridge.
The whole world is a very narrow bridge, a very narrow bridge.
And the main thing to recall, is to have no, have no fear at all.
And the main thing to recall, is have no fear at all.

Listen to campers at Eden Village Camp sing:
youtube.com/watch?v=ZPEGEB72cEk

I WHISTLE A HAPPY TUNE

Whenever I feel afraid
I hold my head erect
And whistle a happy tune
So no one will suspect I’m afraid

While shivering in my shoes
I strike a careless pose
And whistle a happy tune
And no one ever knows I’m afraid

The result of this deception
Is very strange to tell
For when I fool the people
I fear I fool myself as well


Listen to the song in Hebrew:
youtube.com/watch?v=0T9AeD1rQ5Q
Noah’s Ark Songs

THE ANIMALS GO MARCHING

(Traditional with special lyrics)

The animals go marching two by two! Hurrah! Hurrah!
The animals go marching two by two! Hurrah! Hurrah!
The animals marching two by two!
Old Noah stops to tie his shoe
And they all go marching down into the ark
To get out of the rain. Boom! Boom! Boom!

TWO BY TWO

(To the tune of “Skip to My Lou”, Words by Lisa Litman.)

Clap your hands, two by two,
Clap your hands, two by two,
Clap your hands, two by two,
When Noah built the ark, YAHOO!
(Really throw your arms up and let loose!)

Hop like a bunny, two by two.
Hop like a bunny, two by two,
Hop like a bunny, two by two,
When Noah built the ark, YAHOO!

Brainstorm ideas for additional verses. Examples:
• Roar like a lion, two by two...
• Stretch your necks (giraffe), two by two...

FIVE LITTLE MONKEYS

Five little monkeys jumping on the bed
One fell off and bumped his head
Mama called the doctor,
And the doctor said
No more monkeys jumping on the bed

RISE AND SHINE
(TRADITIONAL AMERICAN FOLK SONG)

Chorus:
Rise and shine and
Give God your glory, glory (3x)
Children of the Lord

The Lord said to Noah
There’s gonna be a floody, floody (2x)
Get those children out of the muddy, muddy
Children of the Lord (Chorus)

So Noah, he built him
He built him an arky, arky (2x)
Made it out of hickory barky, barky
Children of the Lord (Chorus)

The animals they came on
They came on by twosie, twosies (2x)
Elephants and kangaroosies-roosies
Children of the Lord (Chorus)

It rained and it poured for forty daysies
daysies (2x)
Drove those animals nearly crazy, crazy
Children of the Lord (Chorus)

The sun came out and
Dried up the landy, landy (2x)
Everything was fine and dandy, dandy
Children of the Lord (Chorus)

The animals they came off
They came off by twosie, twosies (2x)
Started life a newsy, newsy, newsy
Children of the Lord (Chorus)
Resources for parents, teachers, families

NURTURING THE FAMILY

After the program, contact the families and thank them for coming. If you took pictures, send a few to the families.

Check out other PJ Library books that exemplify themes associated with the value of Ometz Lev:

PJ Library books of courage.

Check out the PJ Library Blog Post: Courageous Children and the Value of Ometz Lev.

Instructions for Animal Lotto

Object of the Game: To be the first player to completely fill one’s Lotto card
Note: This game works best with 2 players

1. Each player receives one large Lotto board.
2. Arrange small individual picture cards in a pile, with the pictures facing down. This is the draw pile.
3. Player 1 picks a card from the draw pile. Player 1 matches the draw card with a picture on Player 1’s Lotto board. (A match is made by placing the small draw card on top of its identical image on the lotto board).
4. Play moves on to Player 2. Player 2 picks a card from the draw pile and matches it to the appropriate picture on Player 2’s lotto board.
5. If a player picks a card that has already been matched, the card is placed face-up next to the draw pile in a discard pile.
6. The first person who is able to cover every image on the lotto board with a matching image from the draw pile shouts “Lotto” and wins the game.

Variations for younger children:

The game is not played competitively. Instead children are given one card at a time and are asked to place their small card on top of the matching picture on the lotto card. When every space on the lotto card has been covered with a matching picture the game ends and play can begin again.

FAMILY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

My new friend’s name(s):

My friend’s favorite animal and why:

Something my friend was afraid of in the past:

Something that helped my friend feel less afraid:
Noah’s Bed
Noah’s Bed
Noah’s Bed
Noah's Bed
The Sabbath Lion
By Harold Schwartz and Barbara Rush
Illustrated by Stephen Fieser

CENTRAL VALUE: Ometz Lev—Courage  5–8 year olds  45–60 minutes

GOALS
This program is designed to help children expand their strategies for coping with fear and to help families gain an understanding of the Jewish value of courage—ometz lev (literally translated as “strength of heart”). To help participants acquire a realistic view of courage and bravery, the program also strives to assure participants that feeling frightened is a normal emotion that affects all of us at one time or another in life. To highlight the Middle Eastern source of this folktale, families are introduced to the Sephardic custom of wearing a Hamsa or hanging one in the house as a protective measure.

Plan in Advance

NOTE TO FACILITATOR
We suggest preparing one of the drums or the medal, as well as the Hamsa, in advance to show as an example.

Prepare Courage Drum or Medal (3 options)

Balloon Courage Drum

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Large (28 oz.) empty aluminum cans or any other cylinder-shaped container (i.e. oatmeal container, peanut butter jar, plastic planting pot)
- Large (8–10 in. diameter) deflated balloons
- Stickers
- Decorative or colorful duct tape (pre-cut into strips and attached to the edge of a table or chair for easy use)
- Masking tape
- Small pieces of paper or craft foam cut into shorter and longer strips

This book-based Program curriculum was developed by The PJ Library.
Submitted by Vivian Newman—Vivian@hgf.org
**Masking Tape Courage Drum**

**MATERIALS NEEDED**
- Assorted coffee cans, quart sized yogurt containers, cocoa tins, etc.
- Construction paper of a size that can wrap around the cans
- Masking tape, packing tape, or duct tape
- Scissors
- Crayons or markers
- Paper glue
- Ometz lev—Courage labels (see end of program)

**Advance Preparation**
- Use 2 of the larger foam circles to create a “pocket” by spreading glue around one half to three quarters of the edges of both circles. Place one circle on top of the other so that the glued surfaces face each other and stick together.
- Punch a hole in the unglued top of one of the circles.

---

**Courage Medal**

**MATERIALS NEEDED**
- Craft foam, cut into 2” and 4” circles
- Pipe cleaners
- Googly eyes
- Smaller foam circles and shapes to be used for decorating medals
- Glue
- String, ribbon or lace
- Pony beads (optional)
- Small pieces of paper cut into shorter and longer strips
- Ometz lev—Courage label (see end of program)

**Advance Preparation**
- Cut off lower portion of balloon and pre-stretch balloon (optional).
- Stretch balloon over top of container.
- Apply masking tape to edge where balloon and container meet. Tape one half of the balloon to container, leaving an opening to enable children to insert notes into their drums before closing.

---

**ADVANCE PREPARATIONS**
- Clean containers.
- Cut off lower portion of balloon and pre-stretch balloon (optional).
- Stretch balloon over top of container.
Hamsa Necklace / Door Plaque

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Wooden Hamsas (2" necklace or 6" plaque)
- Glue
- Collage materials: gem stones, glitter, ribbon, lace
- Markers
- String and beads (for necklaces)
- Spray paint (optional)
- Ometz lev—Courage label (see end of program)

ADVANCED PREPARATIONS
- Order and purchase wooden Hamsas:
- Spray paint Hamsas (optional)

Introduce with activities

Introductory Words
Today we’re going to read a book about a boy named Yosef who spends a night in the desert all by himself. Being alone in the desert is pretty scary. When we read our book, we’ll discover how Yosef finds his courage and we’ll talk about things that each of us can do to build up our own courage. Right now, we’re going to do a craft project that may help give us courage whenever we feel afraid.

BALLOON DRUM DIRECTIONS
1. Use stickers, markers, and adhesive strips or duct tape to decorate drum.
2. Leave the top of drum partially opened.
3. Glue ometz lev label to drum.

MASKING TAPE / DUCT TAPE DRUM DIRECTIONS
1. Cover the open top of container with overlapping strips of tape.
2. Leave a small section of the drum top without tape to enable children to insert notes later in the program.
3. Measure and cut a piece of construction paper to wrap around the body of the can with enough overlap to be able to glue or tape it in place after it is decorated.
4. Decorate the paper; glue and or tape it around the can.
5. Glue ometz lev label to drum.
COURAGE MEDAL DIRECTIONS
1. Glue googly eyes, pipe cleaners, other small pieces of craft foam to decorate your medal. (Optional: create an animal face)
2. Glue ometz lev label to medal.
3. String pony beads onto the medal's ribbon or string “chain” (optional).

Read the story

Introductory Remarks
Your projects (drums / courage medals) look wonderful. One of the purposes of these drums/medals is to help give you courage whenever you may need it. What is courage? (Courage is bravery—a willingness to do something even though you may be afraid). In The Sabbath Lion, the book that we’re going to read today, a young boy named Yosef needs a great deal of courage when he has to spend a night and day (a full Shabbat) alone in the desert. What kinds of things might be scary for a person in the desert? Let’s read our book and discover why Yosef was alone in the desert, the fears that he had while he was in the desert, and how he found his courage.

Post-Reading Discussion: Ometz Lev—Courage
1. Why did Yosef want to go to Cairo?
2. Why did the caravan leader refuse to stop for Shabbat?
3. When Yosef first finds himself alone in the desert he is very frightened. Not knowing what else to do, Yosef does all of his usual Shabbat tasks, which help calm his fears. What are some of the Shabbat tasks that he does?
4. In Judaism we are taught that when we feel afraid we should try to strengthen our hearts. The Hebrew word for courage is ometz lev—a strong heart. One way to strengthen our hearts is to practice an action called chazak v’ematz—be strong and of good courage. When we’re afraid, we need to try to change the way we think. Rather than thinking, “I can’t do this,” or “I’m so scared I can’t move,” we need to say to ourselves, “I can get through this difficulty.” Think about what actions we can take to strengthen our hearts and go forward. In the Bible when people feel afraid many of them turn their thoughts and hearts towards God. They tell themselves, “I believe (I have faith) that God will help me.”
5. When Yosef is afraid, he sings songs and prays. Do you remember what he asks the Sabbath Queen? (To bring peace and blessing). Like Yosef, when we feel afraid we can sing songs, say prayers and perform rituals to help calm us.
6. Do you have routines or rituals that you perform in order to feel relaxed (and less frightened)? What do you do before bed? These routines probably started when you were younger and may have been afraid of the dark. Do you have any other routines or rituals that you do when you’re feeling afraid?
7. Yosef was frightened of wild animals and not being able to find his way out of the desert. What kinds of things frighten you?
8. What words of advice would you give to someone who is feeling afraid?
9. Adults, can you share a story with your child about a time when you needed to be brave and act courageously? What did you do to get through your scary experience?
Add Text to Courage Drums / Medals

Introductory Words
You may be wondering why we asked you to make a drum or medal when you first came to today’s program. We’ve been talking about the ways in which rituals and routines can help strengthen one’s heart and give courage. The drum or medal that you made today can be part of a routine that you can do whenever you feel afraid. What might you do with a drum when you feel afraid? What might you do with a medal when you feel afraid? As you can see your drum/medal contains an opening that’s just right for putting pieces of paper into. On these slips of paper we’d like you to write down (or ask an adult to write for you) names of things that frighten you and actions that you can take to feel less afraid.

DIRECTIONS:
1. On shorter strips of paper, write down names of things that frighten you.
2. On longer strips of paper, write actions/things you can do to help calm your fears.
3. Drop your notes into the drum or slip them into the medal pocket.
   Tape balloon to container (optional).
5. Complete masking tape drums: Tape over the remaining opening of drum top.

Drum Playing

Introductory Words
Just as doing familiar actions can calm a person, chanting or singing is a good way to help us feel calm. You can use your drum while you chant and sing.

SIMPLE DRUM PLAYING DIRECTIONS:
1. Participants make up a short drum pattern that can be played on your drum whenever they feel afraid (i.e., 2 loud beats, 2 soft beats, 2 drum pinches).
2. Volunteers share their drum song with the group. Volunteers can be encouraged to add a chant to accompany their song (i.e. “Go away my fear of________. I will not be afraid of ______ any more.”)
3. Ask the group to imitate the volunteer’s drum song (and chant).

ADVANCED DRUM PLAYING DIRECTIONS:
1. Ask a volunteer to play just a few beats on his/her drum.
2. Ask the entire group to imitate the volunteer’s beats.
3. Ask for a second volunteer. The second volunteer will play the first volunteer’s notes and then add a few beats of his/her own.
4. Encourage the entire group to play the new song.
5. Ask for a 3rd volunteer to add a few more beats to the song.
6. Continue asking for volunteers and then asking the group to play the newly created song until everyone who wishes to volunteer has had a chance or until the song becomes so long that it can no longer be remembered!
Medal Sharing

Summary Sharing
Your courage medals look wonderful. You can wear your courage medal whenever you feel afraid. Put it around your neck, rub your hand over the medal, and use it to remember how to be brave. Would anyone like to share some of the notes that you included in the medal? What are some of the fears you wrote down? What will you do to quiet those fears?

Make a Hamsa Necklace / Door Plaque

Introductory Words

In our book, the lion served as Yosef’s protector, watching over him and making sure that nothing bad happened to Yosef while he was in the desert. Yosef came from the country of Algeria in North Africa. For Jews from North African countries this symbol (Hold up a Hamsa) serves as a type of personal protector.

What does a Hamsa look like? A Hamsa looks like a hand. It looks like a hand that is saying “stop.” Some say a Hamsa is telling bad luck and bad things to stop—to stay away. Others think the Hamsa is a stop sign for ourselves; a Hamsa can be a reminder to stop, calm down and think about what to do, instead of just being afraid. Others claim that the Hamsa hand is more like a hand that is placed upon someone’s head in order to bring the person a blessing. Many believe that a Hamsa will offer blessings of power and strength to those who wear it or hang it in their homes.

Today, we are going to make our own Hamsas. We hope that this Hamsa will help you feel blessed and protected and help give you the strength to face your fears.

HAMS A DIRECTIONS

1. Decorate Hamsa with available materials.
2. Add ometz lev stickers (optional).
3. Add string and beads to make a necklace (optional).

Singing Songs

Courage Songs
A selection of songs to boost courage can be found on the following page.
**Courage Songs**

**KOL HAOLAM KULO GESHER TSAR ME’OD**

*Kol Ha’olam kulo—gesher tsar me’od (3x)*
*Kol Ha’olam kulo—gesher tsar me’od, (2x)*
*Veha’ikar, veha’ikar, lo lefached, lo lefached kflal.*
*Veha’ikar, veha’ikar, lo lefached kflal.*

The whole world is—a very narrow bridge (3x)
The whole world is—a very narrow bridge (2x)
And the main thing to recall, is to have no,
have no fear at all.
And the main thing to recall, is have no fear at all.

Listen to campers at Eden Village Camp sing: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPEGEB72cEk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPEGEB72cEk)

**CHAZAK V’EMATZ**

Chazak v’Ematz (3x) chazak
Chazak v’Ematz (3x) chazak


**I WHISTLE A HAPPY TUNE**

Whenever I feel afraid
I hold my head erect
And whistle a happy tune
So no one will suspect I’m afraid

While shivering in my shoes
I strike a careless pose
And whistle a happy tune
And no one ever knows I’m afraid
The result of this deception
Is very strange to tell

I whistle a happy tune
And every single time
The happiness in the tune
Convinces me that I’m not afraid

Make believe you’re brave
And the trick will take you far
You may be as brave
As you make believe you are
You may be as brave
As you make believe you are

While shivering in my shoes
I strike a careless pose
And whistle a happy tune
And no one ever knows I’m afraid

The result of this deception
Is very strange to tell
For when I fool the people
I fear I fool myself as well

I whistle a happy tune
And every single time
The happiness in the tune
Convinces me that I’m not afraid

Make believe you’re brave
And the trick will take you far
You may be as brave
As you make believe you are

While shivering in my shoes
I strike a careless pose
And whistle a happy tune
And no one ever knows I’m afraid

The result of this deception
Is very strange to tell
For when I fool the people
I fear I fool myself as well

I whistle a happy tune
And every single time
The happiness in the tune
Convinces me that I’m not afraid

Make believe you’re brave
And the trick will take you far
You may be as brave
As you make believe you are

Listen to Julie Andrews sing: [http://www.songlyrics.com/king-i/i-whistle-a-happy-tunelyrics/#3B8S4c7KuLrplhSx.99](http://www.songlyrics.com/king-i/i-whistle-a-happy-tunelyrics/#3B8S4c7KuLrplhSx.99)

Listen to the song in Hebrew: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPEGEB72cEk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPEGEB72cEk) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0T9AeD1rQ5Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0T9AeD1rQ5Q)
After the program, contact the families, thanking them for coming. If possible, e-mail one or two photos which you may have taken at the program.

Check out other PJ Library books that exemplify themes associated with the value of Ometz Lev: PJ Library books of courage.

Check out the PJ Library Blog Post: Courageous Children and the Value of Ometz Lev
### Ometz Lev Stickers for Drums and Medals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>O-metz lev</td>
<td>Courage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ometz Lev Stickers for Hamsas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>O-metz lev</td>
<td>Courage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>O-metz lev</td>
<td>Courage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
<th>אומץ לברון</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>O-metz lev</td>
<td>Courage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An excerpt from Biblical Images by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

The characters and heroes of the Bible are without doubt some of the best-known figures in history. Even people who are not well versed in the Scriptures, and who do not read the Bible regularly, know at least the names of some of the major personalities. We encounter them again and again, directly or indirectly, in art, in literature, in speech, or in folklore. And yet these biblical men and women remain among the most elusive, enigmatic, and least understood of any heroes. This lack of knowledge and understanding is not necessarily a function of ignorance but stems rather from the fact that the biblical personae are so familiar, so “famous,” that they have become almost stereotyped. They have fallen victim to accepted patterns of thinking, been fitted into conventional molds and subjected to unquestioning assumptions which have prevented any attempt at deeper understanding. It is not uncommon for the very thing that “everyone knows” not to receive the attention it deserves.

However, there is another, more crucial factor at work here, and that is the nature of the biblical narrative itself, which confronts even those thoroughly familiar with an actual story with a bewildering blankness regarding the personalities portrayed in it.

Two fundamental elements in the Scriptures lend these accounts their special character and power and produce the mystery surrounding the protagonists. Scriptural style is almost always objective and distant; the heroes and heroines are not idealized but are seen, as it were, from above, in a way that is both more comprehensive and, at the same time, more detached than the standard historical chronicle. The narrative is also as factual as possible, with no attempt to penetrate the psyche of the characters or to analyze their motives. The techniques and tricks of dramatists, the revealing monologue, the intimate conversation to explain dreams and longings, a chorus providing background details, are all absent in the Scriptures. It is this almost dry style that gives the biblical story its impact. Here, every sentence, every action counts, indicating by means of the most subtle allusions occurrences whose significance resounds in the souls of men and in the world at large. We see the events, but their implications remain obscure; we see the outcome of the events, without ever knowing clearly anything of their internal mechanisms. What did Abraham think as he led his son Isaac to the sacrifice? How did Moses feel when the Almighty revealed Himself? Why did Absalom rebel against his father? We can only guess at the answers to these questions: in the Scriptures, no word is said about them.

Another aspect of this detached view is the multifaceted picture it provides. Although the distinction between good and evil, between sinners and saints is clear-cut and unequivocal, there is no attempt to adjust events and incidents to suit the general image of a personality. The great men and women who serve as examples and models for all generations are not described only in terms of glowing admiration. Their failings, failures, and difficulties are described with the same objectivity as are those of the sinful; and the contrary is also true: the good points of those generally considered to be negative personalities are also shown. The “good guys” of the Scriptures are not plaster saints, all “sweetness and light;” nor are the “bad guys” monsters, but human beings shown in all their many (and sometimes contradictory) aspects.

The biblical persona is shown not only in his or her true colors but also in the context of a wider dimension. One’s worth as an individual is never judged simply on the basis of one’s private existence, but also in terms of broad implications. Biblical heroes and heroines have their private lives, but their every action has, too, a significance for society at large. The private life of a given figure may be a model of goodness and decency (at least in his or her own eyes) but may well be quite destructive in terms of society. On the other hand, the private sin may not always lead to a negative outcome in the context of family, society, or state. In the Bible, events are measured in relation not only to the time in which they occur, but also to the whole spectrum of historical time, which inevitably leads to changes in the evaluation of deeds and events, in the relationship between great and small, between the important and the trivial. Thus, the great and powerful ruler turns out to be a small and insignificant historical episode, and the persecuted wretch proves to be the only significant person in a whole era.
This yardstick of significance extends beyond the judgment of history, because in the Scriptures all these are measured in terms not only of finite time but also of eternity. Yet no matter how exalted its viewpoint, the general judgment of events and people, the Bible relates to all dimensions—the exalted and the abstract alongside the petty details of life as it is lived at the mundane, human level. The exaltation here can also encompass the transient, the minor, the passing dream. Thus, the biblical narrative is built on sweeping generalizations encompassing large periods of time and fascinating events at the same time as it relates to the smallest of precise details. The greatest in the world is not described as greater than the ability of man to relate to; and the smallest is never too trivial, but always important for the understanding of existence.

The bold strokes of the biblical canvas are supplemented here and there by highly detailed miniatures; and together these images produce remarkable, multidimensional portraits, full of life and vigor. It is these characteristics that produce the beauty and power of the biblical story and also lead to the difficulty of understanding the characters. No story is simple and one-dimensional; no character self-explanatory. As in real life, there are variations and contradictions; and, as in real life, they hint at solutions without actually providing them.

There is another aspect to the problem of biblical personae. The Bible is not a book to be idly read in passing, and the men and women of the Scriptures are more than mere life portraits: they continue to live and function long after their deaths in this world. The ancient Jewish custom of speaking of biblical characters in the present tense is an expression of a genuine experience. These are not ordinary historical figures but archetypes; as such, their lives are carried on and continue not only in literature and philosophy but in the lives of their descendants through-out the generations. In a sense, they continue to live and also to evolve throughout Jewish history, in its psychic experience, and as part of the collective personality of the Jewish nation.

Over the generations, thousands of commentaries have been written, and thousands of legends have arisen and become an integral part of the story of each biblical personality. Dimensions and aspects only hinted at in the biblical accounts have been developed, and each character has gained in depth and substance through the great expositions in the Talmud, in the Kabbalah, in oral tradition, and in folk tales. No biblical story is complete without these additional strata of content, which add new forms and lines to each portrait, solving some problems, adding new material and producing new outlines which in turn must be filled in and completed.

This collection of selected portraits of biblical characters is an attempt to fill in some of the outlines in the picture, to clarify certain things hinted at in the Scriptures. It is an attempt to understand some well-known biblical figures from within, to analyze their motives, and to try to understand their spiritual experiences and aspirations in the context of the historical period in which they lived. In order to try to present a complete picture and not merely to be content with historical hindsight, this material is drawn from traditional Jewish sources. In most cases, these sources are not listed since the material is culled from many levels and types of the rich treasury of Jewish literature; and, in the nature of things, much more is alluded to than is explicitly written. Readers who are familiar with these sources will be able to recognize the allusions to a greater or lesser degree, while those who are outside the world of Jewish scholarship would merely be confused by detailed references.

Because of the complexity of the Bible personae, it has not been possible to discuss them in all their various aspects. These chapters are therefore intended as a commentary on one facet of a given character—a viewpoint that illuminates him or her in a certain way and is also relevant to the problems and events of the present day.

The need to deal with a limited canvas naturally reduces the scope of each portrait, so that each chapter should be seen as the elaboration and perfection of one detail within the whole. Thus, certain personalities have been omitted because this framework would make it impossible to do justice to their overall importance. Jacob, Moses, and David are such fundamental, multidimensional characters that it would be inappropriate to restrict oneself to one or the other side of their personalities.
The personages in this book have therefore a dual significance. They are biblical-historical characters and also archetypal figures in some way relevant to the inner life of the modern individual, and to modern society and politics as well. Not all these people were model characters; they include the good and the bad, those whose acts we perpetuate today and those who have served as a warning and a deterrent to repeating the mistakes of the past.

Most of all, this book is not intended to provide all the answers, but rather to encourage the reader to become better acquainted with the men and women of the Bible, to read—or re-read—the Scriptures for himself and to rediscover the pleasure of studying the Bible: for it is a map through the past, a guide for the present, and a directory to the future.
