EXTRAORDINARY PASSAGES:
TEXTS AND TRAVELS

Global Day of Jewish Learning: Curriculum

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www.theglobalday.org

A Project of the Aleph Society
The Global Day of Jewish Learning
A project of the Aleph Society

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www.steinsaltz.org       www.theglobalday.org

We Salute

The Matanel Foundation

For their generous support of Rabbi Steinsaltz’s Talmud project and all of his worldwide efforts.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

We are pleased and honored to acknowledge the cooperation and assistance of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, in its critical partnership in the Global Day of Jewish Learning in memory of Ralph Goldman and in its help in advancing Jewish learning worldwide.
We dedicate the Global Day of Jewish Learning to the memory of Ralph I Goldman, z”l.

There was only one title that Ralph Goldman claimed for himself: “civil servant of the Jewish people”. During his 100 years of life, Ralph both served and led the Jewish people, most notably at the helm of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. More than almost anyone, he helped steer the course of 20th century Jewry.

Ralph worked under Teddy Kollek (later the legendary Mayor of united Jerusalem) as a purveyor of ships, arms and goods during the War of Independence. He then served David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, in securing American support for the newly-created Jewish State.

In later years, Ralph raised the funds to establish Israel's high school system and its community centers. He promoted Israeli artists, writers and musicians. His wisdom and foresight — and his many communal connections — were key in establishing the Israel Museum. As the leader of the Joint, he created channels for Soviet Jews to emigrate and helped to lead the exodus of Ethiopian Jewry. Under Ralph’s aegis, the Joint expanded its work in Israel, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Ralph adored the Jewish people — and profoundly loved its heritage. Steeped in the Bible, he would quote its verses in conversation. He opened cultural centers in the former Soviet Union. At a critical moment for the monumental endeavor of the Steinsaltz Hebrew Talmud — when a funding shortage threatened the entire enterprise — Ralph understood the enormous importance of this asset of Jewish culture and persuaded the JDC's leadership to step in and make it accessible to every Jew.

We will always miss — we can never replace — Ralph’s shock of white hair, his dapper bow ties and his huge, huge grin. But as we name the Global Day of Jewish Learning in his memory, we are inspired by his life and lifted by his legacy.
The Aleph Society dedicates this curriculum in memory of Fanya Gottesfeld Heller z”l. Fanya Gottesfeld Heller was a true champion of the Jewish people and our shared heritage. As a Holocaust survivor, she saw the darkest of times, and so she dedicated her life to holding up the light of wisdom. A longtime friend of Rabbi Steinsaltz, Fanya was a staunch partner in his ongoing efforts to reconnect Jews to their heritage and of his Global Day of Jewish Learning. She was a treasured teacher, a storyteller, and a beloved mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

“Grandchildren are the crown of their elders, and the glory of children is their parents.”
– Proverbs 17:6

In honor of Fanya Gottesfeld Heller’s grandchildren and great-grandchildren: their lives burnish the glory of those who perished in the Shoah.

- Chana Hanina
- Galia Hanina
- Joseph Nathaniel Warren

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

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

Children of Tamar and Josh Heller
- Yakira Eliana
- Gavriella Talia
- Yehuda Meir
- Sarah Avigayil
- Yoel Natan

Children of Laura and Adam Hanina
- Samuel Azriel
- Charlotte Eliora
- Lucy Yael
- Yitzchak Binyamin

Children of Sarah Rose Warren Siebold and Mike Siebold
- Noah Wilber

For her parents, Benjamin and Charlotte Gottesfeld z”l, these children are the greatest reward...
Preface

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz has laid down a challenge to Jews everywhere: “To take a step ahead in Jewish learning and commitment.” This year we focus on the call to move forward, through our study theme of Extraordinary Passages: Texts and Travels, exploring the journeys that matter most to us.

The Global Day of Jewish Learning is the collective response — a most successful one — with some 500 communities in 43 countries participating in 2017.

Initiated in 2010 to celebrate the completion of Rabbi Steinsaltz’s monumental translation and commentary on the Talmud, the Global Day has 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, community organizations, and homes 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 Steinsaltz Center, which promotes the work of Rabbi Steinsaltz. We are grateful to Rabbi Menachem Even-Israel 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 to 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 appreciate the increased involvement this year of the Institute of Southern Jewish Life. 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 Aliza Sperling, Danny Drachsler, and Sandra Lilienthal for contributing units to this curriculum. We appreciate Sandra Lilienthal for serving as Senior Educator and Danny Drachsler for being Educational Advisor. A special thank you to Lily Meyer for wearing many hats to support all our work and to Eliana Moskowitz for all her work on this initiative. We also appreciate the input of Jeremy Borovitz, Yakov Ellenbogen, Howard Hirt, and Yael Smoocha.

We greatly appreciate PJ Library and its work to prepare family engagement ideas for learning about journeys. We wish you a wonderful day of learning on Sunday, November 11th and hope that the study of Extraordinary Passages will offer us new insights into the journeys that matter most to us.

Margy-Ruth Davis and Karen Sponder
The Aleph Society
Curriculum 2018 — Extraordinary Passages: Texts and Travels

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FOR ADULTS:

1. Generations: A Family’s Journeys
A family journey of three generations - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - led to the formation of a nation of people called the Children of Israel. We’ll look at how the paths of the patriarchs diverged, how their lives connected with the Land of Israel, and explore the meanings of their multi-generational saga.

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The Aleph Society’s Mission & Ventures

The Aleph Society was founded in 1990 to further Rabbi Steinsaltz’s mission to “Let My People Know”. The Rabbi’s network of publishing ventures, scholarly work and schools spans the globe. After completing a 45-volume Hebrew translation and commentary on the Talmud, he oversees translations of this masterwork into English, French, Russian, Italian and Spanish. He has written more than sixty other books that have been translated into a dozen languages. Thousands of students in Israel — from kindergarten to those in post-army advanced studies — have studied in institutions under his aegis. All of the Rabbi’s affiliate organizations are under the umbrella of the Steinsaltz Center in Jerusalem; its website, steinsaltz-center.org, 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 ninth year, is celebrated in over 500 communities, from Singapore to San Francisco and from Dallas to Djerba. Many, many thousands of Jews join together to study the same foundational texts, inspired to “take a step ahead” as Rabbi Steinsaltz has challenged us. A variety of materials are available at steinsaltz.org, including essays, videos and information about Rabbi Steinsaltz’s work.

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz is internationally regarded as one of the leading scholars and rabbis both of this century, and of 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 Israeli society.”

Born in 1937 to a secular family, Rabbi Steinsaltz has authored more than 60 books and hundreds of articles on Jewish mysticism, religious thought, sociology, biography, and philosophy. The best known of these is his interpretation of the Talmud, the seminal work of Jewish culture. His The Thirteen Petalled Rose is considered a modern classic of Jewish mysticism.

He is the first person since the medieval sage Rashi to have completed a full translation of and commentary on the Babylonian Talmud and the Bible. This historic achievement was commemorated in 2010 by the inaugural Global Day of Jewish Learning, which has since become an annual international event in over 40 countries.

This year, the groundbreaking Steinsaltz Humash will give more readers the chance to delve deeper into the Bible. Nearly 40 volumes of the Koren Talmud Bavli, an English edition of the Steinsaltz Hebrew Talmud, have been published to date, and the debut volumes 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 has lectured and taught in hundreds of communities around the world.
Introduction for Facilitators & Educators

The theme of “Extraordinary Passages: Texts and Travels” 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 this theme
- 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 life, 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.

This curriculum uses English translations and commentaries on the Bible from The Steinsaltz Tanakh. The Steinsaltz Humash, published by Koren in 2018, is the first of three volumes of Tanakh. The Steinsaltz Tanakh brings Rabbi Steinsaltz’s unique and humane outlook along with his sterling intellect to a Bible edition that is clear and concise.

The Sessions
To delve into the theme and to help participants see Jewish texts and narratives as relevant to their lives, the sessions address significant questions related to Extraordinary Passages: Texts and Travels.

Each unit reviews primary ideas in different areas, and the units complement each other.

We have chosen texts that will challenge participants, raise key questions and help us to develop a richer understanding of journeys, 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.

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 sessions’ timing is provided to facilitators. While we outline 60 minutes for the adult sessions with some units offering additional content/time, we expect the facilitator to abridge or lengthen these sessions based on time allotted and/or the participants’ interests.

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. In the end, the true purpose of the day is to increase participants’ familiarity with and appreciation for Jewish text study and what texts can teach us about journeys, as well as to foster connections with Jewish tradition and insights for 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 chavruta 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. Monitor their progress so you know how many sources they have covered. 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 five to seven 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 5 to 7 minute summary at the end.

Video Classes: Global Day ON AIR

To supplement this year’s curriculum, there are video classes from educators teaching on the theme and, in some cases, from specific curricular units. Facilitators are encouraged to view the videos as inspiration for their own sessions — the interpretations and conclusions of the video sessions are by no means the only “right” ones.

Consider these pairings:

- Sandra Lilienthal teaching from “The Making of a Wandering People”, the unit she authored
- For a learning experience involving genealogy, Arthur Kurzweil’s video “Mishpachology” can enrich discussion of “The Journey of Our Names” or “Generations: A Family’s Journey”

These videos are being produced monthly in 2018 in order to build a library of interactive material that facilitators and participants can access before November 11. This will allow for more time to plan the use of videos, as well as offer opportunities for “flipped classroom” learning.

Video sessions can also be used as they are, in full, on November 11, as though the speakers in the videos were there with you, guiding the learning. This may be especially helpful to communities with fewer educators available to teach or lead on the day. Live videos broadcast on November 11 can also be streamed live, if your event venue allows for a large screen or a projector.

Questions addressed in the video classes include:

- How does your Jewish identity intersect with your sense of nationality or citizenship?
- Do you know the names of the towns in your family history? Have you ever traveled to them?
- What are the connections between freedom and searching?

The supplemental curriculum videos are available in the Toolbox section of the Global Day website.
The Global Day ON AIR is a series of live webcasts of Jewish learning from around the world. Both leading up to and on November 11, renowned Jewish educators, rabbis, artists and thinkers ask the big questions in real time. Bring a featured speaker to your Global Day event with the Global Day ON AIR — no plane ticket necessary!

Visit www.theglobalday.org/videos to learn more.

Using the Curriculum for All Learning Levels

Beginning Adult Learners

- Study “Journey Into the Unknown”, as this session is intended to be an especially accessible starting point for new learners.
- Close a session by asking participants about their experience of text study, debriefing and helping participants look forward to studying again.

Middle School Students

The Middle School unit is an imaginative look at the story of Jonah, in which lesser-known characters’ journeys intersect with the title character. The journey of transformation is also a central idea. Questions and activities can be adapted to suit the needs of different ages of Middle School students.

Elementary School Students

This unit includes activities around name changes and the origins of our names. Questions and activities can be easily adapted for varying ages and educational needs.

PJ Library

The units “The Journey of Our Names” (Adult) and “Journey of my Name” (Elementary School) both explore where our names come from. Bible texts about the name changes of Abraham, Sarah and Jacob form the basis of both units, and guided questions are adapted for varying age-groups. Looking at what our names tell us about our past and our hopes for the future provides opportunities for rich intergenerational conversations.
By Aliza Sperling, with Danny Drachsler

Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today we will follow along with the journeys of the three patriarchs — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — when they are given commands about where they should, or should not, travel. We will look at how the paths of these fathers and sons diverged and how they lived in relationship with the Land of Israel. The generations of the patriarchs and the course of their lives had an impact on both the immediate and the distant future; we will explore the meanings of their multi-generational saga.

Let’s begin with the patriarch Abraham, and a promise God makes to him about his future descendants.

» Read Text #1 aloud.


12 It was when the sun was setting; a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And behold, a dread, a great darkness fell upon him. 13 He, God, said to Abram: Know that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs. Your children will ultimately inherit the land, but their descendants shall not receive it immediately. Beforehand, they will be foreigners and nomads like you are. And furthermore, they shall be enslaved to them, the inhabitants of that foreign land; and they shall oppress them for four hundred years. 14 And also that nation that they shall serve, I will judge. And afterwards they, your children, will emerge with great property. 15 But these travails will not affect you personally, and you will not be exiled or suffer, but rather, you shall go to your fathers, you will die and be united with your ancestors in peace, and you shall even be buried at a good old age. 16 And the fourth generation of your descendants shall return here to inherit the promised land, for the iniquity of the Emorite is not complete until then.

» Ask:

1. What is God telling Abraham here about the future of his descendants? Is specific information given about his children and grandchildren?
2. Abraham is told that he himself won’t experience this future. How do we understand this?
3. This text describes that the descendants will be strangers and oppressed, and that they will then return to the Land. What might be the value to Abraham and his family in having knowledge of both pieces of this journey?

The events God is referring to in this text, are known as the “Covenant Between the Parts”. This will come to fruition when Abraham’s descendants become slaves in Egypt, are brought out with the Exodus, and then journey to return to the Land of Israel.
Part One: Isaac, the Stranger in His Own Land (15 minutes)

Text #1 foretells of Abraham's descendants being “strangers in a land that is not theirs”. While the Torah describes the stories of Abraham and Jacob at great length, we are told less about Isaac. Much of Isaac's life was spent continuing the ways of Abraham; in fact many of the events in his life seem to mirror those of Abraham’s story. However, unlike Abraham who left the Land of Canaan to journey to Egypt when there is a famine, Isaac is told that he may not go.

→ Ask a participant to read Text #2 aloud.


1 There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was during the days of Abraham. Isaac went to Avimelekh, king of the Philistines, to Gerar. 2 The Lord appeared to him, and said: Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land that I will tell you. 3 Reside in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you; for I will give all these lands to you and to your descendants, and I will keep the oath that I took to Abraham your father. You belong to this land, and it belongs to you and your descendants, and therefore you must stay here and live here. 4 And I will multiply your descendants like the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your descendants all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your descendants. 5 However, your right to the land is not due exclusively to your own merit; rather, it originated because Abraham heeded My voice, and kept My commission, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. 6 Isaac lived in Gerar. Since he was prohibited from leaving for Egypt, Isaac remained in Gerar.

→ Ask:

1. Why doesn't God allow Isaac to leave the Land of Israel?
2. The text says there was a famine in the time of Abraham, and there is a famine now in the time of Isaac. Are there any other references to Abraham in this text? How might his father’s experiences have shaped how Isaac thought about leaving the Land?

God appears to Isaac to tell him that he may not leave, and that God will bless him despite the famine. However, it is not clear why it was so important for Isaac to remain in the Land of Israel. Let's look at two different explanations, the first from the Sforno and the second from the Malbim. The Sforno, Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (c.1475-1550), was an Italian rabbi, commentator, philosopher and physician. He is noted for mixing new interpretations with comments from earlier rabbis, while remaining faithful to the original texts. The Malbim, Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, was a 19th century scholar and commentator and the chief rabbi of Bucharest.

→ Ask participants to read Texts #3 and #4 together in chavruta.

Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.
Text #3: Sforno. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

“He will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.”

And the reason that I told you to dwell in this land and by doing so I will do good with you, is because I have already sworn to Abraham to give this land to him and his descendants, and therefore when you dwell in it you will be a prince of God in it, and you will acquire a presumption of ownership to bequeath it to your children.

Text #4: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

Dwell (Gur) in this land: The condition of being a stranger (ger) that you were bound to be [in the Covenant Between the Parts] will take place in this land, for one can be a stranger either by going from place to place, or by considering oneself to be a stranger even if he remains in one permanent place, and so you can fulfill the condition of being a stranger also in this land.

Ask in chavruta:

1. According to the Sforno, how is Isaac’s dwelling in the land a necessary piece of God’s fulfilling His promise to Abraham?
2. According to Malbim, how can Isaac be a stranger in the Land of Israel?
3. What are some of the attitudes and orientations of a stranger/a person on a journey? How could Isaac adopt those attitudes, even without journeying physically?

Bring the group back together and ask some chavruta pairs to share their responses.

Part Two: Jacob goes to Egypt (15 minutes)

Jacob’s life is very different from that of his father Isaac. In particular, while Isaac never leaves the Land of Israel, Jacob spends a good deal of time away from the Land. When Jacob receives the news that his long-lost son Joseph is alive and the viceroy of Egypt, he must decide whether to stay and be the leader of his sons and his tribe, or journey to visit his youngest son in a distant place.

Read text #5 aloud.

1 Israel and everything that he had traveled. He likely departed from Hebron, where he lived, and he came to Beersheba, which was located in the south, on the road to Egypt. Apparently, he specifically chose to pass this important landmark, where both Abraham and Isaac had constructed altars, just as he had on his initial journey to Haran (28:10). And there he slaughtered offerings to the God of his father Isaac. 2 God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night and said: Jacob, Jacob; and he said: Here I am. 3 He said: I am the God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, as I will make you a great nation there. 4 I will go down with you to Egypt and I will also take you up again. You will merit seeing your beloved son, and furthermore, Joseph shall place his hand over your eyes, as he will care for you when you die. 5 Jacob arose from Beersheba. It was easier for him to leave the land of Canaan with God's approval and His promise to accompany him to a foreign land. And the sons of Israel conveyed Jacob their father, and their children, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to convey him.

Complete this chart as a group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abraham (Genesis 15:12-16)</th>
<th>Isaac (Genesis 26:1-6)</th>
<th>Jacob (Genesis 46:1-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does God tell him to stay or leave?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does God say will happen to his children/descendants?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there references to his ancestors? If so, what is the context?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other aspects of the messages strike you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ask:

1. What are some reasons why Jacob would have been so conflicted about going to Egypt?
2. How does Jacob's message from God compare to that given to his father and to his grandfather?
3. Why do you think the text emphasizes that it is the God of Isaac who is telling Jacob to go? Does following in someone's path always mean that you pursue goals in the same way?
Unlike Isaac, who is told to remain in the Land, Jacob is told to go down to Egypt. This descent to Egypt marks the beginning of the slavery and oppression described in the Covenant Between the Parts (Text #1). Aside from worrying about whether he was allowed to leave the Land, Jacob may also have known about the prophecy given to Abraham, and hesitated to bring this fate upon his descendants. In the following commentary, The Malbim offers an explanation for why Jacob needed to go down to Egypt.

**Ask:**

1. Why couldn’t Jacob experience himself as a stranger in the Land of Canaan, as Isaac did?
2. Why was Jacob needed in Egypt?
3. In what ways did Jacob follow the path that came before him? In what ways did he break from it?
4. Look back at Text #1. How does the promise made there and what we just read in Malbim help shape these generations of descendants into the Jewish people?

In each patriarch’s case, God promises that He will “make you a great nation” or “multiply your descendants like the stars in the heavens”. The reward — the eventual destination for the generations of this family — is to be a great nation that begins with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whether they are told to go or stay, the patriarchs obey God and the reward for these generations of obedience is that Jacob becomes “Israel” and the father of the Jewish People — the Children of Israel.
Part Three: Journey Through Generations (12 minutes)

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz helps us look closer at the three generations of fathers and sons, and how the lives and accomplishments of each father pushed their sons in different directions. Rabbi Steinsaltz encourages us to look beyond the local events of the stories themselves, and to consider the characters and their actions as archetypes both for families and for Jewish history. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

Read Text #7 aloud.


...Isaac was passive; he was acted upon by others and had little or no scope for initiative. His actions were muffled and vague, as though in response to the actions of others. Altogether his personality was like an echo - not clear of definite in itself. He gave the impression of being a non-entity, one who was always known as the son of his father or as the father of his son.

This apparently was Isaac's essential problem: to find his own place in a world dominated by the genius of his father. He did the only thing left for him to do: he carried on.

...Hence, one does not ascribe to the second generation the same glorious qualities that capture the imagination. The son's task is to hold steady and not create. Or as the Bible story puts it, they have to dig again the wells that the fathers dug before them and that have become blocked up. The father digs wells and creates new facts; time, enemies, and habit gradually fill these wells with silt. It is the son's task to go back and dig the wells again, to release the living waters and let them flow as they will.

Isaac's task, therefore, even if lacking in splendor or legendary exploits, is of utmost value and significance. And the statement “These are the generations of Isaac...Abraham begat Isaac” contains the deeper meaning that, although Abraham and Isaac may be worlds apart and Abraham towers over Isaac both in personality and in the magnitude of his actions, they are nonetheless together as one - Isaac not only justifying Abraham, but establishing him forever. Thus, Isaac's achievement amounts to more than a mere contribution. By virtue of Isaac, Abraham is made what he is.

This passivity was expressed in every part of his being: he remained always a tent dweller...Even when he prayed for his sons and for the future, it was his wife Rebecca who was the manipulator.

On that occasion, when he blessed his son [Jacob], we are given to understand that in his heart he seemed to prefer Esau, the son who was conspicuously the very opposite of himself...This preference of the fond father could well point to certain contradictions - or at least inner conflicts - in Isaac, which may ultimately have complemented each other. The story of the blessing throws this preference into sharp relief. The man who had always been passive and conservative retained in the core of his being a profound love for the son who was all that he, the father, was not.

The conclusion to the blessing incident seems, therefore, to have a clear meaning. It was Jacob who had to succeed Isaac...Isaac could not see the potential of his tent-dweller son Jacob, who seemed to be no more than a copy of himself.
Of course, Isaac’s inference was incorrect. He was simply unable to see beyond the immediate facts of the situation. The very initiative shown by Jacob in trying to get the blessing for himself is proof that he was not a copy of his inactive father. It is the clue to the essence of Jacob: he who will fight fiercely to gain only those ends he considers important.

As such, Jacob was the one who made it possible for something new to take place. He was the keeper of traditions who was also an innovator.

Ask:

1. Rabbi Steinsaltz points out how these characters are archetypes, where Isaac is “the second generations.” Do you recognize any of these archetypes from your own experience? What makes them familiar to you? What makes them different to you?
2. What do you think is the relationship between the personalities of the first, second, and third generations of these archetypes? Rabbi Steinsaltz shows that some traits may skip a generation and others may always appear. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. The essay says, “The father digs wells...it is the son’s task to go back and dig the wells again.” How might the behaviors of the first generation affect the second and third generations?

Conclusion (8 minutes)

Ask a participant to read Text #8 aloud.


Abraham is an archetype and, in a way, so is his son and so is his grandson. Some people may recognize them only as characters in a story; others may understand them only as archetypes, while not thinking about them as people at all. There is a phrase: Maaseh Avot Siman L’Banim. [Ramban, Commentary on Genesis 12:6]. It means: The deeds of the fathers are signs or path-makers for the children. Those who proceed first — in any venture — make movements and, willingly or unwillingly, we follow them. They break the path. It is true in anything – science, for instance, or behavior, for example. Sometimes the same behavior continues down the line for 10 generations. The same things repeat — the good things as well as the bad. The first in every field — or the most influential in every field — create something of a path. A path is something that people will follow, even unknowingly. The actions of Abraham and his descendants become, if not a symbol [then] something that is compelling, enticing people to follow.

Ask:

1. Look back at Text #1 (the Covenant Between the Parts). How is the covenant carried forward through Jewish history?
2. Rabbi Steinsaltz states that “the same things repeat — the good things as well as the bad.” What can we learn about our own behavior and the future by learning about these archetypes?
Introduction


12 It was when the sun was setting; a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And behold, a dread, a great darkness fell upon him. 13 He, God, said to Abram: Know that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs. Your children will ultimately inherit the land, but their descendants shall not receive it immediately. Beforehand, they will be foreigners and nomads like you are. And furthermore, they shall be enslaved to them, the inhabitants of that foreign land; and they shall oppress them for four hundred years. 14 And also that nation that they shall serve, I will judge. And afterwards they, your children, will emerge with great property. 15 But these travails will not affect you personally, and you will not be exiled or suffer, but rather, you shall go to your fathers, you will die and be united with your ancestors in peace, and you shall even be buried at a good old age. 16 And the fourth generation of your descendants shall return here to inherit the promised land, for the iniquity of the Emorite is not complete until then.

Part One: Isaac, the Stranger in His Own Land


1 There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was during the days of Abraham. Isaac went to Avimelekh, king of the Philistines, to Gerar. 2 The Lord appeared to him, and said: Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land that I will tell you. 3 Reside in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you; for I will give all these lands to you and to your descendants, and I will keep the oath that I took to Abraham your father. You belong to this land, and it belongs to you and your descendants, and therefore you must stay here and live here. 4 And I will multiply your descendants like the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your descendants all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your descendants. 5 However, your right to the land is not due exclusively to your own merit; rather, it originated because Abraham heeded My voice, and kept My commission, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. 6 Isaac lived in Gerar. Since he was prohibited from leaving for Egypt, Isaac remained in Gerar.
Text #3: Sforno. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

"I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham:"

And the reason that I told you to dwell in this land and by doing so I will do good with you, is because I have already sworn to Abraham to give this land to him and his descendants, and therefore when you dwell in it you will be a prince of God in it, and you will acquire a presumption of ownership to bequeath it to your children.

Text #4: Malbim. Commentary on Genesis 26:3.

Dwell (Gur) in this land: The condition of being a stranger (ger) that you were bound to be [in the Covenant Between the Parts] will take place in this land, for one can be a stranger either by going from place to place, or by considering oneself to be a stranger even if s/he remains in one permanent place, and so you can fulfill the condition of being a stranger also in this land.

Part Two: Jacob goes to Egypt


1 Israel and everything that he had traveled. He likely departed from Hebron, where he lived, and he came to Beersheba, which was located in the south, on the road to Egypt. Apparently, he specifically chose to pass this important landmark, where both Abraham and Isaac had constructed altars, just as he had on his initial journey to Haran (28:10). And there he slaughtered offerings to the God of his father Isaac. 2 God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night and said: Jacob, Jacob; and he said: Here I am. 3 He said: I am the God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, as I will make you a great nation there. 4 I will go down with you to Egypt and I will also take you up again. You will merit seeing your beloved son, and furthermore, Joseph shall place his hand over your eyes, as he will care for you when you die. 5 Jacob arose from Beersheba. It was easier for him to leave the land of Canaan with God’s approval and His promise to accompany him to a foreign land. And the sons of Israel conveyed Jacob their father, and their children, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to convey him.
And this is what we have said as to the reason for the Exile in Egypt, for Israel needed to go down to Egypt which was a fiery furnace, so that like silver is pressed in the furnace, they will be pressed with suffering, and will be refined and...whitened and therefore they needed to be there, as preparation for being a “great nation.”

And concerning the question as to why Jacob could not be a “stranger” living in the Land as Isaac did, and rest quietly “settled on his lees” [an expression meaning “undisturbed”] (see Jeremiah 48:11), and not enter the Exile, and rather have his children go down to Egypt after he died — God said to him, “I will descend with you.” If you do not go with your children, the hope of your children’s redemption may be lost for they will sink into the impurities of Egypt and it is not their place. They need the Divine Presence with them protecting them as an “eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young” (Deuteronomy 32:11) so that the impurities of Egypt will not dominate them.

Part Three: Journey Through Generations


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...Hence, one does not ascribe to the second generation the same glorious qualities that capture the imagination. The son’s task is to hold steady and not create. Or as the Bible story puts it, they have to dig again the wells that the fathers dug before them and that have become blocked up. The father digs wells and creates new facts; time, enemies, and habit gradually fill these wells with silt. It is the son’s task to go back and dig the wells again, to release the living waters and let them flow as they will.

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Isaac could not see the potential of his tent-dweller son Jacob, who seemed to be no more than a copy of himself. Of course, Isaac’s inference was incorrect. He was simply unable to see beyond the immediate facts of the situation. The very initiative shown by Jacob in trying to get the blessing for himself is proof that he was not a copy of his inactive father. It is the clue to the essence of Jacob: he who will fight fiercely to gain only those ends he considers important.

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Conclusion


Abraham is an archetype and, in a way, so is his son and so is his grandson. Some people may recognize them only as characters in a story; others may understand them only as archetypes, while not thinking about them as people at all. There is a phrase: Maaseh Avot Siman L’Banim. [Ramban, Commentary on Genesis 12:6]. It means: The deeds of the fathers are signs or path-makers for the children. Those who proceed first — in any venture — make movements and, willingly or unwillingly, we follow them. They break the path. It is true in anything — science, for instance, or behavior, for example. Sometimes the same behavior continues down the line for 10 generations. The same things repeat — the good things as well as the bad. The first in every field — or the most influential in every field — create something of a path. A path is something that people will follow, even unknowingly. The actions of Abraham and his descendants become, if not a symbol [then] something that is compelling, enticing people to follow.
Adapted from a Russian-language unit by Dana Pulver

Introduction (3 minutes)

Facilitator’s Note: The unit is presented as a 75-minute session, but if time constraints necessitate a 60-minute unit, omit Part 4, or use Part 4 in lieu of the concluding art activity. This unit explores the lesser-known journeys described in the story of Jonah, rather than looking at repentance, which is often the central teaching focus. However, if you wish to explore the journey of repentance or the significance of the people of Nineveh, feel free to include that in your discussion. You can also choose to open up conversations about personal experiences like immigration or spiritual journeys.

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today we will travel with Jonah, whose story and extraordinary journey you may have encountered before. In this exploration, however, we will also take a close look at the journeys of some lesser-known characters in the Book of Jonah. We will read interpretations from commentators, look at artistic depictions of the story, and find ways to connect the story with our own experiences.

By traveling along with these other characters we will see how journeys can happen in many forms — physical and spiritual — and how an individual’s journey can have consequences for the journeys of others.

Have participants ask themselves:

1. Think of a journey you have been on that has changed you in some way. In what ways did you change?
2. Did that journey have an effect on people you met along the way?

Keep these questions and your answers in mind as we learn today.

Part One: Jonah On the Run (15 minutes)


1 The word of the Lord was with Jonah son of Amitai, saying: 2 Rise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim against it, as their evildoing has arisen before Me. 3 Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from before the Lord, he went down to Jaffa, and found a ship bound for Tarshish; he paid its fare, and he went down into it, to come with them to Tarshish from before the Lord. 4 But the Lord cast a great wind upon the sea, and there was a great storm in the sea, and the ship was about to be wrecked.
Ask:

1. Jonah is asked by God to journey to Nineveh to give them a prophecy, but Jonah chooses to board a ship to Tarshish instead. Why do you think Jonah fled?
2. Verse 3 gives a detailed description of Jonah's flight. What are some of the verbs used? How do the verbs relate to each other, and enliven the sense of motion in Jonah's actions?
3. What do you learn about Jonah's state of mind from all of this movement?

The Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer offers us an interesting rationale for Jonah's decision to flee. Compiled between the 1st and 8th centuries CE, Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer ("The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer") is a work of explanations and stories about Bible.

Ask a participant to read Text #2 aloud.


On the fifth day Jonah fled before his God. Why did he flee? Because on the first occasion when God sent him to restore the border of Israel, his words were fulfilled, as it is said, “And he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath” (II Kings 14:25). On the second occasion God sent him to Jerusalem to (prophesy that He would) destroy it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did according to the abundance of His tender mercy and repented of the evil (decree), and He did not destroy it; thereupon they called him a lying prophet. On the third occasion God sent him against Nineveh to destroy it. Jonah argued with himself, saying, I know that the nations are nigh to repentance, now they will repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, will direct His anger against Israel. And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)?

Ask:

1. According to Text #2, what are two reasons why Jonah decided to flee?
2. What might be some other repercussions of making “false” prophecies?
3. In light of this commentary, do you empathize with Jonah and his decision to flee? Why or why not?

The Midrash refers to II Kings 14:25, when Jonah was the prophet responsible for warning the King of Samaria to cease his oppression of the Israelites or face the wrath of God. According to the Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, the king did as he was warned, and so God did not have to punish the Samarians. Therefore, it seemed that Jonah's prophecy was false — there was no “wrath” to prove that Jonah's warning was real. The Midrash suggests that, because he’d been called a “lying prophet” in the past, Jonah would rather take his chances at sea than endure the shame of making another prophecy that does not come true.

When Jonah flees, God sends a great storm to threaten him, but what happens next affects more than just Jonah.
Part Two: A Journey with the Sailors  (15 minutes)

There are others aboard the ship — the sailors — and their journey is about to get much more complicated.

Ask two or three participants to read Text #3 aloud.


5 The sailors were afraid, and each man cried out to his god, and they cast the articles that were on the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. But Jonah descended to the hold of the ship, and he lay down, and fell asleep. 6 The captain approached him and said to him: What is it with you that you have fallen asleep? Arise, call to your God; perhaps God will reconsider with regard to us, and we will not perish. 7 Each man said to his counterpart: Let us cast lots, that we may discover due to whom this misfortune is upon us. They cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. 8 They said to him: Please tell us, due to whom is this misfortune upon us? What is your labor and from where do you come? What is your country and from what people are you? 9 He said to them: I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land. 10 The men feared with great fear, and they said to him: What is this that you have done, for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he told them. 11 They said to him: What shall we do to you, that the sea will calm from upon us, as the sea continually grew stormier. 12 He said to them: Lift me and cast me into the sea, and the sea will calm from upon you, as I know that it is due to me that this great storm is upon you. 13 The men rowed to return to dry land, but they could not, for the sea continually grew stormier upon them. 14 They called to the Lord and they said: Please Lord, please let us not perish for this man's life, and do not put upon us innocent blood, for You, Lord, have done as You desired. 15 They lifted Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 The men feared the Lord with great fear; and they slaughtered an offering to the Lord, and took vows.

Ask:

1. Why do you think Jonah avoids telling the sailors and the captain that he was the reason for the storm?
2. What were the first steps the sailors took to calm the sea? Why do you think they hesitated to throw Jonah overboard?
In Text #4, Let’s return to the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, and this time look at his commentary about how the sailors wish to avoid throwing Jonah overboard, even though they are in danger.

Read Text #4 aloud.

**Text #4: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 10.6, “The History of Jonah”.** Translated by Gerald Friedlander.

They took him [Jonah] (and cast him into the sea) up to his knee-joints, and the sea-storm abated. They took him up again to themselves and the sea became agitated again against them. They cast him in (again) up to his neck, and the sea-storm abated. Once more they lifted him up in their midst and the sea was again agitated against them, until they cast him in entirely and forthwith the sea-storm abated, as it is said, “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.”

Ask:

1. How does the Midrash describe the process of throwing Jonah into the raging sea?
2. Why do you think the Midrash emphasizes the sailors’ reluctance to kill Jonah to save themselves?
3. Does your understanding of the story of Jonah change when you look more closely at the effect his journey has on the lives of the sailors? How and why?

The Midrash shows the sailors’ fear and hesitation in sending Jonah to a watery end. They start by just dipping him up to his knees in the water; when the storm stops raging they pull him back up, which starts the storm again. They test the effect and find that the only way to stop the storm is really to throw him completely in. While the sailors demonstrate an interest in not harming Jonah, Jonah does not try to act on his own behalf, as if he’s just willing to drown rather than intercede with God.

**Part Three: A Journey With the Fish** (15 minutes)

You might think that this is where Jonah meets his fate, but Jonah does not drown when he is tossed overboard. Instead, he is swallowed by an enormous fish! Let’s return to the Book of Jonah to see what happens next, and to meet another character whose journey is of interest to us.


1 The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the innards of the fish for three days and three nights. 2 Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, from the innards of the fish...11 The Lord told the fish, and it spewed Jonah onto the dry land.
Ask:

1. Why do you think this verb, “appointed”, is used? What other verbs could have been used, and how might they have changed how we interpret God’s action?
2. Jonah did not pray aboard the ship when his life was in danger. Why do you think Jonah prays now, inside the fish?

The Book of Jonah does not include any words spoken by the fish that comes to swallow Jonah. Yet the fish plays an important role in what happens next. In Text #6, the Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer proposes what the fish might have said or might have been doing. Let’s read his description of the fish together in chavruta.

Ask participants to read Text #6 and discuss the questions together in chavruta.

Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.


The fish said to Jonah, Dost thou not know that my day had arrived to be devoured in the midst of Leviathan’s mouth? Jonah replied, Take me beside it, and I will deliver thee and myself from its mouth. It brought him next to the Leviathan. (Jonah) said to the Leviathan, On thy account have I descended to see thy abode in the sea, for, moreover, in the future will I descend and put a rope in thy tongue, and I will bring thee up and prepare thee for the great feast of the righteous...(Jonah) said to it (i.e. the fish), Behold, I have saved thee from the mouth of Leviathan, show me what is in the sea and in the depths.

Ask:

1. What are the events Text #6 is describing?
2. What, if anything, surprises you about this text?
3. How do the journeys of the fish and Jonah intersect? What impact do they have on each other?

According to the Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, the fish is destined to be eaten by an even larger beast: the Leviathan. Since he is currently inside the smaller fish, Jonah is hesitant to have his new travelling companion eaten, as that will spell disaster for himself. So he promises his fish to save them both from the hungry Leviathan. Jonah scares the Leviathan with a prophecy of being cooked and eaten at a feast. In exchange for being saved, the fish takes him on a tour of the deep sea.

Thinking about the fish as a character with a speaking role within the Book of Jonah offers us another perspective and journey to explore. Jonah’s journey puts him on a path to intersect with this fish, who has a life and a history of its own. Jonah’s travels have a direct impact on the life of the fish. However you may look at it, the fish and Jonah are on the same path for a time, and their days together change the course of the story.
Part Four: Transformation? (15 minutes)

It is interesting to note that the experience of being inside the fish is what changes Jonah’s path and behavior, in a way that his encounter with the sailors and the storm on the ship did not. What is it, exactly, that changed? When the fish vomits Jonah up onto dry land, God instructs Jonah — again — to go to Nineveh, and Jonah finally does.

When Jonah reaches Nineveh and gives his prophecy (Jonah 3), the people of Nineveh change their ways and God spares them from His destruction. At this point, one might think the story of Jonah is over. However, the Book of Jonah continues (Jonah 4) with a description of Jonah after his great task is complete. This description of his behavior and his attitude reveal whether or not Jonah’s spiritual journey took him as far as his physical journey.

Ask a participant to read Text #7 aloud.


1 Jonah was displeased with great displeasure and he was upset. 2 He prayed to the Lord, and said: Please, Lord, is this not what I had said while I was in my own land? Because of this I initially fled to Tarshish, as I knew that You are God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness, and reconsidering of harm. 3 Now, Lord, please take my life from me, as my death is better than my life. 4 The Lord said: Are you truly so upset?

Ask:

1. Why is Jonah upset? What insights into Jonah’s character do his emotions at the point in the story provide?
2. Do you think Jonah’s journey has changed or transformed him? How and why?

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz delves deeper into Jonah’s response to completing his mission. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

Ask a participant to read Text #8 aloud.


...Jonah’s morose response to the success of his mission is rather surprising. Whereas other prophets of catastrophe expressed pain and misery when their harsh prophecies came to pass, Jonah is upset by the annulment of his prophecy. One might consider Jonah’s dismay to be an extension of his initial decision to flee from his prophetic mission, a decision motivated by his frustration with the tragic lot of the prophet, whose very success causes him to be mocked.
Ironically, while the book of Jonah deals with repentance, and demonstrates the power of repentance through the actions of Nineveh’s people, it is ultimately the prophet Jonah who does not transform. Even after he accepts God’s decree and proclaims to the people of Nineveh what is demanded of him, his character and his personal stance remain unchanged.

**Ask:**

1. Rabbi Steinsaltz challenges us to consider that “it is ultimately the prophet Jonah who does not transform.” Does this surprise you? Do you agree or disagree?
2. If Jonah has changed behavior but has not changed his heart and mind, is that really a transformation? Has he really changed as a person?
3. Think of a challenging journey you went on. How did it transform you? Have you been on a challenging journey that left you unchanged? How and why?

Jonah’s behavior and attitude towards the situation make it clear that he has not let go of his fear of being called a false prophet. Despite all the challenges of his voyage, and despite his near-death experiences, his concern is for his reputation, and that does not change over the course of the story.

**Conclusion (10 minutes)**

**Activity: Interpreting Jonah Through Art**

Art can be a form of Midrash, and is a way we can show how a story is understood in different ways. There is something about being swallowed and spat out by a fish that captures the imagination — we see in different generations of art, and among our own interpretations, a fascination with the idea of Jonah in the belly of the fish. Let us look at how the journeys of the various characters come together, by looking at some works of art depicting the story of Jonah.

One is from 14th century Persia. The second is from the Northern Renaissance period by Flemish artist Jan Brueghel the Elder, a master painter and contemporary of Reubens. The third is a 20th century work by Eugene Abeshaus. He was a “Refusenik”, a Jew in the Soviet Union who was seeking the opportunity to emigrate, who in 1976 received governmental permission to go to Israel.
Take a close look at each of the paintings. Ask:

1. Eugene Abeshaus paints the moment of his Jonah arriving in Haifa. What might the fish represent in this case? What might Jonah’s experience inside the fish have been? What do you think Jonah’s feelings are, standing in the port?
2. There is an angel present in the Persian painting. What do you think that angel signifies?
3. In your opinion, which traits of the fish did Brueghel depict? What could the fish be a metaphor for? Does it have its own separate path, or is it a mere reflection of Jonah’s journey?
4. How are the paintings of Jonah similar and different from one another?
5. In considering the paintings as a form of commentary on the story, what insights have you gained into the journeys we have discussed today?

Just as the artists brought their experiences to their portrayal of the story of Jonah, in our conversation today we connected our own experiences with the various characters’ journeys. We discovered new ways of understanding the story of Jonah, through characters who are not traditionally considered the center of the tale. Each of the characters in the story have intersecting journeys. Contrasting them informs our understanding of each character, the story of Jonah, and journeys, in our own lives.
Part One: Jonah On the Run


1 The word of the Lord was with Jonah son of Amitai, saying: 2 Rise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim against it, as their evildoing has arisen before Me. 3 Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from before the Lord, he went down to Jaffa, and found a ship bound for Tarshish; he paid its fare, and he went down into it, to come with them to Tarshish from before the Lord. 4 But the Lord cast a great wind upon the sea, and there was a great storm in the sea, and the ship was about to be wrecked.


On the fifth day Jonah fled before his God. Why did he flee? Because on the first occasion when God sent him to restore the border of Israel, his words were fulfilled, as it is said, “And he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath” (II Kings 14:25). On the second occasion God sent him to Jerusalem to destroy it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did according to the abundance of His tender mercy and repented of the evil (decree), and He did not destroy it; thereupon they called him a lying prophet. On the third occasion God sent him against Nineveh to destroy it. Jonah argued with himself, saying, I know that the nations are nigh to repentance, now they will repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, will direct His anger against Israel. And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)?

Part Two: A Journey with the Sailors


On the fifth day Jonah fled before his God. Why did he flee? Because on the first occasion when God sent him to restore the border of Israel, his words were fulfilled, as it is said, “And he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath” (II Kings 14:25). On the second occasion God sent him to Jerusalem to (prophesy that He would) destroy it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did according to the abundance of His tender mercy and repented of the evil (decree), and He did not destroy it; thereupon they called him a lying prophet. On the third occasion God sent him against Nineveh to destroy it. Jonah argued with himself, saying, I know that the nations are nigh to repentance, now they will repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, will direct His anger against Israel. And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)?
5 The sailors were afraid, and each man cried out to his god, and they cast the articles that were on the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. But Jonah descended to the hold of the ship, and he lay down, and fell asleep. 6 The captain approached him and said to him: What is it with you that you have fallen asleep? Arise, call to your God; perhaps God will reconsider with regard to us, and we will not perish. 7 Each man said to his counterpart: Let us cast lots, that we may discover due to whom this misfortune is upon us. They cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. 8 They said to him: Please tell us, due to whom is this misfortune upon us? What is your labor and from where do you come? What is your country and from what people are you?

9 He said to them: I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land. 10 The men feared with great fear, and they said to him: What is this that you have done, for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he told them. 11 They said to him: What shall we do to you, that the sea will calm from upon us, as the sea continually grew stormier. 12 He said to them: Lift me and cast me into the sea, and the sea will calm from upon you, as I know that it is due to me that this great storm is upon you. 13 The men rowed to return to dry land, but they could not, for the sea continually grew stormier upon them. 14 They called to the Lord and they said: Please Lord, please let us not perish for this man's life, and do not put upon us innocent blood, for You, Lord, have done as You desired. 15 They lifted Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 The men feared the Lord with great fear; and they slaughtered an offering to the Lord, and took vows.

Text #4: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 10.6, “The History of Jonah”. Translated by Gerald Friedlander.

They took him [Jonah] (and cast him into the sea) up to his knee-joints, and the sea-storm abated. They took him up again to themselves and the sea became agitated again against them. They cast him in (again) up to his neck, and the sea-storm abated. Once more they lifted him up in their midst and the sea was again agitated against them, until they cast him in entirely and forthwith the sea-storm abated, as it is said, “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.”

Part Three: A Journey With the Fish


1 The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the innards of the fish for three days and three nights. 2 Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, from the innards of the fish...11 The Lord told the fish, and it spewed Jonah onto the dry land.
The fish said to Jonah, Dost thou not know that my day had arrived to be devoured in the midst of Leviathan’s mouth? Jonah replied, Take me beside it, and I will deliver thee and myself from its mouth. It brought him next to the Leviathan. (Jonah) said to the Leviathan, On thy account have I descended to see thy abode in the sea, for, moreover, in the future will I descend and put a rope in thy tongue, and I will bring thee up and prepare thee for the great feast of the righteous... (Jonah) said to it (i.e. the fish), Behold, I have saved thee from the mouth of Leviathan, show me what is in the sea and in the depths.

Part Four: Transformation?

1 Jonah was displeased with great displeasure and he was upset. 2 He prayed to the Lord, and said: Please, Lord, is this not what I had said while I was in my own land? Because of this I initially fled to Tarshish, as I knew that You are God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness, and reconsidering of harm. 3 Now, Lord, please take my life from me, as my death is better than my life. 4 The Lord said: Are you truly so upset?

...Jonah’s morose response to the success of his mission is rather surprising. Whereas other prophets of catastrophe expressed pain and misery when their harsh prophecies came to pass, Jonah is upset by the annulment of his prophecy. One might consider Jonah’s dismay to be an extension of his initial decision to flee from his prophetic mission, a decision motivated by his frustration with the tragic lot of the prophet, whose very success causes him to be mocked.

Ironically, while the book of Jonah deals with repentance, and demonstrates the power of repentance through the actions of Nineveh’s people, it is ultimately the prophet Jonah who does not transform. Even after he accepts God’s decree and proclaims to the people of Nineveh what is demanded of him, his character and his personal stance remain unchanged.
Conclusion

Activity: Interpreting Jonah Through Art


Based on a lesson by Danny Drachsler

Introduction (2 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

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 journeys and how we strive to progress.

Have participants ask themselves:

1. What is the farthest you have ever been from home? When you left, did you know that was how far you'd go? If not, what was it like to go farther than you thought you would?
2. Do you measure distance by how far you are from home or how far you are from the last place you stopped? Why do you suppose you measure this way?

Keep these questions and your answers in mind as we learn today.

Facilitator's Note: Abraham was previously known as Abram; you can point this out if necessary.

Part One: The Bible Text (10 minutes)

Read text #1 aloud.


1 The Lord said to Abram: Go you from your land, the geographic location where you were born; and from your birthplace, the place for which you harbor a sense of closeness and belonging; and from your father's house, and travel to the land, currently unknown to you, that I will show you. You will be told only the general direction you must travel, and you will be informed when you reach your destination. 2 You embark on this journey as an individual who is merely the head of a family or tribe. Nevertheless, I assure you that in the place where you are going I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great as you will be renowned, and you shall be a blessing, meaning that people will use you as a paradigm for blessings. When they bless one another, they will say: May you merit to be like Abram. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you I will curse; and all the families of the earth, not only the families of your descendants or your neighbors, shall be blessed in, or through, you.
PART TWO: DEPARTURE (15 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?

The Malbim, Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, was a 19th century scholar and commentator and the chief rabbi of Bucharest. He suggests that God wanted Abraham to make a departure that was more than merely physical.

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

Malbi''ם בראשית יב

אמר לו=======/elkh-lekha/sc: "Go forth from your land…"

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 The Malbim, why does God want Abraham to leave his land, birthplace, and father’s house? What might be the consequences of staying?

2. If, as The 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?

The Malbim emphasizes the philosophical element of Abraham’s departure. Abraham is to commit to a new set of beliefs and values, separating himself from a certain worldview. The significance of this intellectual challenge resonates with us today. Yet 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 was a rabbi who lived in the 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 — his land, his birthplace, his father's house — presented in this order?
2. Kli Yakar acknowledges that cutting ties with your home is hard. How might going to an unknown destination affect one's sense of loss in leaving?

Kli Yakar suggests that, as a child is taught, Abraham is gradually prepared for the “three steps” in his departure. This shows us that sometimes big journeys need to be broken down into more approachable stages. To leave his homeland is presented as one in a series of steps, rather than a single massive leap. But the destination is still a mystery. How does that uncertainty affect Abraham?

Part Three: Destination Unknown (15 minutes)

The commandment and journey are not only that Abraham must leave a place. He is to go somewhere else — but the destination is not specified to Abraham. All Genesis 12:1 says is, “to the land that I will show you.”

Ask:

1. Why do you think the destination is deliberately kept from Abraham?

The Malbim and Rashi offer different explanations of why the destination was kept a secret. Rashi lived in France in the 11th century. He is the most important commentator on the Bible and Talmud, and one of the most famous scholars in Jewish history.

Read Texts #4 and #5, and ask the following questions in chavruta.

Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.

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. What do you think that means, and why would that be a good reason not to know?
2. According to Malbim, what does Abraham prefer? To know the destination, or not to know? Why?
3. How could these aspects of Abraham’s journey offer us guidance in dealing with the unknown?

Rashi imagines Abraham as 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: Go Forth (10 minutes)

We’ve addressed questions concerning Abraham’s place of 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, lekh-lekha (לך-לך), “go forth”, “go-you-forth” or “go for yourself” (Genesis 12:1). What does this mean?

One possible understanding comes from Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, a 19th century Polish rabbi and the Gerrer Rebbe, who believed that wandering is good. His book about the value of being in motion, the Sefat Emet, became so well-known that people simply called him Sefat Emet.


The Language of Truth — всегда новая земля. Поэтому мы называем человека «ходящим». «Лех-Леха» — это то, что говорит наше слово, и это слово в двух частях: «до» и «до». Мы говорим, что человек движется в двух направлениях. В одном направлении есть пространство, а в другом — нет. Это значит, что человек должен идти, не зная, куда он идет. Это значит, что человек должен идти, не зная, куда он идет.
“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. What do you think 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”? How might Jewish cycles, rituals, and traditions be opportunities for renewal?
4. Do you think a journey is something that you return from or something that you are always on?

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 (8 minutes)

In Text #7, Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz also explores how we progress. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentary on the entire Talmud and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

Text #7: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “One Step Forward”.

Yes, each of us is at a different point, both geographically and on the chart of his or her own life. Truly, it doesn’t matter exactly where people are in terms of time and achievement, nor is the ratio between what they are capable of doing and what they have actually done all that important. Every person has a different personal graph, a whole different world map. What for one person is the past, for another is a still-distant future.

But one thing that people can do wherever they are — and they can do it in a consistent, ongoing, defined and focused way — is to take one step forward. Each person can move just a tiny bit, but still a tiny bit forward. The essence of all movement is that one does not remain in the same place. Whatever does not progress, regresses, and whatever does not ascend, descends. That which does not improve, deteriorates; and that which does not become more alive, becomes more dead.

The decision to make time and move one step forward is not the solution to all problems; it is merely a decision to move one step forward, and to keep moving. Wherever you may be, move just a little bit forward. There are people who will progress by learning a new thing; one who today knows only one letter but next week knows two, has taken one step forward. This is so much to ask — and yet, so little.

Ask:

1. What does progress mean to you? What are some small steps that you can take to progress?
2. Rabbi Steinsaltz writes that we can all “take one step forward.” How might this change the way you approach the unknown?
3. What would be one step forward in your Jewish journey that you are ready to take for your own sake (remember lekh lekha)?
Part One: The Bible Text


1 The Lord said to Abram: Go you from your land, the geographic location where you were born; and from your birthplace, the place for which you harbor a sense of closeness and belonging; and from your father’s house, and travel to the land, currently unknown to you, that I will show you. You will be told only the general direction you must travel, and you will be informed when you reach your destination. 2 You embark on this journey as an individual who is merely the head of a family or tribe. Nevertheless, I assure you that in the place where you are going I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your name great as you will be renowned, and you shall be a blessing, meaning that people will use you as a paradigm for blessings. When they bless one another, they will say: May you merit to be like Abram. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you I will curse; and all the families of the earth, not only the families of your descendants or your neighbors, shall be blessed in, or through, you.

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 temperment, 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


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: Go Forth


“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.
Conclusion

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Introduction (2 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today, let’s ask ourselves, “What’s in a name?” Names are significant. The names of people and things help us to understand their essence. The ways in which we use and create names often tell us about ourselves. Sometimes names change over time, and those changes are part of the journey of our lives and our families.

According to Jewish tradition, names have a special meaning. We’ll begin by exploring some name changes in the Bible and consider what they can teach us. Names tell us about our past and contain hopes for the future. We are often named after family members, and also sometimes after people in the Bible. We will also look at an interesting discussion in the Talmud regarding the significance of changing one’s name.

Part One: Names and Experiences (13 minutes)

Sometimes we gain names later in life, like nicknames or titles. They often come from actions we’ve taken or traits that identify us. Names we acquire often reflect our experiences and become part of our identity. In the Torah, the names of the characters tell us important things about who they are and why they are important. Our first text is the story of Jacob’s name change. Let’s look closely at what happens to Jacob and his name.

Read Text #1 aloud.


25 Jacob remained alone on the riverbank; and a mysterious, unnamed man wrestled with him until dawn. 26 He, the man, saw that he could not prevail against him, and therefore he touched, struck, Jacob and injured the joint of his thigh; and the joint of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Despite the great pain, Jacob remained standing and refused to be defeated. 27 He, the man, said: Release me, for the dawn has broken. Jacob felt that he was capable of subduing him, and he said: I will not release you unless you bless me. Jacob demanded submission, expressed in the form of a blessing. 28 He, the angel, said to him: What is your name? He said: Jacob. 29 He, the angel, said: No more shall Jacob be said to be your name; rather, you shall be called Israel; for you have striven [sarita] with God [elohim] and with men, and you have prevailed.

Ask:

1. How does Jacob get a new name? What is the new name and what does it mean?
2. How would you describe what Jacob does when he is challenged?
3. Look back at the history of your name. Did anyone in your family go through a challenge or take a journey that caused them to change their name? (Examples include: family names that were changed during immigration; additional or hyphenated surnames from marriage, etc…)
The angel, who is a representative from God, gives Jacob a new name. This new name is made of two Hebrew words. When the name “Israel” is said in Hebrew, the sounds of the Hebrew words for “strive” (שָׂרִיתָ) and “God” (אֱלקֵים) are tied together, in the same way that their meanings are tied together. Jacob’s actions — when he wrestled with God’s angel — are recorded in his new name, Israel.

The daily challenges we face have a lasting impact on us: we absorb these experiences that then inform our future behaviors. At times, these experiences are so life-changing they can even affect our names. For example, marriage, earning a title or degree, gaining a new sense of identity — these kinds of seismic shifts in life are captured in our names as a lasting record of that change that everyone can see.

The way we discuss those challenges are filled with metaphors of movement. We can “rise” to a challenge, “step up” to it, or “go through” it. We call it “the journey of life”. It is possible to “go somewhere” spiritually, emotionally or intellectually that is outside of your sense of the normal, which also causes us to change and grow.

Part Two: Names and Hopes (20 minutes)

Sometimes we are given names — from the Bible or from our family, or from our culture — that represent qualities our parents wanted us to have. Sometimes the names we are given are to preserve the memory of a person who has passed away, and we carry their history within us. Other times, family names can change when people immigrate or come to a new place and want to make their names sound like everyone else’s. When you change your name to fit in, that’s also a kind of promise to yourself.

There are other people in the Bible who had their names changed by God. Their name changes have a different story. Let’s look at how Abram’s name became Abraham and Sarai’s name became Sarah.

Let’s read Texts #2 and #3 in chavruta.

Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.


1 Abram was ninety-nine years old, and the Lord appeared to Abram; He said to him: I am God Almighty. Walk before Me, serve Me, and be wholehearted, perfect. 2 I shall establish My covenant between Me and you. This covenant was established with Abram as a private individual, and also with each of his descendants personally. And I will multiply you exceedingly. 3 Abram fell upon his face, in awe, due to the prophecy, and as an expression of his complete submission to whatever God was about to tell him, as the promise would no doubt include an obligation as well. And God spoke with him, saying: 4 I, My covenant is hereby being established with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 This is a new status, and therefore your name...
shall no longer be called Abram, with its simple meaning of lofty [ram] father [av]. But rather, your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. As part of the covenant, the name given to him by his parents was exchanged for a name chosen by God.


15 God said to Abraham, referring to him by his new name, by which he was to be forever known from that moment forward: Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, as Sarah is her name. 16 I will bless her with various blessings, and I will also give you a son from her; I will bless her, and she too shall become nations. Kings of peoples shall be descended from her.

Ask:

1. What happened around Abram’s name change? Around Sarai’s?
2. What explanations are offered for these name changes? What similarities and differences do you notice?
3. How do these new names reflect new identities?

Let’s read two texts that help us to delve deeper into the significance of the name changes of Abraham and Sarah. The first is from the Babylonian Talmud in Tractate Berakhot. The Second is from Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, who lived in 19th century Frankfurt. Rabbi Hirsch is known as the leader of modern German-Jewish Orthodoxy and wrote a six volume commentary on the Torah.

Read Texts #4 and #5 aloud.


The Gemara explains: Initially he became a father (a minister and important person) only to Aram, so he was called Avram ("Av" of "Aram"), but ultimately with God’s blessing he became the father of the entire world, so he was called Avraham ("Av" of "Hamon" – "the masses"), as it is said: “I have made you father of many nations” (Bereshit 17:5).

Similarly, what is the meaning of changing Sarai’s name to Sarah? The same concept applies to Sarai as to Avram; “Sarai is Sarah.”

The Gemara explains: Initially she was a princess only to her nation (Sarai – “My princess”), but ultimately she became Sarah, a general term indicating that she was a princess for the entire world.
Text #5: Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch. Commentary on Genesis 17:15, Hirsch Commentary on the Torah.

...To Avraham it was said: “thou shalt no longer be called Abram for Abraham shall thy name be, for from now on I have destined thee to be “Abraham”; this is a destiny which thou hast not yet attained but which thou shalt attain”. But here it says” thou shalt no longer call thy wife Sarai, for Sarah is her name, she is Sarah, the tone-setter, the regulator, who has in her heart the most delicate feelings for the right measure of what is right and good and beautiful, what is praiseworthy and holy, practices it herself and with the greatest delicacy applies it to others. And this she has not to become, she is all this already."

Ask:

1. How does the Talmud explain Abraham and Sarah’s name changes?
2. How does Rabbi Hirsch’s interpretation of Abram and Sarai’s name changes contrast with that of the Talmud?
3. Rabbi Hirsch makes a distinction where Abram’s name becomes Abraham, whereas Sarai’s name is Sarah. What might this difference in verb tense signify?

The Talmud presents the name changes of Abraham and Sarah as reflections of their future universal status. Rabbi Hirsch understands Abraham’s name change as conveying his destiny, while Sarah’s name change is to convey her current character traits. It is interesting to note that according to this understanding, God helps Abraham understand his wife’s true character.

The promise of becoming an important family comes from God to Abraham and Sarah, and includes the responsibility to act like their names’ meanings. Their new names represent the personal qualities God wants them to have. Their names should be both a reminder to them and a banner to others, which will lead into their new journeys. Our names, too, embody aspirations – hopes that our parents had for us and that we have for ourselves. In this way, our names carry both a promise and a challenge.

Part Three: A Change of One’s Name (15 minutes)

Having looked at some of the meaning of name changes in the Bible, we will now look at an example from the Babylonian Talmud that offers a different context for the significance of changing one’s name.

Ask a participant to read #6 aloud.
And Rabbi Yitzhak said: A person's sentence is torn up on account of four types of actions. These are: Giving charity, crying out in prayer, a change of one's name, and a change of one's deeds for the better. An allusion may be found in Scripture for all of them: Giving charity, as it is written: “And charity delivers from death” (Proverbs 10:12); crying out in prayer, as it is written: “Then they cry to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses” (Psalms 107:28); a change of one's name, as it is written: “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be” (Genesis 17:15), and it is written there: “And I will bless her, and I will also give you a son from her” (Genesis 17:16); a change of one's deeds for the better, as it is written: “And God saw their deeds” (Jonah 3:10), and it is written there: “And God repented of the evil, which He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it” (Jonah 3:10).

Ask:

1. What do you notice about the four actions listed in the text? How are they similar and different?
2. Is it surprising to see the changing of a name on this list? Why?
3. Among the four types of actions, there is a reference to Sarah’s name change. Given the significance of that change (as we read in Texts #3 and #4), how does that help us value the other actions also included in the list?

Maimonides offers a comment which helps us understand this passage of Talmud. Maimonides (also known as Rambam) lived in Spain and Egypt in the 12th century; he was a physician and philosopher whose extensive works have been an essential influence within Judaism.


Among the ways of repentance are:

- for the penitent to continue to cry out in tearful supplication before God
- to give tzedakah according to his means
- to distance himself exceedingly from the thing wherein he sinned
- to change his name, as if saying: “I am now another person, and not that person who perpetrated those misdeeds”
- to completely change his conduct for the good and straight path, and
- to exile himself from his place of residence, for exile atones iniquity, because it leads him to submissiveness and to be humble and meek of spirit.
A change in name creates a new identity to present to the world, but also changes a person’s sense of their own responsibilities. While a person may act differently when their name changes, this does not necessarily mean they have changed as a person. Instead, when one outwardly behaves in a different way, that process gradually brings a person to make spiritual changes as well. In this way, name changes inspire us to live up to our new names. Our actions and our deeds bring about spiritual growth.

**Conclusion (10 minutes)**

We have seen that names can change to convey experiences or express promises. Sometimes we can choose to change our names to reflect personal growth. From Biblical to modern times, names and name changes have held a special significance in Jewish tradition, and they capture the extraordinary journeys of our lives and history.
Part One: Names and Experiences


25 Jacob remained alone on the riverbank; and a mysterious, unnamed man wrestled with him until dawn. 26 He, the man, saw that he could not prevail against him, and therefore he touched, struck, Jacob and injured the joint of his thigh; and the joint of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Despite the great pain, Jacob remained standing and refused to be defeated. 27 He, the man, said: Release me, for the dawn has broken. Jacob felt that he was capable of subduing him, and he said: I will not release you unless you bless me. Jacob demanded submission, expressed in the form of a blessing. 28 He, the angel, said to him: What is your name? He said: Jacob. 29 He, the angel, said: No more shall Jacob be said to be your name; rather, you shall be called Israel; for you have striven [sarita] with God [elohim] and with men, and you have prevailed.

Part Two: Names and Hopes


1 Abram was ninety-nine years old, and the Lord appeared to Abram; He said to him: I am God Almighty. Walk before Me, serve Me, and be wholehearted, perfect. I shall establish My covenant between Me and you. This covenant was established with Abram as a private individual, and also with each of his descendants personally. And I will multiply you exceedingly. 3 Abram fell upon his face, in awe, due to the prophecy, and as an expression of his complete submission to whatever God was about to tell him, as the promise would no doubt include an obligation as well. And God spoke with him, saying: 4 I, My covenant is hereby being established with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 This is a new status, and therefore your name shall no longer be called Abram, with its simple meaning of lofty [ram] father [av]. But rather, your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. As part of the covenant, the name given to him by his parents was exchanged for a name chosen by God.

15 God said to Abraham, referring to him by his new name, by which he was to be forever known from that moment forward: Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, as Sarah is her name. 16 I will bless her with various blessings, and I will also give you a son from her; I will bless her, and she too shall become nations. Kings of peoples shall be descended from her.


The Gemara explains: Initially he became a father (a minister and important person) only to Aram, so he was called Avram ("Avr" of "Aram"), but ultimately with God's blessing he became the father of the entire world, so he was called Avraham ("Avr" of "Hamon" – the masses), as it is said: "I have made you father of many nations" (Beresit 17:5).

Similarly, what is the meaning of changing Sarai's name to Sarah?
The same concept applies to Sarai as to Avram; "Sarah is Sarah."

The Gemara explains: Initially she was a princess only to her nation (Sarai – "My princess"), but ultimately she became Sarah, a general term indicating that she was a princess for the entire world.

Text #5: Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch. Commentary on Genesis 17:15, Hirsch Commentary on the Torah.

...To Avraham it was said: “thou shalt no longer be called Abram for Abraham shall thy name be, for from now on I have destined thee to be “Abraham”; this is a destiny which thou hast not yet attained but which thou shalt attain”. But here it says” thou shalt no longer call thy wife Sarai, for Sarah is her name, she is Sarah, the tone-setter, the regulator, who has in her heart the most delicate feelings for the right measure of what is right and good and beautiful, what is praiseworthy and holy, practices it herself and with the greatest delicacy applies it to others. And this she has not to become, she is all this already.”
Among the ways of repentance are:

- for the penitent to continue to cry out in tearful supplication before God
- to give tzedakah according to his means
- to distance himself exceedingly from the thing wherein he sinned
- to change his name, as if saying: “I am now another person, and not that person who perpetrated those misdeeds”
- to completely change his conduct for the good and straight path, and
- to exile himself from his place of residence, for exile atones iniquity, because it leads him to submissiveness and to be humble and meek of spirit.

And Rabbi Yitzhak said: A person’s sentence is torn up on account of four types of actions. These are: Giving charity, crying out in prayer, a change of one’s name, and a change of one’s deeds for the better. An allusion may be found in Scripture for all of them: Giving charity, as it is written: “And charity delivers from death” (Proverbs 10:12); crying out in prayer, as it is written: “Then they cry to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses” (Psalms 107:28); a change of one’s name, as it is written: “As for Sarah your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be” (Genesis 17:15), and it is written there: “And I will bless her, and I will also give you a son from her” (Genesis 17:16); a change of one’s deeds for the better, as it is written: “And God saw their deeds” (Jonah 3:10), and it is written there: “And God repented of the evil, which He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it” (Jonah 3:10).
Facilitator’s note: The timing of this unit is currently paced for 75-minutes. Those seeking a 60-minute timeframe can adapt as needed. The unit still flows clearly if Texts #6, #8 and #9 are omitted.

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today we will explore how the experience of exile molded the Jewish people, from biblical times to the present day. Beginning with the first Exile, from the Land of Israel to Babylon, displacement and diaspora have shaped what it means to be Jewish.

Whether we believe we are still in exile, or that the Exile is over, many Jews in the diaspora struggle with the concept when exploring their Jewish identity. Most Jews today no longer have to deal with forced exile, but we still deal with the concepts of permanence and impermanence, creating roots and feeling uprooted.

One of the characteristics of the Jewish People is resilience, which many attribute to the long history of being a nation within other nations. Let’s look at some ways in which our shared history of exile can help us thrive on this continuing journey of the Jewish people. We begin by looking at an example of this cultural resilience, from Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

Text #1: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Do We Have Our Own Set of Character Traits?” We Jews.

The Jewish people have suffered in a particular way from deliberate campaigns of destruction, from the wars of Bar Kokhba until our own time. But on the other hand, the Jewish people have also had many advantages with regard to their physical existence. Their exiled state, in spite of its inherent difficulties, provided the Jews with the possibility—which most inhabitants of other countries did not have—of wandering and migrating from place to place. Moreover, it also gave them a certain kind of flexibility and made them capable of adapting to new conditions, as other people were not. For example, nations that were composed mainly of farmers bound to their land were extremely vulnerable to every natural disaster that befell them, whereas the Jews were not affected by such catastrophes.

Ask:

1. Do you think what Rabbi Steinsaltz says in this passage applies to Jewish life today? Why or why not?
2. How does your Jewish identity intersect with your sense of nationality or citizenship? For example, are you a Jew living in a country, or are you a citizen who is Jewish?

Rabbi Steinsaltz suggests that the years of exile and wandering are a significant, formative part of the Jewish experience. Let’s look more closely at the first displacement of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel: the Babylonian Exile.
Part One: The First Experience of Exile (15 minutes)

In the Bible, the Book of Jeremiah describes how the People of Israel were to be sent into exile in Babylon for seventy years. Jeremiah was a prophet during the reign of King Josiah in the 6th century BCE.


10 For so said the Lord: For at the completion of seventy years for Nebuchadnezzar’s empire in Babylon, I will remember you, and I will fulfill for you My good word to restore you to this place. 11 For I know the designs that I am devising in your regard — the utterance of the Lord — designs of peace and not for evil, to give you a remnant and hope. I want you to prosper and thrive. 12 You will call Me and you will go, and you will pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek Me and you will find, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 And I will be found for you; I will make Myself available to you and will answer you — the utterance of the Lord — and I will restore your returnees to their former status, and I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I banished you — the utterance of the Lord — and I will restore you to the place from which I exiled you. Now is your opportunity to return to God and worship Him with all your heart.

Ask:

1. Who is speaking in this text, and why is that significant? What is being promised? What are the terms and conditions of exile?
2. If the Exile lasted seventy years (Jeremiah 29:10), how many generations do you think came and passed in that time? Would that generation gap be enough to make living in Babylon “normal” and the homeland a more distant memory?
3. Do you think anyone in the first generation of the Exile believed that their children or grandchildren would return? How might this Exile have affected the culture of the exiled people if it had been described as permanent, rather than only seventy years?

This journey into exile, and the return from exile years later, was in many ways the origin of the Jewish diaspora. The first test of going into exile was whether we would survive as a people without a land. Peoplehood and Land are strongly connected. In order to survive as a people outside of their land, it was imperative to balance the longing for the old life, the hopes for a bright future, and the ability to make the best out of the in-between period.

This push and pull between longing for return and looking forward to the future is present in every era of Jewish history, from biblical times to the present day. Let’s now compare the Babylonian Exile to later instances of Jewish life outside the Land of Israel.
Part Two: From Exile to Diaspora (20 minutes)

Text #3 is also from the Book of Jeremiah. As you read it, keep in mind Text #2, and compare them.


4 So said the Lord of hosts, God of Israel, to the entire exile that I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses, and dwell in permanent residences, and plant gardens, and eat their fruit. It is advisable for you to engage in agriculture for your livelihoods, and you should even plant for the long term, as your stay in Babylon will not be brief. 6 Take wives, and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, and they will bear sons and daughters; and you will multiply there, and do not be diminished. Therefore, there is no point in living in anticipation of your imminent return to your land. 7 And moreover, seek the peace of the city to which I exiled you, and pray to the Lord on its behalf. You are now citizens of another state, and you must pray for that country's welfare, as in its peace there will be peace for you.

Ask:

1. Who is speaking in this text, and why is that significant? What is being promised? How is this different from the implications of Text #2?
2. Does this difference in attitude surprise you? How and why?
3. What might this text tell us about the individual's responsibility for the survival of the Jewish People?

It is interesting to note that the permission to build a life in exile appears in Jeremiah 29:4-7, before the promise of return in 29:10-14. This encouragement to live and thrive seems at odds with the idea of a promised return. In fact, many Jews settled in Babylon beyond the end of the Exile. Jeremiah acknowledges that even when there is no choice but to go into exile, you don't have to choose to live in mourning and sackcloth for generations. Instead, you can build community and continue living as Jews even when in another country.

What happens, then, when the 70 years of exile come to an end? This is described in Text #4, from The Book of Ezra. Ezra the Scribe was a priest in the 5th century BCE. The Book of Ezra describes how the exiled Jews living in Babylon returned to Jerusalem and to Jewish traditions, under the guidance of Ezra. Text #5 is a commentary from Rashi on this text. Rashi lived in France in the 11th century. He is the most important commentator on the Bible and Talmud, and one of the most famous scholars in Jewish history. Text #6 is a commentary on The Book of Ezra by Rabbi Steinsaltz.

Ask participants to read Texts #4, #5, and #6 together in chavruta.

Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.

1 It was in the first year of the newly-independent rule of Cyrus, king of Persia, once the end of the allotted time according to the word of the Lord from the mouth of Jeremiah, had been fulfilled. Jeremiah had predicted that the exiles would return from Babylonia after seventy years. In that year, the Lord roused the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, and he, circulated a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom. And Cyrus not only issued an oral declaration, but he put it also in writing, saying, 2 So said Cyrus, king of Persia: The Lord, God of the heavens, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. My reign is a gift from the Lord, the God of Israel. And He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. This command came to me from God, and I wish to fulfill it. 3 The previous declaration had certain practical ramifications: Any among you from His entire people, the people of the God of heaven, the Jewish nation, may his God be with him, and he may go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the House of the Lord, God of Israel, He is the God who is in Jerusalem...[Cyrus] did not decree that all Jews must go back to their land. Rather, he called upon those Jews who felt as he did, that the Temple should be rebuilt, and invited them to arise and travel to Israel out of their own desire. 4 Whoever remains, from any place where he resides, let the people of his place load him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with livestock, along with the gift to the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Text #5: Rashi. Commentary on Ezra 1:3-4.

And all that remains. And every Jew who remains in his place cannot immigrate because he has no money: They will marry him. I command the people of his place to give him and marry him with money and gold and property and cattle so that he can go up to Jerusalem with the donation, which the people of his place will volunteer for the building of the house, To the house of God which is in Jerusalem.


It was clear to Cyrus that not all Jews would respond to his call, as Babylonia was far from the Land of Israel, and the journey was grueling. Therefore, he said: Whoever of the Jews remains, from any place where he, one who has decided to return to the Land of Israel, resides, let the people of his place load him, thereby helping financially, by providing him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with livestock, along with a contribution toward the gift to the house of God that is in Jerusalem. Cyrus exhorted any Jews who had decided not to return to at least help those who had chosen to go. He even urged them to send a free-will offering to Jerusalem. Cyrus may or may not have known that the returning Jews were about to encounter a virtually desolate land. However, he realized they would require more money than mere travel expenses. In addition, Cyrus himself, along with several other kings, donated money and goods to the Temple, and was adamant that the Jews themselves should participate in this voluntary enterprise. Thus Cyrus’ statement was more than just the granting of permission for Jews to return to the Land of Israel. He was actively encouraging them to return, to build the Temple, and to establish for themselves a national home.
Ask in chavruta:

1. Ezra anticipates that Jews in exile may very well not return, referring to “all who stay behind”. Does this surprise you? How is this different from what Jeremiah envisions for the future of the exiled Jews?
2. Rashi presents one possible explanation as to why some people may not return to Israel. What do you think could be some other reasons not to return?
3. These texts suggest that it is acceptable to not return. Do you agree with that? Why or why not?

Bring the group back together and have a few of the chavruta pairs share their answers.

Between the times of Jeremiah and Ezra, a part of the Jewish People went from seeing themselves as a nation in exile to seeing themselves as a nation able to live outside The Land of Israel, even when return was a possibility.

These texts suggest that The Exile, as an early example of that unwilling expulsion from the homeland, did not destroy the Jewish Nation. Instead, that first forced displacement forged the Jewish trait of resilience. Through that resilience and their portable culture, the Jewish People began the process of adapting to life in diaspora.

Part Three: Diaspora (20 minutes)

Text #7 is a poem by Yehudah HaLevi (c.1075–1141) about his life in the diaspora. A Jewish poet and philosopher who lived in both Muslim and Christian Spain, he left in 1140 for Israel and died shortly after arriving there.

Text #7: Yehudah HaLevi, “My Heart is in the East”.

ליבִּי בְמִזְרָח וְאָנֹכִי בְּסוֹף מַעֲרָב
אֵיךָ אֶטְעֲמָה אֵת אֲשֶׁר אֹכַל וְאֵיךָ יֶעֱרָב
אֵיכָה אֲשַׁלֵּם נְדָרַי וָאֱסָרַי, בְּעוֹד ציָון בְּחֶבֶל אֱדוֹם וַאֲנִי בְּכֶבֶל עֲרָב
יֵקַל בְּעֵינַי עֲזֹב כָּל טוּב סְפָרַד, כְּמוֹ יֵקַר בְּעֵינַי רְאוֹת עַפְרוֹת דְּבִיר נֶחֱרָב

My heart is in the East, yet I am in the utmost West
How can I taste the food I eat, could it bring me any rest?
The vows and oaths I’ve sworn, can I heed them as I must
When Zion’s bound with Christian rope and I with Arab chains?
It seems as easy in my eyes to leave the charms of Spain,
As precious as my eyes would find the ruined Temple’s dust.

Ask:

1. How does HaLevi feel living in Spain? What do you think he means by “the charms of Spain”?
2. When this poem was written, HaLevi had never been to Israel. What is he longing for?
3. Do you think this longing is common among those who lived outside of Israel in the past?
4. How did people live in the diaspora? Did they long for Israel? Did they forget Israel and move on with their lives?

HaLevi speaks of a longing for the Land of Israel which prevents him from fully enjoying life in Spain. Yet, there are others who did not feel the diaspora in the same way.
Text #8 is from the prophet Micah, who lived in the 7th century BCE, and is a well-known verse that has been used in songs and poetry for centuries. Rabbi Jacob ben Meir, better known as Rabbenu Tam, was a 12th century French authority on Jewish Law and a grandson of Rashi. In Text #9, he writes about Jews living in Bari and Otranto (cities in what is now Italy), using a reference to Micah.


וְֽהָלְכ֞וּ גּוֹיִ֣ם רַבִּ֗ים וְאָֽמְרוּ֙ לְכ֣וּ ׀ וְנַעֲלֶ֣ה אֶל־הַר־ה' וְאֶל־בֵּית֙ אֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹ֔об וְיוֹרֵ֙נוּ֙ מִדְּרָכָ֔יו וְנֵלְכָ֖ה בְּאֹֽרְחֹתָ֑יו כִּ֤י מִצִּיּוֹן֙ תֵּצֵ֣א תוֹרָ֔ה וּדְבַר־ה' מִירוּשָׁלִָֽם׃

And the many nations shall go and shall say: “Come, Let us go up to the Mount of the LORD, To the House of the God of Jacob; That He may instruct us in His ways, And that we may walk in His paths.” For instruction shall come forth from Zion, The word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

**Text #9: Rabbenu Tam. Sefer Hayashar, Chapter 706, Page 90.**

כי מבארי תצא תורה ודבר ה' מאוטרנטו

For out of Bari shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Otranto.

**Ask:**

1. What do you think Rabbenu Tam means when he makes this reference to the verse from Micah?
2. If one is successful building a new life in a new place, will there still be a longing for the old place?
3. How does the continued connection to Torah help the Jews to exist outside The Land of Israel?

Micah, who lived nearly 150 years before the destruction of the Temple, made the now-famous statement that the Torah emanates from the Land of Israel. Rabbenu Tam references this line and subverts it, saying that the Torah might indeed emanate from Otranto and Bari. This is a very interesting text because it seems almost sacrilegious to compare Bari and Otranto to Zion and Jerusalem. Rabbenu Tam demonstrates how those who adapted to a new reality were able to build new communities from which Torah (in the broadest sense) was alive and well. After all, you may be exiled from a specific land, but you are not exiled from Judaism, from being a Jew.

Rabbenu Tam points out that, even though they were waiting for a chance to return to the Land of Israel someday, the 12th century Jews in Otranto and Bari felt at home outside of Israel. This interpretation is seen in other instances, for example in Renaissance Italy. There are many examples from different time periods, showing different approaches to living in diaspora. One such occasion is described by Dr. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1932-2009), a rabbi, historian, and professor of Jewish History at Harvard and Columbia Universities.


In 1526, in Siena, Italy, the banker Ishmael da Rieti, whose home is described as “a sanctuary for Torah and science,” was visited by the messianic adventurer David Reuveni to whom he offered hospitality but no financial assistance for his project. Reuveni reports: “I said to him — ‘What do you want? Jerusalem, or to stay where you are?’ And he replied — ‘I have no desire for Jerusalem, and neither will or craving, except for Siena.’”
Ask:

1. How might Texts #8 and #9 change your perception of Jewish life in exile in Babylon? In the 12th century? In the 16th century? Today?
2. When making choices about moving to a new place, how might your connection to the Jewish People factor into your decisions? In what ways could you make that connection from a new environment?
3. In moving from one place to another, what — if anything — do you retain from the “old place” and the “old you”?
4. How might a wandering nation retain a connection to its place of origin?

Professor Yerushalmi’s research suggests that, whereas some people may feel their Jewish existence outside of the Land of Israel is something deeply painful, others settle into and love their new countries, having no longing for and no desire to return to Jerusalem. Even though it is acknowledged and the precedent set that we can stay “away” from the place we should “return” to, for some there is still a tug on the psyche to connect with that sense of return.

Conclusion: The Wandering People (10 minutes)

Throughout the centuries, wherever Jews are living — whether by choice or because they had been forced to leave Israel — they are able to build new lives and new communities. In different places and time periods, there were different means of connecting with Judaism, but throughout history the Jewish People were able to connect to each other through shared culture and shared journeys, which allowed for the survival of their Jewish identity.

So how can a nation or a people exist in diaspora? The portability of the Torah, Jewish Law, and Jewish thought through the journeys of exile and diaspora enables the Jewish people to move across the continents while retaining a collective identity as a people. Rabbi Steinsaltz writes:

Read Text #11 aloud.


In all the years of exile and wandering, Jews had to make peace with their inability to be masters of their own fate in many areas of life, but their exile was not complete because they did not regard themselves as inferior. As long as they retained and nurtured their inner core, their spiritual life not only consoled them, but also served as their homeland, a refuge that could be neither harmed nor diminished.

Ask:

1. What is Rabbi Steinsaltz’s understanding of how the People of Israel are the Nation of Israel? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? How might this change your perception of Jewish Peoplehood?
2. What are some of the similarities and differences you’ve seen in the journeys we’ve discussed today? Do you see any similarities with other major moments in the diaspora in recent times?
3. Has this discussion changed your understanding of Diaspora and Jewish wandering? How and why?
Introduction

Text #1: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Do We Have Our Own Set of Character Traits?” We Jews.

The Jewish people have suffered in a particular way from deliberate campaigns of destruction, from the wars of Bar Kokhba until our own time. But on the other hand, the Jewish people have also had many advantages with regard to their physical existence. Their exiled state, in spite of its inherent difficulties, provided the Jews with the possibility—which most inhabitants of other countries did not have—of wandering and migrating from place to place. Moreover, it also gave them a certain kind of flexibility and made them capable of adapting to new conditions, as other people were not. For example, nations that were composed mainly of farmers bound to their land were extremely vulnerable to every natural disaster that befell them, whereas the Jews were not affected by such catastrophes.

Part One: The First Experience of Exile


10 For so said the Lord: For at the completion of seventy years for Nebuchadnezzar’s empire in Babylon, I will remember you, and I will fulfill for you My good word to restore you to this place. 11 For I know the designs that I am devising in your regard — the utterance of the Lord — designs of peace and not for evil, to give you a remnant and hope. I want you to prosper and thrive. 12 You will call Me and you will go, and you will pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek Me and you will find, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 And I will be found for you; I will make Myself available to you and will answer you — the utterance of the Lord — and I will restore your returnees to their former status, and I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I banished you — the utterance of the Lord — and I will restore you to the place from which I exiled you. Now is your opportunity to return to God and worship Him with all your heart.
Part Two: From Exile to Diaspora


4 So said the Lord of hosts, God of Israel, to the entire exile that I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses, and dwell in permanent residences, and plant gardens, and eat their fruit. It is advisable for you to engage in agriculture for your livelihoods, and you should even plant for the long term, as your stay in Babylon will not be brief. 6 Take wives, and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, and they will bear sons and daughters; and you will multiply there, and do not be diminished. You should settle in the land, bear children, and live normal lives, as a lengthy exile awaits you. Therefore, there is no point in living in anticipation of your imminent return to your land. 7 And moreover, seek the peace of the city to which I exiled you, and pray to the Lord on its behalf. You are now citizens of another state, and you must pray for that country’s welfare, as in its peace there will be peace for you.


It was in the first year of the newly-independent rule of Cyrus, king of Persia, once the end of the allotted time according to the word of the Lord from the mouth of Jeremiah, had been fulfilled. Jeremiah had predicted that the exiles would return from Babylonia after seventy years. In that year, the Lord roused the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, and he, Cyrus, circulated a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom. And Cyrus not only issued an oral declaration, but he put it also in writing, saying, 2 So said Cyrus, king of Persia: The Lord, God of the heavens, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. My reign is a gift from the Lord, the God of Israel. And He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. This command came to me from God, and I wish to fulfill it. 3 The previous declaration had certain practical ramifications: Any among you from His entire people, the people of the God of heaven, the Jewish nation, may his God be with him, and he may go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the House of the Lord, God of Israel, He is the God who is in Jerusalem...[Cyrus] did not decree that all Jews must go back to their land. Rather, he called upon those Jews who felt as he did, that the Temple should be rebuilt, and invited them to arise and travel to Israel out of their own desire. 4 Whoever remains, from any place where he resides, let the people of his place load him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with livestock, along with the gift to the house of God that is in Jerusalem.
Text #5: Rashi. Commentary on Ezra 1:3-4.

And all that remains. And every Jew who remains in his place cannot immigrate because he has no money: They will marry him. I command the people of his place to give him and marry him with money and gold and property and cattle so that he can go up to Jerusalem with the donation, which the people of his place will volunteer for the building of the house, To the house of God which is in Jerusalem.


It was clear to Cyrus that not all Jews would respond to his call, as Babylonia was far from the Land of Israel, and the journey was grueling. Therefore, he said: Whoever of the Jews remains, from any place where he, one who has decided to return to the Land of Israel, resides, let the people of his place load him, thereby helping financially, by providing him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with livestock, along with a contribution toward the gift to the house of God that is in Jerusalem. Cyrus exhorted any Jews who had decided not to return to at least help those who had chosen to go. He even urged them to send a free-will offering to Jerusalem. Cyrus may or may not have known that the returning Jews were about to encounter a virtually desolate land. However, he realized they would require more money than mere travel expenses. In addition, Cyrus himself, along with several other kings, donated money and goods to the Temple, and was adamant that the Jews themselves should participate in this voluntary enterprise. Thus Cyrus’ statement was more than just the granting of permission for Jews to return to the Land of Israel. He was actively encouraging them to return, to build the Temple, and to establish for themselves a national home.

Part Three: Diaspora

Text #7: Yehudah HaLevi, “My Heart is in the East”.

My heart is in the East, yet I am in the utmost West
How can I taste the food I eat, could it bring me any rest?
The vows and oaths I’ve sworn, can I heed them as I must
When Zion’s bound with Christian rope and I with Arab chains?
It seems as easy in my eyes to leave the charms of Spain,
As precious as my eyes would find the ruined Temple’s dust

וְֽהָלְכ֞וּ גּוֹיִ֣ם רַבִּ֗ים וְאָֽמְרוּ֙ לְכ֣וּ ׀ וְנַעֲלֶ֣ה אֶל־הַר־ה' וְאֶל־בֵּית֙ אֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹ֔ב וְיוֹרֵ֙נוּ֙ מִדְּרָכָ֔יו وְנֵלְכָ֖ה בְּאֹֽרְחֹתָ֑יו כִּ֤י מִצִּיּוֹן֙ תֵּצֵ֣א תוֹרָ֔ה וּדְבַר־ה' מִירוּשָׁלִָֽם׃

And the many nations shall go and shall say: “Come, Let us go up to the Mount of the LORD, To the House of the God of Jacob; That He may instruct us in His ways, And that we may walk in His paths.” For instruction shall come forth from Zion, The word of the LORD from Jerusalem.


כי מבארי תצא תורה ודבר ה' מאוטרנטו

For out of Bari shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Otranto.


In 1526, in Siena, Italy, the banker Ishmael da Rieti, whose home is described as “a sanctuary for Torah and science,” was visited by the messianic adventurer David Reuveni to whom he offered hospitality but no financial assistance for his project. Reuveni reports: “I said to him — ‘What do you want? Jerusalem, or to stay where you are?’ And he replied — ‘I have no desire for Jerusalem, and neither will or craving, except for Siena.’”

Conclusion: The Wandering People


In all the years of exile and wandering, Jews had to make peace with their inability to be masters of their own fate in many areas of life, but their exile was not complete because they did not regard themselves as inferior. As long as they retained and nurtured their inner core, their spiritual life not only consoled them, but also served as their homeland, a refuge that could be neither harmed nor diminished.
Based on a lesson by Rabbi Alex Israel

Introduction (10 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

For many of us, travel is the thing we do to get from point A to point B. Sometimes the journey can be quick, and we don’t really pay any attention to it, relative to the things we do once we’ve reached our destinations. Other times, a voyage can be unpleasant or grueling, and we remember the bad things about those negative travel experiences.

Then, there are the times when we travel for travel’s sake. Sometimes we do it deliberately, and other times we are surprised by how much we learn or experience unintentionally. When we go on a journey, our horizons are broadened, we gain new insights into the world, and new appreciation for the human experience.

Is it any wonder that we use journeys as a metaphor for life? Today, as we explore the “Extraordinary Passages” of the Jewish People, we will look closely at texts that tell stories of journeys and paths, and find ways these ancient stories can inform our present-day behaviors.

Let’s start by looking at a map. This map is a 16th century German woodcut, depicting the “Journey of the Children of Israel out from Egypt”. (Look closer, using the National Library of Israel’s interactive map reader at bit.ly/exodusmap)
The Stops Along the Way

Ask:

1. What does this map tell you about the route the Jewish People took through the desert?
2. Do you recognize any of the places marked? Can you understand the map at all? How does your ability to understand the map make you feel about the journey depicted?
3. While the map is of something ancient, what could it tell you about the culture and times of the mapmaker?
4. Why is it important to make a map? What do you do to record/remember your travels?

Even if you can’t identify any markers on the map, it’s clear to see that the Jewish People made a lot of stops and traveled a very tangled route between Egypt and the Promised Land. They certainly didn’t go as the crow flies!

Sometimes looking at a map does not tell you much. You can’t see from this map how rough the terrain was, or what the weather was like. You probably couldn’t use it to navigate around the region today. So why is the map important?

The map is a record, which is part of the process of remembering. Today, we might take photos or use geolocation tags on our social media posts, or keep a personal journal. Those are all records we keep to show that we were in a place. Even in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, there is preserved graffiti on the walls that says “Lucius wrote this” — it is a very human impulse to prove that “I was there”. Our photos, our tags, our journals — they can be records of being in a physical space or an emotional state, or even at a developmental stage in life. Those journeys are preserved in our recorded memories.

Part One: These are the Journeys (20 minutes)

The journey through the desert after the Exodus from Egypt has been described by generations of sages and scholars as a symbol of the Jewish state of wandering. The Book of Numbers details the journey of the Jewish People after their escape from slavery. As they moved around in the desert between Egypt and the Promised Land, they made stops along the way.


1 These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who came out from the land of Egypt according to their hosts, at the hand of Moses and Aaron. 2 Moses wrote their points of origin, their starting points for each of their journeys according to the directive of the Lord; these are their journeys from their points of origin. Each journey ended at a place of encampment from which the next journey commenced.
Ask:

1. What do you notice about what parts of the journey Moses records? Why might that be significant?
2. What do you find surprising about this text? When and where is this text?
3. What might be the significance of Moses writing down their points of origin for each of the journeys?

Chapter 33 goes on to list the places where they stopped and then set out from again, and some of the major events that occurred along the way, such as the death of Aaron. Many people, including Rashi, have wondered why an entire chapter of the Bible is given over to listing places where the Jewish People stopped. Rashi lived in France in the 11th century. He is the most important commentator on the Bible and Talmud, and one of the most famous scholars in Jewish history.

Ask a participant to read Text #2 aloud.

Text #2: Rashi. Commentary on Numbers 33:1.

These are the journeys: Why are these stations recorded here? In order to make known the loving acts of the Omnipresent: that although He had decreed against them to make them move about and wander in the wilderness, you should not think that they wandered and moved about without cessation from one station to another station all the forty years, and that they had no rest. For you see that there are here only forty-two stages. Deduct from them fourteen, all of which were their stopping places in the first year after they left Egypt, before the decree was made...

Further deduct from them the eight stages which were after Aaron’s death viz., those from Mount Hor to the plains of Moab in the fortieth year (v. 38). It follows that during the whole of the thirty eight years they made only twenty journeys. This is excerpted from the work of R. Moses the Preacher [Moshe Hadarshan].

— Rabbi Tanhuma gave another explanation of it (of the question why these stages are here recorded). A parable! It may be compared to the case of a king whose son was ill and whom he took to a distant place to cure him. When they returned home the father began to enumerate all the stages, saying to him, “Here we slept, here we caught cold, here you had the headache, etc.” (Midrash Tanhuma 4:10:3.)

Ask:

1. What are the different explanations Rashi cites in order to describe why journeys are recorded? How do those approaches and their underlying perspectives differ?
2. Which attitude appeals to you — playing down the number of stops, or counting them all deliberately? Why?
3. What are some challenges or journeys in your life that you’ve taken either attitude towards? How did your attitude towards the stops and starts shape your appreciation for those experiences?
Rashi explains that the many stops were recorded to “make known the loving acts of the Omnipresent”, as a demonstration that God kindly let the People rest, rather than let them wander without stopping for 40 years. Rashi then brings two texts with differing ideas of how record shows those “loving acts”.

The first comes from Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan (Moses the Preacher), who downplays the number of stops. In his view, the stops are kindly given by God, and they are really not that disruptive to the process of travel. Thanks to His kindness, the people were able to spend a few years in the 20 or so major stops, taking rest and building up resources for the next leg of the journey.

Next, Rashi brings a story from Midrash Tanhuma, which has an opposite perspective. Midrash Tanhuma is a collection of discussions of the Torah passed down through the generations, believed to have been compiled around the 16th century in Constantinople, and republished later in a 19th century edition. The story in Midrash Tanhuma tells of a king who travelled a long way with his sick son to seek a cure. The tenderness with which the father treats his son is analogous to the “loving acts of the Omnipresent”. God remembers every stop His People made, and holds them as precious markers of His Children’s development, even though they might not be aware of them as such.

Let’s look at another explanation for the record offered by the Sforno. Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (c.1475-1550) was an Italian rabbi, commentator, philosopher and physician. He is noted for his mixture of new interpretations and comments from earlier rabbis, while remaining faithful to the original texts.

$\text{Read Text #3 aloud.}$

**Text #3: Sforno. Commentary on Numbers 33:1.**

> אלה מﾃּסֵעַ רַבֵּה הַכָּלִיל יִתְבַּרְכֶּךָ שִׁמְךָ מַסֵּעַ אֲלֵהֶם אֲלֵהֶם מַסֵּעַ אֲלֵהֶם, God wanted all the journeys to be recorded in order to compliment the Jewish people who had followed him blindly through the desert where nothing grew, so that as a reward for their faith they would deserve to enter and inherit the land of Israel.

$\text{Ask:}$

1. What does the Sforno say is the reason to record the journeys? How does he describe it?
2. The Midrash Tanhuma highlights the miracles that God performed to help the Jewish people in the desert. How does that compare to the Sforno? Which of the three explanations do you connect with? Why?

Unlike the explanations given by Rashi, the Sforno sees the journeys as a test of worthiness, and the record is a testament to the Jewish People’s success in passing that test. The hardships of the desert, “where nothing grew” and that the people went “blindly through,” were a test of faith that proved the People deserved to enter the Land of Israel.

The different perceptions — a clerical record, a memorializing list, a test of faith — each shift the ways in which we value and learn from the experiences of the Jewish People in the desert. But, regardless of the reason for the record, it is agreed that the way through the wilderness was difficult. What, then, is the significance of the desert? If the journey through is so difficult and long, why not take a shorter route?
Part Two: Looking for a Longer Route (20 minutes)

The Jewish People have continually taken longer and/or more difficult routes, as the Talmud and subsequent commentaries say. The difficulty and test of the journey through the desert could have conclusively told the Jewish People to take a shorter road, but no, consistently the difficult way was chosen. But why choose the harder path? The Mekhilta D’Rabbi Yishmael, a commentary on the Book of Exodus from the Mishnaic times (2nd century CE), offers an explanation for this behavior.

Ask participants to read Text #4 aloud.


God did not bring the people to Israel on the direct route. Instead he took them through the desert. God said “If I bring them to the Land of Israel now, everyone will immediately involve themselves with their field and vineyard and they will pay no attention to Torah! Instead, I will take them through the wilderness. They will eat the Manna and drink water from the miraculous Well and the Torah will become absorbed in their body.

Ask:

1. What parts of the journey to the Land of Israel does the text emphasize?
2. How does the text see the indirect route as beneficial? How does the text see the direct route as disadvantageous?
3. Does this idea that going through the “wilderness” allows wisdom to be “absorbed in [the] body” resonate with you? Have you experienced anything like this in your life?

The longer route through the desert was, in a sense, the fire in which the Jewish people were forged. Before they could enter the Promised Land they had to receive the Torah. Their shared experiences in surviving the desert, acquiring the Law, and solidifying their identity was what made them a People. They then came into the Land as a nation formed, rather than entering the Land as loosely-associated people escaping Egypt. The difficulty of the passage through the desert was essential to becoming the People.

The Talmud also grapples with this tension between wanting to take a shorter road and finding that the longer road was the better path to take. The Talmud recounts several stories about Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya, who was said to have never been defeated in a debate, except for three times. Let’s read together about two occasions on which he was looking for the shortest or fastest route, and found his choices questioned.

Ask participants to read and discuss Text #5a and #5b together in chavruta.

Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.
The very next story in the Talmud recounts the time when Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya also takes a shortcut, and this time finds himself matching wits with a little boy.

Text #5b: Babylonian Talmud *Eruvin* 53b. English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

What is the incident with a young boy? One time I was walking along the path, and I saw a young boy sitting at the crossroads. And I said to him: On which path shall we walk in order to get to the city? He said to me: This path is short and long, and that path is long and short. I walked on the path that was short and long. When I approached the city I found that gardens and orchards surrounded it, and I did not know the trails leading through them to the city.

I went back and met the young boy again and said to him: My son, didn’t you tell me that this way is short? He said to me: And didn’t I tell you that it is also long?31 I kissed him on his head and said to him: Happy are you, O Israel, for you are all exceedingly wise, from your old to your young.

**Ask:**

1. How do these two stories about Rabbi Yehoshua compare? What are some similarities and differences?
2. What could Rabbi Yehoshua’s thought process have been in these instances of taking a shortcut?
3. Rabbi Yehoshua justifies his path through the field by saying that a well-trodden path gives implicit permission to use that path. What are some examples of this attitude you’ve encountered? Do you think it’s justified?
4. If we use paths as a metaphor for our behaviors, what do you think the Talmud is cautioning us against doing?

Bring the group back together and ask a few of the *chavruta* pairs to share their responses with everyone.

Rabbi Yehoshua discovers that what he thinks is a shorter route is actually not the best route. As the little girl pointed out, just because a path has been used before, that doesn’t mean it is the right path for everyone. And as the boy pointed out, the route that looked shorter did not actually lead into town, but into an orchard next to town.
In both instances, Rabbi Yehoshua knew where he wanted to go, but still was not certain the best way to travel there. In those cases, he thought his own logic — and his urgency to reach his destination — would be enough to guide him. But what happens when we don’t even know where it is we want to go?

**Conclusion (10 minutes)**

In Text #6, Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz provides insights into the challenges involved in journeying through our lives, without having a map or being able to know the final destination. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

» Read Text #6 aloud.

**Text #6: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Masei”, Talks on the Parsha.**

Part of the difficulty of the wilderness, which is also a perennial trial for the Jewish community and for the individual, is that if one could understand where one’s steps are leading, one would know his exact distance from the final destination, and one would know what the solution is: Everything would be simpler. The great difficulty is that just when it seems that we are going northward, we suddenly begin to move southward; just when we think that we are ascending the mountain, we suddenly begin our descent.

This problem is the source and essence of the whole conception of Jewish destiny. If we understood all the nuances of the process leading to redemption, and saw clearly that we are progressively drawing nearer to it, everything would seem different. But since we do not know this, we need only recall that “these were their stops along the way,” for the community and the individual. We constantly re-experience the same journeys; we stand and we fall…

This is our story, which we will be able to read and understand only at the end of time, when we reach the final station. Then we will receive the meaning of the map by which we have traveled, and this will enable us to explain our history and the events that have befallen us.

The path from Egypt to the “good and spacious land” is long and arduous, a path that traversed “the wilderness of the peoples.” Only at the end of the path will we come to the point at which it will be possible to understand both the “going forth” and the “journey.” Only then will we comprehend the meaning and the content of all our experiences over the years.

» Ask:

1. Do you agree with Rabbi Steinsaltz that everything would be simpler if we could know the exact distance to our “final destination”? Why or why not?
2. When in your life have you experienced an unexpected change in direction, when you had thought you were going one way and found yourself moving in another direction?
3. When have you or your community made “stops along the way”? How do the texts we explored today change your understanding of your journey and the journey of the Jewish people?
The stories we tell and the traditions we keep are a map of our lived experience. As a people, these records serve as ways to tell the future generations what we have done and what we have learned along the way, so that the lived experiences and memories do not disappear as each generation gives way to the next. Likewise, our personal records make it possible for future generations to learn from our mistakes and remember our triumphs. At the same time, we know that maps can be inconclusive, and that life itself doesn’t have a detailed map. Our journey — as a Jewish People and as individuals — has never been a straightforward one.
Introduction
Part One: These are the Journeys


1 These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who came out from the land of Egypt according to their hosts, at the hand of Moses and Aaron. 2 Moses wrote their points of origin, their starting points for each of their journeys according to the directive of the Lord; these are their journeys from their points of origin. Each journey ended at a place of encampment from which the next journey commenced.

Text #2: Rashi. Commentary on Numbers 33:1.

These are the journeys: Why are these stations recorded here? In order to make known the loving acts of the Omnipresent: that although He had decreed against them to make them move about and wander in the wilderness, you should not think that they wandered and moved about from one station to another station all the forty years, and that they had no rest. For you see that there are here only forty-two stations.

Further deduct from them the eight stages which were after Aaron’s death viz., those from Mount Hor to the plains of Moab in the fortieth year (v. 38). It follows that during the whole of the thirty-eight years they made only twenty journeys. This is excerpted from the work of R. Moses the Preacher [Moshe Hadarshan].

— Rabbi Tanhuma gave another explanation of it (of the question why these stages are here recorded). A parable!

It may be compared to the case of a king whose son was ill and whom he took to a distant place to cure him. When they returned home the father began to enumerate all the stages, saying to him, “Here we slept, here we caught cold, here you had the headache, etc.” (Midrash Tanhuma 4:10:3.)


These are the journeys: G’d wanted all the journeys to be recorded in order to compliment the Jewish people who had followed him blindly through the desert where nothing grew, so that as a reward for their faith they would deserve to enter and inherit the land of Israel.
**Part Two: Looking for a Longer Route**

**Text #4: Mekhilta D’Rabbi Yishmael. Introduction to Parshat Vayihi (Genesis 47:28-50:26).**
Translated by Jacob Z. Lauterbach.

God did not bring the people to Israel on the direct route. Instead he took them through the desert. God said “If I bring them to the Land of Israel now, everyone will immediately involve themselves with their field and vineyard and they will pay no attention to Torah! Instead, I will take them through the wilderness. They will eat the Manna and drink water from the miraculous Well and the Torah will become absorbed in their body.

**Text #5a: Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 53b.** English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the Koren Talmud Bavli.

What is the incident with a young girl? One time I was walking along the path, and the path passed through a field, and I was walking on it. A certain young girl said to me: My Rabbi, isn’t this a field? One should not walk through a field, so as not to damage the crops growing there. I said to her: Isn’t it a well-trodden path in the field, across which one is permitted to walk? She said to me: Robbers like you have trodden it. In other words, it previously had been prohibited to walk through this field, and it is only due to people such as you, who paid no attention to the prohibition, that a path has been cut across it. Thus, the young girl defeated Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya in a debate.

**Text #5b: Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 53b.** English translation [bold text] and commentary [plain text] by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz in the Koren Talmud Bavli.

What is the incident with a young boy? One time I was walking along the path, and I saw a young boy sitting at the crossroads. And I said to him: On which path shall we walk in order to get to the city? He said to me: This path is short and long, and that path is long and short. I walked on the path that was short and long. When I approached the city I found that gardens and orchards surrounded it, and I did not know the trails leading through them to the city.

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Conclusion


Part of the difficulty of the wilderness, which is also a perennial trial for the Jewish community and for the individual, is that if one could understand where one’s steps are leading, one would know his exact distance from the final destination, and one would know what the solution is: Everything would be simpler. The great difficulty is that just when it seems that we are going northward, we suddenly begin to move southward; just when we think that we are ascending the mountain, we suddenly begin our descent.

This problem is the source and essence of the whole conception of Jewish destiny. If we understood all the nuances of the process leading to redemption, and saw clearly that we are progressively drawing nearer to it, everything would seem different. But since we do not know this, we need only recall that “these were their stops along the way,” for the community and the individual. We constantly re-experience the same journeys; we stand and we fall…

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For more lessons and resources from Rabbi Alex Israel, visit his website www.alexisrael.org.
On A Journey With Jonah
(Middle School)

Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today we will travel with Jonah, whose story and extraordinary journey you may have read before. This time, we will also take a closer look at some other characters in the Book of Jonah whose stories are not as well-known. As we read the Bible text closely, we'll explore interpretations from commentators and find ways to connect the story with our own experiences.

By travelling along with these other characters, we will see how journeys can happen in many forms — physical and spiritual — and how an individual's journey can have consequences for others.

Ask participants to share some answers to the following questions:

1. Think of a journey you have been on that has changed you in some way. In what ways did you change?
2. Did your journey have an effect on people you met along the way? How?

Part One: Jonah On the Run (10 minutes)

Let's look together at the opening verses of the Book of Jonah.

Read Text #1 aloud.


1 The word of the Lord was with Jonah son of Amitai, saying: 2 Rise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim against it, as their evildoing has arisen before Me. 3 Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from before the Lord, he went down to Jaffa, and found a ship bound for Tarshish; he paid its fare, and he went down into it, to come with them to Tarshish from before the Lord. 4 But the Lord cast a great wind upon the sea, and there was a great storm in the sea, and the ship was about to be wrecked.

Ask:

1. Jonah is asked by God to journey to Nineveh to give them a prophecy, but Jonah chooses to board a ship to Tarshish instead. Why do you think Jonah tried to run away?

Compiled between the 1st and 8th centuries CE, the Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer (“The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer”) is a work of explanations and stories about Bible. This Midrash gives us an interesting reason for why Jonah decided to flee.
On the fifth day Jonah fled before his God. Why did he flee? Because on the first occasion when God sent him to restore the border of Israel, his words were fulfilled, as it is said, “And he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath” (II Kings 14:25). On the second occasion God sent him to Jerusalem to (prophesy that He would) destroy it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did according to the abundance of His tender mercy and repented of the evil (decree), and He did not destroy it; thereupon they called him [Jonah] a lying prophet. On the third occasion God sent him against Nineveh to destroy it. Jonah argued with himself, saying, “I know that the nations are nigh [near] to repentance, now they will repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, will direct His anger against Israel. And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)?”

The Midrash is referring to another story about Jonah in II Kings 14:25. Remember, Jonah is a prophet, and it’s his job to give people instructions from God when they are breaking God’s laws. In II Kings, Jonah was sent to warn the king of Samaria that God would destroy the Samaritans if they did not stop oppressing the Israelites. According to the Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, the Samarian king stopped oppressing the Israelites — so God did not have to destroy the Samaritans. That meant Jonah’s prophecy never came true — Samaria wasn’t destroyed, so there was nothing to prove that Jonah was telling the truth, and everyone then called him a liar. Because of his experience being called a “lying prophet,” Jonah would rather try and hide from God than take the chance that people would call him a liar again.

> Ask:

1. What do you think about this explanation? Do you agree or disagree that this is why Jonah ran away? Why?
2. Why do you think Jonah is so afraid of being called a “lying prophet”? What might be some consequences of making “false” prophecies?
3. Does the Midrash change how you feel about Jonah’s decision to run away? Why or why not?

When Jonah boards a ship to flee, God sends a great storm to threaten him. What happens next has an effect on more than just Jonah. There are others aboard the ship, and their journey is about to get much more complicated.

**Part Two: A Journey with the Sailors** (10 minutes)

The Book of Jonah extends the story beyond Jonah himself to include the other people on the ship: the sailors.

> Ask a participant to read Text #3 aloud.

5 The sailors were afraid, and each man cried out to his god, and they cast the articles that were on the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. But Jonah descended to the hold of the ship, and he lay down, and fell asleep. 6 The captain approached him and said to him: What is it with you that you have fallen asleep? Arise, call to your God; perhaps God will reconsider with regard to us, and we will not perish. 7 Each man said to his counterpart: Let us cast lots, that we may discover due to whom this misfortune is upon us. They cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. 8 They said to him: Please tell us, due to whom is this misfortune upon us? What is your labor and from where do you come? What is your country and from what people are you? 9 He said to them: I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land. 10 The men feared with great fear, and they said to him: What is this that you have done, for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he told them. 11 They said to him: What shall we do to you, that the sea will calm from upon us, as the sea continually grew stormier. 12 He said to them: Lift me and cast me into the sea, and the sea will calm from upon you, as I know that it is due to me that this great storm is upon you. 13 The men rowed to return to dry land, but they could not, for the sea continually grew stormier upon them. 14 They called to the Lord and they said: Please Lord, please let us not perish for this man's life, and do not put upon us innocent blood, for You, Lord, have done as You desired. 15 They lifted Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 The men feared the Lord with great fear; and they slaughtered an offering to the Lord, and took vows.

Ask

1. Why did Jonah avoid telling the sailors and the captain that he was the reason for the storm? 2. What did the sailors try to do to calm the sea before throwing Jonah overboard? Why do you think they waited so long to do that?

In Text #4, we go back to the Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, to look at the way the sailors avoid throwing Jonah overboard, even though they are in danger.

Read Text #4 aloud.

They took him [Jonah] (and cast him into the sea) up to his knee-joints, and the sea-storm abated. They took him up again to themselves and the sea became agitated again against them. They cast him in (again) up to his neck, and the sea-storm abated. Once more they lifted him up in their midst and the sea was again agitated against them, until they cast him in entirely and forthwith the sea-storm abated, as it is said, “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.”

The sailors hesitate to hurt him, even though Jonah tells them that’s what they need to do to end the storm. Instead, they try dipping him up to his knees in the water. The storm stops, so they pull him back up, thinking it’s over for good. But the storm starts again the moment Jonah is lifted out. They try again, with the same result, until finally the sailors accept that the only way to stop the storm is really to throw him completely in.

**Ask:**

1. What effect does Jonah’s presence on the ship have on the lives of the sailors?
2. Do you think the sailors’ lives changed after they met Jonah? How and why?
3. Has your understanding of the Book of Jonah changed now that you’ve met the sailors? How and why?

Part Three: A Journey With the Fish (15 minutes)

You might think that this is where Jonah meets his end, but Jonah does not drown. Instead, he is swallowed by an enormous fish! Let’s return to the Book of Jonah to see what happens next, and to meet another character.

**Read Text #5 aloud.**


1 The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the innards of the fish for three days and three nights. 2 Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, from the innards of the fish...11 The Lord told the fish, and it spewed Jonah onto the dry land.

In Text #6, the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* suggests what the fish might have said or might have been doing when Jonah suddenly appeared. Let’s read this together in chavruta. Chavruta is partnered learning. Learning with a friend or two allows you to share ideas and insights with one another as you read and discuss texts together.

**Ask participants to read Text #6 and discuss the questions together in chavruta.**
According to the *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the fish is in danger of being eaten by an even bigger fish called the Leviathan. Since he is currently inside the smaller fish, Jonah doesn’t want that fish to be eaten, since he himself will get digested. So, he promises his fish to save them both from the hungry Leviathan. Jonah scares the Leviathan with a prophecy of being cooked and eaten at a feast. In exchange for being saved, the fish takes him on a tour of the deep sea.

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**Ask:**

1. What are the events the text is describing? What, if anything, surprises you?
2. We know the fish has a positive impact on Jonah, because he is saved from drowning underwater. What do you think was Jonah’s impact on the fish?

Thinking about the fish as a character with a speaking role in the Book of Jonah offers us another perspective and journey to explore. Jonah’s journey puts him on a path to intersect with this fish, who has a life and a history of its own. The fish and Jonah are on the same path for a time, and their days together change the course of the story.

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**Part Four: Does the Journey Really Change Anything?** (15 minutes)

When the fish spits Jonah up onto dry land, God instructs Jonah — again — to go to Nineveh, and Jonah finally does. When Jonah reaches Nineveh and gives his prophecy (Jonah 3), the people of Nineveh change their ways and God spares them from His destruction.

You might think Jonah’s story is finally over, now that his mission is complete. However, the Book of Jonah continues with a description of Jonah after he gives the prophecy to the people of Nineveh. Let’s look at a little of what Jonah says when God shows mercy to the people of Nineveh.

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**Ask a participant to read Text #7 aloud.**

1 Jonah was displeased with great displeasure and he was upset. 2 He prayed to the Lord, and said: Please, Lord, is this not what I had said while I was in my own land? Because of this I initially fled to Tarshish, as I knew that You are God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness, and reconsidering of harm. 3 Now, Lord, please take my life from me, as my death is better than my life. 4 The Lord said: Are you truly so upset?

Ask:

1. Does anything surprise you about Jonah’s reaction? Why?
2. Jonah delivers the prophecy, but did he have a choice to do so? Do you think he finally did as God asked because he truly saw the importance of God’s command, or is he just going through the motions?
3. If Jonah has changed his behaviour but has not changed his heart and mind, is that really a transformation? Has he really changed as a person?
4. Think of a time when you were in a situation like Jonah’s, where you had to do a certain thing but your heart wasn’t in it, or you went along even though you didn’t want to. How did that make you feel?

Conclusion (10 minutes)

Let us look at how the journeys of the various characters come together, and how we relate to them.

Activity: So...You’ve Met Jonah

A big part of Jonah’s journey takes place on the ship with all the sailors. As we’ve seen, their lives and their journeys are certainly affected by Jonah! Then, there is something fascinating about being swallowed and spat out by a fish that captures the imagination. What would it be like to meet Jonah and get caught up in his journey?

1. Imagine that you are the fish who swallows the prophet Jonah. While he’s in your stomach, you can hear each other and have a conversation.

OR

Imagine you are on the ship — the captain or one of the sailors — and Jonah comes aboard, bringing the biggest storm you’ve ever seen.

2. Using the comic-book page panel and your own creative ideas, draw your interpretation of what your character would do or say in the situation. What would you feel about meeting Jonah? What would you feel after he left? What would you do when this strange prophet appears in your life?

3. Use speech bubbles to write in dialogue, descriptions or narration. Don’t worry — you don’t have to draw like a comic-book artist!
On A Journey With Jonah (Middle School)

- Hand out the activity sheet and let students use their imaginations. When they are done, invite a few of the students to show their drawings or read through their scripts. Then, ask:

1. Do you think Jonah is the hero of this book? Do you think Jonah is the hero of his own story?
2. We’ve seen how, just by showing up in the lives of others, Jonah’s journey has a ripple effect on those who meet him. What are some ways that you and your journey can affect others around you?
**Part One: Jonah on the Run**


1 The word of the Lord was with Jonah son of Amitai, saying: 2 Rise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim against it, as their evildoing has arisen before Me. 3 Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from before the Lord, he went down to Jaffa, and found a ship bound for Tarshish; he paid its fare, and he went down into it, to come with them to Tarshish from before the Lord. 4 But the Lord cast a great wind upon the sea, and there was a great storm in the sea, and the ship was about to be wrecked.

**Text #2: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 10, “The History of Jonah”.** Translated by Gerald Friedlander.

On the fifth day Jonah fled before his God. Why did he flee? Because on the first occasion when God sent him to restore the border of Israel, his words were fulfilled, as it is said, "And he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath" (II Kings 14:25). On the second occasion God sent him to Jerusalem to (prophesy that He would) destroy it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did according to the abundance of His tender mercy and repented of the evil (decree), and He did not destroy it; thereupon they called him [Jonah] a lying prophet. On the third occasion God sent him against Nineveh to destroy it. Jonah argued with himself, saying, "I know that the nations are nigh [near] to repentance, now they will repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, will direct His anger against Israel. And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)?"

**Part Two: A Journey with the Sailors**

**Text #3: Jonah 1:5-16.** English translation from *The Steinsaltz Tanakh*, by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, Koren Publishers Jerusalem.

On the fifth day Jonah fled before his God. Why did he flee? Because on the first occasion when God sent him to restore the border of Israel, his words were fulfilled, as it is said, “And he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath” (II Kings 14:25). On the second occasion God sent him to Jerusalem to (prophesy that He would) destroy it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did according to the abundance of His tender mercy and repented of the evil (decree), and He did not destroy it; thereupon they called him [Jonah] a lying prophet. On the third occasion God sent him against Nineveh to destroy it. Jonah argued with himself, saying, “I know that the nations are nigh [near] to repentance, now they will repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, will direct His anger against Israel. And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)?"
5 The sailors were afraid, and each man cried out to his god, and they cast the articles that were on the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. But Jonah descended to the hold of the ship, and he lay down, and fell asleep. 6 The captain approached him and said to him: What is it with you that you have fallen asleep? Arise, call to your God; perhaps God will reconsider with regard to us, and we will not perish. 7 Each man said to his counterpart: Let us cast lots, that we may discover due to whom this misfortune is upon us. They cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. 8 They said to him: Please tell us, due to whom is this misfortune upon us? What is your labor and from where do you come? What is your country and from what people are you?

9 He said to them: I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land. 10 The men feared with great fear, and they said to him: What is this that you have done, for the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he told them. 11 They said to him: What shall we do to you, that the sea will calm from upon us, as the sea continually grew stormier. 12 He said to them: Lift me and cast me into the sea, and the sea will calm from upon you, as I know that it is due to me that this great storm is upon you.

13 The men rowed to return to dry land, but they could not, for the sea continually grew stormier upon them. 14 They called to the Lord and they said: Please Lord, please let us not perish for this man's life, and do not put upon us innocent blood, for You, Lord, have done as You desired. 15 They lifted Jonah and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 The men feared the Lord with great fear; and they slaughtered an offering to the Lord, and took vows.


They took him [Jonah] (and cast him into the sea) up to his knee-joints, and the sea-storm abated. They took him up again to themselves and the sea became agitated again against them. They cast him in (again) up to his neck, and the sea-storm abated. Once more they lifted him up in their midst and the sea was again agitated against them, until they cast him in entirely and forthwith the sea-storm abated, as it is said, “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.”

Part Three: A Journey With the Fish


1 The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the innards of the fish for three days and three nights. 2 Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God, from the innards of the fish...11 The Lord told the fish, and it spewed Jonah onto the dry land.

The fish said to Jonah, Dost thou not know that my day had arrived to be devoured in the midst of Leviathan’s mouth? Jonah replied, Take me beside it, and I will deliver thee and myself from its mouth. It brought him next to the Leviathan. (Jonah) said to the Leviathan, On thy account have I descended to see thy abode in the sea, for, moreover, in the future will I descend and put a rope in thy tongue, and I will bring thee up and prepare thee for the great feast of the righteous... (Jonah) said to it (i.e. the fish), Behold, I have saved thee from the mouth of Leviathan, show me what is in the sea and in the depths.

Part Four: Does the Journey Really Change Anything?


1 Jonah was displeased with great displeasure and he was upset. 2 He prayed to the Lord, and said: Please, Lord, is this not what I had said while I was in my own land? Because of this I initially fled to Tarshish, as I knew that You are God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness, and reconsidering of harm. 3 Now, Lord, please take my life from me, as my death is better than my life. 4 The Lord said: Are you truly so upset?
So...You’ve Met Jonah
Introduction (10 minutes)

Facilitator’s note: This unit asks students to trace the origins of their name, and asks about other names in their family. If your students are unaware of their family histories, ask them to take home Activity Sheet #1 “What’s My Name” a few days before the lesson, and ask their parents (or grandparents!) to help. Feel free to adapt, exclude or substitute any of the activity questions to suit your students’ interests or needs.

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

Today we’re going to trace the history of our names and find out what each name’s journey can tell us about ourselves. Then, we’ll look at how our names can take on different meanings depending on who is saying them. Let’s discover why names are important, read about how some special names in the Bible came to be, and see what Judaism says about looking at things from different perspectives.

According to Jewish tradition, names have a special meaning. They tell us about our past and contain hopes for the future. We are often named after family members, and also sometimes named after people in the Bible.

Where does your name come from? Let’s retrace the journey of our names.

Activity #1: What’s My Name?

Hand out Activity Sheet #1 for students to complete. When they have finished, ask a few students to share their answers.

Names can have an impact on us, and different names can change how we feel in the moment. Names can have meanings that change, depending on who says the name.

Ask:

1. Who calls you by your full name? How does that make you feel?
2. Do you act differently when people call you by different names? How?
3. Do you have different nicknames for your friends? What makes you switch between names?
4. Which of your names is your favorite? Why?
5. Do you think your name fits you? Why or why not?

Part One: Gaining a New Name (15 minutes)

Sometimes we gain names later in life, like nicknames or titles. Names we acquire reflect things and experiences that we show to the world about ourselves. They often come from actions we’ve taken or traits that identify us.

Let’s read together a piece of text from the Bible. In the Torah, the names of the characters tell us important things about who they are and why they’re important. This story about Jacob happens when he is about to cross a river on his way home. It’s late at night when suddenly a strange man appears and starts to fight him! This man turns out to be an angel sent to test Jacob, who finds that Jacob isn’t so easily defeated.
Jacob remained alone on the riverbank; and a mysterious, unnamed man wrestled with him until dawn. 25 He, the man, saw that he could not prevail against him, and therefore he touched, struck, Jacob and injured the joint of his thigh; and the joint of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Despite the great pain, Jacob remained standing and refused to be defeated. 26 He, the man, said: Release me, for the dawn has broken. Jacob felt that he was capable of subduing him, and he said: I will not release you unless you bless me. Jacob demanded submission, expressed in the form of a blessing. 27 He, the angel, said to him: What is your name? He said: Jacob. 28 He, the angel, said: No more shall Jacob be said to be your name; rather, you shall be called Israel; for you have striven [sarita] with God [elohim] and with men, and you have prevailed.

The angel, who is a representative from God, gives Jacob a new name. This new name is made of two Hebrew words. When the name “Israel” is said in Hebrew, the sounds of the Hebrew words for “strive” (wrestle) and “God” are tied together, in the same way that their meanings are tied together. Jacob’s actions — when he wrestled with God’s angel — are recorded in his new name, Israel.

Ask:

1. Can you think of anything else that can be recorded in a name? (Examples include: multiple family names hyphenated; “ben” or “bar” or “bat”, meaning “son of” or “daughter of”; or “Smith” means originally someone was a blacksmith)
2. Look back at your Activity Sheet and the history of your name. Are any of your names like the name Israel? How are they like that?
3. Look back at the history of your name. Did anyone in your family whose name you have go through a challenge or take a journey that caused them to change their name? (Examples include: family names that were changed during immigration; anglicization of names in other languages such as “Shmuel” being written as “Samuel”; additional or hyphenated surnames from marriage, etc…)
4. What are some of the words you would use to describe what Jacob does when he is challenged?

Every day we face challenges of all kinds and have experiences that we learn from. They have a lasting impact on us. Sometimes, something happens to us that is so big that it can even affect our name, which makes a record of that change that everyone can see.

The words we use to describe challenges are interesting words. We can “rise” to a challenge, “step up” to it, or “go through” it. Why do we use words that show movement when we talk about challenges? Challenges and experiences are like a journey: you go somewhere that is outside of your normal life. You go into a challenge or experience from one end, and come out the other side, and the things you learn or do during that journey become a part of who you are. You grow and change because of them, and that can look and feel like you have traveled or been on a journey.
Part Two: When Names are Promises  (15 minutes)

There are other people in the Bible who had their names changed by God. Their names have a different story. Let’s look at the Book of Genesis again, this time at Jacob’s grandparents: Abraham and Sarah.

Before they became grandparents — and before they even became parents! — Abraham and Sarah’s names were actually Abram and Sarai. What did that change mean?

Read Text #2 aloud.


1 Abram was ninety-nine years old, and the Lord appeared to Abram; He said to him: I am God Almighty. Walk before Me, serve Me, and be wholehearted, perfect. 2 I shall establish My covenant between Me and you. This covenant was established with Abram as a private individual, and also with each of his descendants personally. And I will multiply you exceedingly. 3 Abram fell upon his face, in awe, due to the prophecy, and as an expression of his complete submission to whatever God was about to tell him, as the promise would no doubt include an obligation as well. And God spoke with him, saying: 4 I, My covenant is hereby being established with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 This is a new status, and therefore your name shall no longer be called Abram, with its simple meaning of lofty [ram] father [av]. But rather, your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. As part of the covenant, the name given to him by his parents was exchanged for a name chosen by God.

God makes a promise to Abram: that his family will grow, and that family will become so big it will start whole nations of people. Abram is from the words av (father) and ram (lofty or great). God adds a hey “ha” to the middle of his name, changing it into Abraham, which means “father of all”.

Ask a participant to read Text #3 aloud.


15 God said to Abraham, referring to him by his new name, by which he was to be forever known from that moment forward: Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, as Sarah is her name. 16 I will bless her with various blessings, and I will also give you a son from her; I will bless her, and she too shall become nations. Kings of peoples shall be descended from her.
To find out more about Sarai’s name change, let’s see what Rabbi Steinsaltz has written. One of the leading scholars of this century, Rabbi Steinsaltz is best known for his commentaries on the Bible and Talmud, and for his work on Jewish mysticism.

**Ask a participant to read Text #4 aloud.**

**Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. Note on Genesis 17:15.**

Sarah is her name: The name Sarai can be interpreted as “my princess” or “my queen ruler.” The possessive form indicates a certain limitation. Just as her husband’s name was changed from that of a private individual to one that described him as the father of a multitude of nations, so too the name Sarai, meaning my princess or my queen, became Sarah, the princess or queen of all.

God also makes a promise to Sarai: that she will be the mother of a son, who will grow the family into nations of people. Her descendants will be kings of those nations, too. Her name, “Sarai” in Hebrew is “my princess” or “my queen”, meaning, to Abram she is his beloved wife. But as Sarai she is only a princess or a queen to him alone. When her name is changed to “Sarah”, that hey “ha” is the same as the hey “ha” in Abraham: it turns her name into “queen of all”.

For both Abraham and Sarah, the promises in their names are not in the past but in the future. Their names represent things that have not yet come to pass. Because the promise of becoming such an important family comes from God, they have the responsibility — they have to promise to God — to be worthy of that importance. They need to act like their names’ meanings. Their names represent the personal qualities that God wants them to have.

**Ask:**

1. What do you think it means to have a name that is a promise?
2. Look back at your name history. Are any of your names from Bible names?
3. Do you have any names that come from people in your family history?
4. Do you have any names that show where your family came from originally?

The history of our names is quite a journey to go on! Some of us have names that came from the Bible. Others of us have names that came from other countries and languages. Several of us have names that carry the memories of our ancestors. Family names can change when people immigrate or come to a new place and want to make their names sound like everyone else’s. When you change your name to fit in, that’s also a kind of promise to yourself. When your name is a promise, it’s like a journey that hasn’t started yet.

There are many ways to think about the names people call us or we call ourselves and how these may change when we look at things from a different perspective or when we change as we grow up.
Conclusion (15 minutes)

Let's read a quote from Pirkei Avot, which means “The Ethics of the Fathers”. It is a collection of teachings that have been passed down the generations of rabbis, starting with Moses. This one is from a rabbi named Ben Bag Bag.

**Text #5: Pirkei Avot 5:22.**

Ben Bag Bag says: Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it. Reflect on it and grow old and gray with it. Don’t turn from it, for nothing is better than it.

**Ask:**

1. What do you think is the “it” Rabbi Ben Bag Bag is talking about?
2. What do you think he means when he says, “turn it”?
3. Can you think of something you “turn” over again and again, and find something new to see each time?
4. How does your understanding of your name, and your own history, change when you look at your name from the different perspectives we used today?

The “it” Rabbi Ben Bag Bag is talking about is actually the Torah. The idea that we “turn it” is important in Judaism and connects with why we continually reread the Torah. We know we are never finished learning and we can always get new information.

There are many ways to understand ourselves and our personal journeys. Whether it’s through the names people call us or by looking at things from a different perspective, it’s important to think about our histories, and remember the ways we change and grow.

**Activity #2: My Memory Suitcase**

*Facilitator’s Note: This activity encourages participants to make creative representations of memories and experiences they carry. Depending on the comfort level and age range of your students, you can ask them about specific types of challenges, such as those they may experience at school or in your class, or if appropriate, ask about broader experiences in life, such as moving to a new city, or gaining a sibling, or even losing a family member. By drawing or making things to “pack” in a “suitcase” of experiences, students can see how their life experiences become part of who they are.*

**Supplies:**

- Pens, markers, color pencils for decorating
- Scissors (optional)
- Transparent tape or glue (optional)
- Color craft paper (optional)
- Stencils or printed outlines of geometric shapes and objects (optional)
- A copy of Activity Sheet #2 for each participant
Directions:
1. Give each participant a “suitcase” by printing Activity Sheet #2.
2. Using the craft paper and pens/pencils, ask participants to draw or cut out shapes that represent different memories or experiences that are important to them. For example, if a student has recently arrived from another school they might draw/cut out a backpack shape and write the name of their school on it.
3. “Pack” each suitcase by taping or gluing the cut out shapes onto the suitcase, OR draw/write directly on the suitcase.

Hand out Activity Sheet #2. At the conclusion of the activity, bring the group back together and ask:

1. What is the purpose of a suitcase?
2. What kinds of things would you wish to take? What would you like to leave behind?
3. Did you “pack” the memory of something that had a big effect on who you are today? What is it?

Our experiences shape us and become part of who we are. The challenges we face, the times we succeed, the moments when we learn something new — they all combine in a way that adds to our whole selves. It’s like we carry those experiences — or their memory — in a suitcase. We can open up the suitcase and take out individual memories to look at them again. Sometimes we forget them. Others we keep but don’t like to think about very often. Whatever we feel about our experiences, they come with us wherever we go, and they are unique to each of us.
Part One: Gaining a New Name


24 Jacob remained alone on the riverbank; and a mysterious, unnamed man wrestled with him until dawn. 25 He, the man, saw that he could not prevail against him, and therefore he touched, struck, Jacob and injured the joint of his thigh; and the joint of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Despite the great pain, Jacob remained standing and refused to be defeated. 26 He, the man, said: Release me, for the dawn has broken. Jacob felt that he was capable of subduing him, and he said: I will not release you unless you bless me. Jacob demanded submission, expressed in the form of a blessing. 27 He, the angel, said: What is your name? He said: Jacob. 28 He, the angel, said: No more shall Jacob be said to be your name; rather, you shall be called Israel; for you have striven [sarita] with God [elohim] and with men, and you have prevailed.

Part Two: When Names are Promises


1 Abram was ninety-nine years old, and the Lord appeared to Abram; He said to him: I am God Almighty. Walk before Me, serve Me, and be wholehearted, perfect. 2 I shall establish My covenant between Me and you. This covenant was established with Abram as a private individual, and also with each of his descendants personally. And I will multiply you exceedingly. 3 Abram fell upon his face, in awe, due to the prophecy, and as an expression of his complete submission to whatever God was about to tell him, as the promise would no doubt include an obligation as well. And God spoke with him, saying: 4 I, My covenant is hereby being established with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 This is a new status, and therefore your name shall no longer be called Abram, with its simple meaning of lofty [ram] father [av]. But rather, your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. As part of the covenant, the name given to him by his parents was exchanged for a name chosen by God.

וַיֹּאמֶר אלֵיהּ אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָהָם שָׂרָי אִשְׁתְּךָ לֹא-תִקְרָ֥א אֶת-שְּמָ֖הּ שָֽרָ֑י כִּ֥י שָֽרָ֖ה שְּמָֽהּ׃ ... מִמֶּ֛נָּה לְְךָ֖ בֵּ֑ן וּבֵֽרַכְְְתִּ֙יהָ֙ וְְהָֽיְְתָ֣ה לְְגוֹיִ֔ים מַלְְְכֵ֥י עַמִּ֖ים מִמֶּ֥נָּה יִֽהְְְיֽוּ׃

15 God said to Abraham, referring to him by his new name, by which he was to be forever known from that moment forward: Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, as Sarah is her name. 16 I will bless her with various blessings, and I will also give you a son from her; I will bless her, and she too shall become nations. Kings of peoples shall be descended from her.

Text #4: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. Note on Genesis 17:15.

Sarah is her name: The name Sarai can be interpreted as “my princess” or “my queen ruler.” The possessive form indicates a certain limitation. Just as her husband’s name was changed from that of a private individual to one that described him as the father of a multitude of nations, so too the name Sarai, meaning my princess or my queen, became Sarah, the princess or queen of all.

Conclusion

Text #5: Pirkei Avot 5:22.

ובנ בַּג בַּג אוֹמֵר, הֲפֹךְ בָּהּ וַהֲפֹךְ בָּהּ, דְּכֹלָּא בָּהּ. וּבָהּ תֶּחֱזֵי, וְסִיב וּבְלֵה בָּהּ, וּמִנַּהּ לֹא תָזוּעַ, שֶׁאֵין לְךָ מִדָּה טוֹבָה הֵימֶנָּה

Ben Bag Bag says: Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it. Reflect on it and grow old and gray with it. Don’t turn from it, for nothing is better than it.
Activity #1: What’s My Name?

My first name is ________________________________
That name means/I was named after ________________________________

My middle name is ________________________________
That name means/I was named after ________________________________

My family name is ________________________________
That name comes from ________________________________ (e.g. another language or country)

My Hebrew name is ________________________________ (Optional question)
That name means/I was named after ________________________________

Some nicknames that people call me are:
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________

Some names in my family that come from different places or languages:
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________

My favorite name to be called is: ________________________________, because ________________________________
Activity #2: My Memory Suitcase
Teaching it to our children means also making them partners in what is so very important.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz
PJ Library Book List

For more resources and activities for these books, visit www.PJLibrary.org

Family Journeys
Books about moving to a new place, immigration, and families.

*My Grandfather's Coat* (ages 5-6)
Grandfather made himself a coat when he came to America - and now it's wearing out. As changes are made to this beloved garment, the reader witnesses a family's journey through life.

*First Rain* (ages 5-6)
When Abby moves with her family to Israel, she misses her grandmother and remembers the fun they had with each other. Writing to each other helps, but it doesn't take the place of spending time together.

Personal Journeys
Books about courage, spiritual journeys, and embracing the unexpected.

*The Sabbath Lion* (ages 7-8)
In this Algerian folktale, Yosef is determined to keep the Sabbath — even though he is in the middle of a dangerous desert journey. But he knows he'll be all right because he is getting help from a powerful friend.

*Noah's Bed* (ages 3-4)
It's storming outside, and Noah's ark is rocking from side to side. How is young Eber ever going to fall asleep? Pretty soon he ends up in bed with grandpa Noah...and a few other guests.

*The Mitten String* (ages 6-7)
Ruthie loves to knit — and to help people. When her family gives shelter to a deaf woman and her baby, Ruthie realizes there's a way for her to do both at once!

Travel to Israel
Books about going to Israel, learning Hebrew phrases, and experiencing new things.

*Sammy Spider's First Trip to Israel* (ages 3-5)
As a stowaway on a little boy's model airplane, Sammy Spider joins the family's sightseeing trip in Israel and uses his five senses to experience the country.

*Ella's Trip to Israel* (ages 2-3)
A little girl named Ella travels through Israel with her parents, enjoying many sights. With her is her best friend, her stuffed monkey, Koofi, whose misadventures are never a problem.
Read the PJ Library Book

My Grandfather’s Coat
RE TOLD BY J IM AY ELSWO T H
ILLUSTRATED BY BARBARA M C CLINT OCK
PUBLISHED BY SCHOLASTIC PRESS

On one foot
The story in this book is told equally through its words and its illustrations. It is not only about a man’s immigration to America, but also his inexhaustible work ethic and attention to repurposing goods.

Highlighted Jewish values

Tradition: from generation to generation — L’dor va-dor — ל ’ז ’ א ר ה ו ד ר
Preventing waste — Bal tash-chit — ב ’ל ק ש ח

Connection to journeys (theme)
This story is about two journeys – the life of a garment and a man’s journey through life.

Optional preparation for reading the story:
Find an old or torn garment, such as a coat, to bring into the classroom. (Thrift shops are a good source for this.)

Before You Read

Jewish Values and Background Information

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION - L’DOR VADOR
Three aspects of this value to consider
- We learn values from previous generations
- Traditions are passed via objects, stories, and rituals
- Each of us is part of the chain of tradition, contributing to the future of the Jewish people
The concept of passing tradition “l’dor vador,” from generation to generation, is so fundamental to Judaism that its words are recited as a core part of our liturgy. This central prayer, the Kedusha (from the Hebrew word kadosh, meaning holy), is said three times a day and signifies the endurance of faith and the continuity of the Jewish people. We gain strength and knowledge from the generations before us, and we commit to passing on the tradition after us. Each generation is like a link in a chain, making its own unique contributions to the collected lore of Jewish culture. This is often physically represented at a bar or bat mitzvah service, as a grandparent takes a Torah scroll from its sacred cabinet and passes it to the child’s parent who then passes it to the child. What role do each of us, teacher and student, play in this chain of transmission?

PREVENTING WASTE — BAL TASHCHIT
Three aspects of this value to consider

- Preserve our resources by repurposing what we have
- Train yourself to think differently about used objects or objects that need repair
- New is not always better

The Jewish concept of not destroying the earth has its origins in the first chapters of the Torah, when God creates humans to fill the earth and govern all of its creatures (Genesis 1:28). An ancient commentary on the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes puts it eloquently: “Consider that [the world was created for humankind], and do not corrupt or desolate my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you” (Kohellet Rabbah 7:13). The sages teach that responsibility for the earth includes everything from preventing food waste to stopping misuse of property and vandalism. We naturally teach children not to harm others’ property, but how do we teach children not to be wasteful in today’s increasingly “disposable” culture?

When You Read

Introducing the story and engaging the children

SET THE STAGE WITH QUESTIONS

1. The boy on the cover is coming to new country. How he is arriving? Why? (Hint: this journey was a long time ago.)
2. There are threads and buttons around the border. This has to do with the boy’s job when he gets older. What do you think that is?
3. During this book the boy grows up; we see him become an old man. How do you think he will change?

CHOOSE A STORYTELLING TECHNIQUE (OPTIONAL)

1. Bring in an old garment and ask the children what they would do with it. Wonder aloud if the main character will use any of their suggestions.
2. In this book the grandfather repeats several movements each time he tailors his garment. Solicit movements from the students to enact at the appropriate times in the story.
Making connections and making it personal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITION</th>
<th>DO NOT WASTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSS</td>
<td>DISCUSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Why was the coat important to the grandfather?</td>
<td>1. Why did the grandfather keep making things from his coat instead of throwing it away?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The grandfather makes a toy from his beloved coat. Do you have anything that was special to your grandparents?</td>
<td>2. What were the many ways in which the coat became useful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The family in this book observes both personal family traditions and Jewish traditions. What Jewish traditions can you find in the book?</td>
<td>3. What’s the difference between donating and throwing away? Where does garbage go? (What journey does it go on?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACTIVITIES

Which one is missing? Gather 10 to 12 ritual objects and display them on a tray. (You can also use photos. See family engagement activity below.) Ask the children to identify them. Direct the children to look at the items for 10 seconds, and then cover the items with a cloth. Secretly remove one of the items. Can the students identify the missing object?

T-shirt quilt: Have students bring in a T-shirt that is outgrown or worn out. Allow students to share the importance of the shirt. Make a quilt of these shirts by sewing, tying, or clipping the pieces together. See Image from Rachel Hobson blog: makezine.com/craft/t-shirt_memory_scarf/

Passing along tradition: Bring one or more Ping-Pong balls to class. Imagine with your students that the balls are really miniature storage units for their most important traditions. What traditions and values would they store inside? Play relay races and pass the “traditions” on spoons or by hand.

Where did it come from? We understand why a Torah is valuable, but what about common objects? Where did your clothing come from? Map a garment’s journey. How did it get there, how many miles, how many workers?

What can you do with this? Divide students into small groups. Give each group a common object such as a swimming noodle, a large scarf, or a small box. How many alternate uses for the object can each team devise?

Book ambulance/hospital: Books are often sacred in Jewish tradition, and at the very least are objects deserving of respect. Perhaps your school can sponsor a visit from a scribe to explain how to repair a Torah. You might also consider creating a space for repair of textbooks and storybooks.

Repair/conserve bingo: Brainstorm things that might need repair or conservation at your school, such as dripping faucets and torn carpet. Create a bingo game or scavenger hunt, and send your students on a journey to find these objects.
### Engaging Families — Tradition

- Turn your classroom into a live or virtual museum. Ask families to lend an object (or its photo) for a ritual object display. Invite families to write a card explaining the object’s importance. Host an opening day reception for your families. Serve hors d’oeuvres and peruse the display.

### Engaging Families — Do Not Waste

- Arrange for a family swap meet. One family’s trash might be another family’s treasure.
- Do you have a “bag of bags” at home? Ask your students to count how many bags are hidden away at home, and challenge families to reuse or repurpose those bags.
- Repair fair. Invite families to help you with bringing and repairing items at a family day. Items might include books, bicycles, lamps, and teddy bears.
**Travel to Israel:** Books that introduce children to the wonders of Israel, and to the joy of travelling.

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**Book-Based Family Program**

**Ella’s Trip to Israel**

**BY VIVIAN NEWMAN**

**ILLUSTRATED BY AKEMI GUTIERREZ**

**PUBLISHED BY KAR-BEN PUBLISHING**

**Synopsis**

A little girl named Ella travels through Israel with her parents, enjoying many sights. With her is her best friend, her stuffed monkey, Koofi, whose fur always seems to collect something from each place they go. His many spots and stains will help them recall every moment of their memorable trip to Israel.

**Goals**

- Strengthen families’ feelings of connection and attachment to Israel
- Introduce the land, people, and culture of Israel
- Connect children with the excitement and joy of travel
- Learn about making memories of our trip

**Discuss the Jewish values and vocabulary with one another**

**Love of Israel — A-ha-vat Yis-ra-el**

**Hebrew — Iv-rit**

**Love of Israel/Ahavat Yisrael**

Israel today is a land of beautiful landscapes, with ancient and holy sites visible among ultra-modern, high-tech buildings. The people of Israel are made up of diverse cultures, each with its own customs, foods, and styles. For millennia many Jews around the world have yearned for the opportunity to visit Israel. Ahavat Yisrael, the love of Israel, is highlighted in Jewish prayers and celebrations – even the last words of a Passover Seder are, “Next Year in Jerusalem.”
Hebrew/Ivrit

Hebrew is the language of the Jewish people, the Israelites and their ancestors. It has a distinctive alphabet, which is written and read from right to left. About 2,000 years ago, Hebrew ceased to be an everyday spoken language and survived only as a holy language (Lashon Kodesh) of Jewish liturgy and rabbinic literature. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Russian Zionist and linguist, revived the Hebrew language in the 19th century.

For the teacher

1. Where in the world is Israel, and how far away is it from you?
2. Why are Jews connected to Israel?
3. Words like “Shalom” are good starting points for young children to begin hearing Hebrew. How do you explain a word that can mean “hello”, “goodbye” and “peace” all at once?

Questions for children

1. Do you know what Israel is? Do you know where it is?
2. Have you ever been to Israel? Did you enjoy it/Would you like to go?
3. Has anyone in your family, or any of your friends been there?
4. Do you know any words in Hebrew?
5. Do you know what “Shalom” means?

Plan in advance

Prepare “Passports” for an imaginary trip to Israel

MATERIALS

- Printed copies of the Passport template, included in this guide
- Stickers, or stamps and inkpads, to “stamp” the passports
- Markers, pencils or pens

PREPARATION DIRECTIONS

1. Fold each sheet into quarters, with the printed side outward, to create a little book.
2. Make a few extra passports, just in case.

Prepare Travel Scrapbooks

MATERIALS

- Printed copies of the Scrapbook Template, included in this guide
- Stapler and staples
- Tape and glue
- Markers, pencils or pens, and stickers or other decorative stationery
PREPARATION DIRECTIONS

1. Each scrapbook will need 2 or 3 sheets of the template. Print twice or three times as many pages as you have anticipated participants.
2. Fold each template page along the dotted line, forming a pocket. Make a hard crease, and leave folded.
3. Fold the pages in half, with the folded edge on the inside, and make a hard crease. Unfold the middle.
4. Stack 2 or 3 scrapbook pages, with the pockets all facing the same direction.
5. Using a stapler, staple a few times down the middle crease, to create a booklet.
6. Using tape or glue, seal the end edges of the pockets.
7. Using tape, cover the sharp ends of the staples wherever they are exposed.

Invite participants to bring a “Koofi”

When inviting participants to join the activities, ask them to bring their child’s favorite stuffed animal (or other favorite companion toy). In the story of Ella’s Trip to Israel, she brings her stuffed monkey, whose name is Koofi, with her. Children can explore the day’s activities with their favorite stuffed friend, too.

Introduce with an activity

Prepare a passport to go on a trip to Israel

DIRECTIONS

1. Give each family a passport template.
2. Fold the passport template into quarters to create a booklet.
3. Using the markers and pens, decorate the front of the passport.
4. Open the passport and draw a “photo” of yourself in the picture area.
5. Fill out the information (ask a grownup for help if you need it).
6. Using stamps or stickers, “stamp” the passport to start the trip.

Introduce the Story

READ THE INTRODUCTION FOR “ELLA’S TRIP TO ISRAEL”

Ella’s Trip to Israel is about a girl named Ella who travels with her parents and her favorite stuffed animal to Israel. Her stuffed animal is named Koofi. Do you know what kind of animal Koofi is? (Tip: use a prop such as a stuffed monkey, or point out Koofi on the book cover). That’s right, he is a monkey. Israel, the country to which Ella and Koofi are travelling, is very far away. How do you think they’ll get to Israel? (Hold up airplane). That’s right; they’ll fly on an airplane. Israel is a place where many Jewish people live. In Israel, they speak a language called Hebrew. Do you know any words in Hebrew? Koofi’s name is actually a Hebrew name. It comes from the Hebrew name for monkey, Kof. As we read the book, we’ll learn several new Hebrew words. Ella and her parents learn a special phrase in Hebrew: “En Baaya! No problem!” They say this phrase each time Koofi gets dirty and needs to be cleaned. Can you say “En Baaya”? Excellent! Can you help me say “En Baaya” whenever something drippy or sticky lands on Koofi? Let’s see what he gets up to…
Read the story

Encourage Participation

1. Encourage children to repeat the Hebrew phrases they hear.
2. Help children notice different types of landscapes, buildings or activities that are unique to Israel.
3. Help children notice landscapes, buildings or activities that are similar between Israel and your location.

Discussion

MAKE SMALLER GROUPS OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS FOR A SHORT DISCUSSION. ASK QUESTIONS LIKE:

1. If you travel to Israel, what would you most like to see there?
2. What was your favorite part of the book?
3. What did you see that looked familiar?
4. What did you see that looked totally different from home?

Follow Up activities and resources

Make a scrapbook

INTRO
Let’s make a special book that you can take with you on your next trip, to help you remember your adventures! We call it a “scrapbook” – has anyone heard that word before? It means you collect small “scraps” or pieces of paper like ticket stubs, photographs or things that you find, and put them in a book to keep them together.

DIRECTIONS

1. Give each family a scrapbook.
2. Using the pens, crayons or pencils, and stickers or stamps, decorate the cover and inside pockets.
3. Put the very first scrapbook item in (passport activity).

Resources for parents, teachers, families


Introduce Hebrew songs into your activity day, with HebrewSongs.com.
I live in ________________________________

I am going to visit ____ISRAEL____ today

I have ______________________ eye color

I have ______________________ hair color

I am travelling with _________________

OFFICIAL STAMP:

This is my picture.

My name is ________________________________
Fold up this way →
This is the pocket

Crease along the middle →
Stack a few sheets
Stack along the crease

Tape or glue the edges
to seal the pocket ↓
Supplemental Discussion: Genealogy and Family Histories

Genealogy is a path that we can trace. In doing so, we learn about ourselves and contemplate the future. Here are some suggested questions to help you facilitate a conversation about family histories and genealogy.

Tracing Origins Through Names:

1. What was the name of the oldest ancestor your family remembers? What do you know about him or her? What do you think about the idea that a person lives as long as people remember his or her name?
2. What are some of the origins of your names — are they biblical? Cultural? Geographical? How does your surname reflect your family’s journey through places and times?
3. Did any of your ancestors change their names? How and why?

Geographical Journeys:

1. Jewish genealogists say that after surnames, the second most important piece of information for doing Jewish genealogical research are the names of the towns from where your family came. Do you know the names of the towns in your family history? What did you hear about them? Have you ever travelled to them?
2. Many of our immigrant ancestors (grandparents, great grandparents), when asked about their family history, often told us that they “didn’t want to talk about it.” Also children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors often get the same response. Why don’t they want to talk about their past? What do you think of that choice?
3. How did major events in modern Jewish history affect the migrations of your ancestors?

Family Trees:

1. Our names can serve as a way of preserving the memory and history of those who came before us. Do you have any names that are from your family tree?
2. Do you have a Hebrew name? What is it? Do you like it? Does it feel like your name? Why or why not?
3. Oral historians advise that when you are interviewing a person for family history, the questions you ask should not be “yes or no” questions. The questions should prompt a story or a lot of information. What are some good questions to ask an older relative?