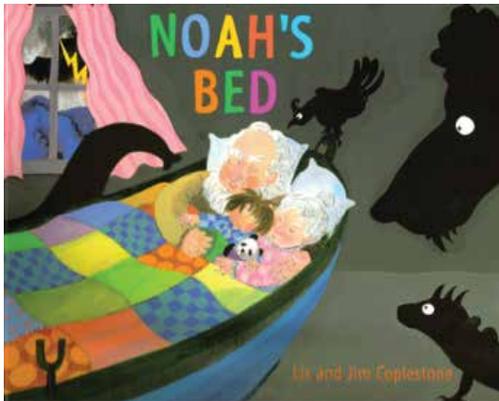




# Global Day of Jewish Learning

## Curriculum: Heroes and Villains, Saints and Fools



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A Project of the Aleph Society



# Esther and Moses: Not All Heroes Wear Capes (Middle School)

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## 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

אסתר ד, יז

י ותאמר אסתר להמה, ותצוהו אל מרדכי. יא כל עבדי המלך ועם מדינות המלך ידעים, אשר כל איש ואשה אשר יבוא אל המלך אל הסצר הפנימית אשר לא יקרא אחת דתו להמית, לבד מאשר יושיט לו המלך את שרביט הזהב, וחקיה; ואני, לא נקראתי לבוא אל המלך זה, שלוש יום. יב ויגידו למרדכי, את דברי אסתר. יג ויאמר מרדכי, להשיב אל אסתר: אל תדמי בנפשך, להמלט בית המלך מכל היהודים. יד כי אם התרש תסרישי, בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר, ואת רבית אביך תאבדו; ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת, הגעת למלכות. טו ותאמר אסתר, להשיב אל מרדכי. טז לך כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן, וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום גם אני ונערתי, אצום פן; ובכן אבוא אל המלך, אשר לא כדת, וכאשר אבדתי, אבדתי. יז ויעבר, מרדכי; ויעש, ככל אשר צוהה עליו אסתר.

**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.

## ► 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.

### ➤ 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

דברים לד, י יב

י ולא קם נביא עוד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יָדְעוּ ה' פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים. יא לְכֹל הָאֵתָת וְהַמוֹפְתִים אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַח ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעֹה וּלְכֹל עַבְדָּיו וּלְכֹל אֶרְצוֹ. יב וּלְכֹל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וּלְכֹל הַמְּוִרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

**10** 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.

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 be 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

שמות ג, י יב

י וְעַתָּה לְכֵה וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל פְּרֹעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אֶת עַמִּי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם. יא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אֲנֹכִי כִי אֵלֶּךָ אֶל פְּרֹעֹה וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם. יב וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְנָהָלְךָ הָאֵת כִּי אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה.

**10** “Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt.” **11** But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?” **12** 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:

### **Text #4: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. "Parshat Shmot." *Covenant & Conversation*.**

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...

## Esther and Moses: Not All Heroes Wear Capes

➤ **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

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י ותאמר אסתר להמך, ותצוהו אל מרדכי. יא כל עבדי המלך ועם מדינות המלך ידעים, אשר כל איש ואשה אשר יבוא אל המלך אל הקצר הפנימית אשר לא יקרא אחת דתו להמית, לבד מאשר יושיט לו המלך את שרביט הזהב, ויחיה; ואני, לא יקראתי לבוא אל המלך זה, שלוש יום. יב ויגידו למרדכי, את דברי אסתר. יג ויאמר מרדכי, להשיב אל אסתר: אל תדמי בנפשוך, להמלט בית המלך מכל היהודים. יד כי אם תחריש תחרישי, בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר, ואת ובית אביך תאבדו; ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת, הגעת למלכות. טו ותאמר אסתר, להשיב אל מרדכי. טז לך כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן, וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום גם אני ונערתי, אצום כן; ובכן אבוא אל המלך, אשר לא כדת, וכאשר אבדתי, אזבדתי. יז ויעבר, מרדכי; ויעש, ככל אשר צוהה עליו אסתר.

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## Part Two: Meeting Moses

### Text #2: Deuteronomy 34:10-12

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י ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו ה' פנים אל פנים. יא לכל האתת והמופתים אשר שלחו ה' לעשות בארץ מצרים לפרעה ולכל עבדיו ולכל ארצו. יב ולכל היד הנזקה ולכל המורא הגדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל.



# Esther and Moses: Not All Heroes Wear Capes

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## Text #3: Exodus 3:10–12

שמות ג, יב

י ועתה לכה ואשקחך אל פרעה והוצא את עמי בני ישראל ממצרים. יא ויאמר משה אל האלוקים מי אנכי כי אלך אל פרעה וכי אוציא את בני ישראל ממצרים. יב ויאמר כי אהיה עמך וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלוקים על ההר הזה.

**10** “Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt.” **11** But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?” **12** 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.”

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## Activity #2: Be a Hero!

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