Introduction (2 minutes)

Welcome to the Global Day of Jewish Learning!

We all know the story of Moses, who said to Pharaoh: “Let my people go!” He’s famous for being a great leader who could speak directly to God and for giving us the Ten Commandments.

It might surprise you to find out that Moses wasn’t confident about speaking to people, and sometimes he used actions where he should have used words.

What can we learn from Moses about how we express ourselves and how we act with other people?

Part One: Speaking to People Can Be Hard (25 minutes)

God appears to Moses in the Burning Bush to tell Moses that he’s been chosen to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. In order to do so, Moses is told to gather his people together and tell them about the plan. God commands Moses to speak to the leaders of the Jewish people, and to speak to Pharaoh on his people’s behalf.

God is asking Moses to give a speech to the leaders of the Children of Israel. Moses must then tell Pharaoh to let them leave Egypt, in order to free his people from slavery. In this important moment, how does Moses react to the news that he’s going to be the leader and have to give a speech?

➢ Ask three participants to read Text #1 as a dialogue between God and Moses, and a narrator.


10 Moses said to the Lord: Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words. I have never been able to express myself eloquently, neither yesterday nor the day before, nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am unfit for this mission, as I am cumbrous of speech and cumbrous of tongue.

11 The Lord said to him: Who gives a mouth to a person? Or who renders one mute or deaf, or sighted or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now, go, and I will be with your mouth and I will instruct you that which you shall say.

13 Despite all the assurances of God, Moses did not want to accept his task: He said: Please, my Lord, please send by means of anyone else whom You will send.
Moses is worried about speaking to the gathered people and speaking to Pharaoh because he thinks he isn’t a “man of words”. Moses tells God that he’s not the right person for the task of speaking to others, or on behalf of his entire people. He says that words are difficult for him to use.

The Hebrew phrase he uses is “kvad pe’h” which literally translates to “tongue-heavy”, or “cumbrous of tongue”. The word “cumbrous”, which is related to the word “cumbersome”, means awkwardly shaped, clunky, difficult to carry, or hard to manage. It could be because Moses actually had a physical difficulty with speaking, and wasn’t able to get the words out. Maybe he only spoke Egyptian, since he was raised in Pharaoh’s palace, and couldn’t speak to the Children of Israel because they spoke Hebrew. Maybe he was just afraid that people wouldn’t believe what he said.

Whatever the reason, God is asking him to help the Jewish people but Moses tries as hard as he can to get out of it. Moses argues that he is too uncomfortable with speaking out loud to others.

Not everyone is comfortable with speaking in front of others. Moses would much rather skip right to the action. Moses is so uncomfortable with words that he’d rather argue with God, to His face!

Let’s ask 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.

With your partner, read the text from the Bible again (Text #2a) then compare it to the commentary in Text #2b. The author of the commentary is Isaac Abarbanel, a 15th century diplomat and scholar from Spain who wrote commentaries on the Five Books of Moses.

Read Text #2a and #2b in chavruta.


11 The Lord said to him: Who gives a mouth to a person? Or who renders one mute or deaf, or sighted or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?

...“Who gives man the powers of speech” is God’s way of saying that the loss of abilities of speech isn’t a purely natural occurrence, but rather happened under God’s supervision... 

Ask:

1. What do you think God is saying when he asks Moses, “Who gives a mouth to a person?”
2. Why do you think God didn’t just turn Moses into a better speaker?

Bring the group back together and ask a few chavruta pairs to share their answers.

Moses may be afraid of what others will think of him if he messes up his speech, or if he sounds weird, or if they don’t believe what he says. We can all understand why Moses might be worried about being judged by others.

What would you say to Moses, to encourage him? Let’s write a message to Moses.

ACTIVITY #1: WRITE A MESSAGE TO MOSES

You will need:

- Paper for folding and decorating as a greeting card
- Pens, markers, crayons, pencils, other decorating materials, etc.
- A whiteboard and markers for brainstorming
- (Optional) Pre-fold the paper into greeting card sizes, print card templates, or use blank greeting cards

Steps:

1. As a group, brainstorm a few encouraging phrases that would be nice on a card.
2. Write the phrases or words on the board, and let the participants pick their favorites to write on the greeting cards.
3. Address the cards to Moses, encouraging him not to be afraid to speak up, or not to be embarrassed.
4. Bring the group back together and ask them to share some of their messages of encouragement.

Part Two: Listening Carefully (20 minutes)

Eventually, Moses does what God commands and the Book of Exodus continues with Moses leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses can perform miracles with his staff, and he uses it to part the Red Sea, taking his people into the desert on the way to the Promised Land. As the leader, Moses is in charge of everyone’s safety, even when things get difficult. How is a leader supposed to address the concerns of his people? How does Moses manage?

Let’s keep this in mind as we read Text #3. After 40 years of wandering in the desert, God tells Moses to speak to a rock to bring out water.
The people quarreled with Moses, and they said: If only we had perished in the perishing of our brethren before the Lord. 4 Why did you bring the assembly of the Lord to this wilderness, that we and our animals should die there? 5 Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to bring us to this wretched place? It is not a place of seed, or figs, or vines, or pomegranates. Now, we are neither in Egypt nor in Canaan, and there is no water to drink. 6 Moses and Aaron came from before the assembly, and were forced by the angry crowd to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they fell upon their faces in prayer, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. 7 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 8 Take the staff with which you performed all the miracles and wonders, and assemble the congregation, you, and Aaron our brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, and it, the rock, will provide its water. You will thereby extract water for them from the rock and you shall give drink to the congregation and their animals. 9 Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as He had commanded him. 10 Moses and Aaron assembled the assembly before the rock, and said to them: Hear now, defiant ones: From this rock will we bring out water for you. 11 Moses raised his hand, and he struck the rock with his staff twice; a great deal of water came out, and the congregation and their animals drank. 12 Although the rock miraculously provided water, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: Because you did not cause the people to have faith in Me, to sanctify Me before the eyes of the children of Israel; therefore, you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.

Ask:

1. How would you describe the way the people speak to Moses? What are they asking for?
2. How would you describe the way Moses speaks to the people? What is Moses worried that the people will do? How do the people respond to his words?
3. What did God tell Moses to do? What did Moses actually do? How are those different?
4. Moses performed a miracle and brought water out of a rock, which calmed the people down. But in the end of the story, God isn’t pleased with Moses. Why do you think that is?
5. Have you ever been frustrated with other people? What do you do in those situations?
6. What is the difference between using words and using force to get your point across?

Moses is told specifically to speak to the rock, but he hits it instead. Moses was too frustrated to listen to and follow the instructions God had given him. The consequence is that Moses will not get to see the Promised Land, even though he was the leader who brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses doesn’t get to enter the Promised Land because he didn’t do what God had instructed him to do.
There are times when we feel frustrated by a situation, and get a strong urge to do something quickly in the moment. It's important to think clearly and figure out the right thing to say or do, before going ahead. Maybe a situation calls for words instead of actions. Or maybe we need to be careful about the words we choose to say in a tough situation.

**Conclusion (13 minutes)**

**ACTIVITY #2: REMINDER ROCKS**

**Supplies:**
- Rocks, flat stones, or classroom clay flattened into rock shapes, one for each participant
- Paint or paint pens, and other decorating supplies

**Steps:**
1. Look back at the whiteboard where you brainstormed encouraging phrases for Moses.
2. Write your favorite of those words on the rock, and decorate it.

When your rock is dry you can take it home or bring it to school. When you’re frustrated, just remember this rock. Like Moses, you might want to hit the rock in frustration. Instead, try talking to it first. Maybe you’ll find the right words to say, or you’ll feel calmer, or you’ll get some confidence.

**Ask:**

1. Of all the things we learned about words today, which one do you think applies most to your own behavior?
2. Think about how you communicate with your words and your actions. Is one more effective than the other? Why?
Part One: Speaking to People Can Be Hard


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וַיֹּ֨אמֶר ה' אֵלָ֗יו מִ֣י שָׂ֣ם פֶּ֔ה לָֽאָדָם֒ א֚וֹ מִֽי־יָשׂ֣וּם אִלֵ֔ם א֣וֹ חֵרֵ֔שׁ א֥וֹ פִקֵּ֖חַ א֣וֹ עִוֵּ֑ר הֲלֹ֥א אָנֹכִ֖י ה'׃

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...מי שאמר אלי כי האaims והעברת הדבור בו לא היה הדבר הפשוט... יאמרתי אלי כי לא היה הדבר הפשוט... "Who gives man the powers of speech" is God’s way of saying that the loss of abilities of speech isn’t a purely natural occurrence, but rather happened under God’s supervision...
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