

Unit 3: *Gevurah* (5.3)

גבורה

General Introduction

Why *Gevurah*?

Gevurah is sometimes translated as "strength" and sometimes as "power." Doing real *teshuvah* or acting as a *tzelem Elohim* (image of God), often come at a cost - in social capital or reputation or in putting yourself at risk.

Gevurah is both inner and outer strength, going beyond physical strength and mythical super-heroes. *Gevurah* includes spiritual courage and the willingness to take risks and incur costs for the right causes. *Gevurah* also incorporates the idea that we all can be heroic in our everyday lives by living an exemplary life and doing what is right and just. For life-cycle appropriate development, our goal is to encourage students to apply *gevurah* to issues of withstanding peer pressure, sticking their neck out for others, and taking a leadership role in their group when the opportunity or need to "step up" comes along.

In the important book "[Mind in the Making](#)," (Harper Collins, 2010) (5.3.1 *Gevurah* Introduction Resources) Ellen Galinsky discusses seven essential life skills that are important components of a child's education/training at home and in school. She observes that 21st century life is becoming more stressful for adults and children. The media is relentless in portraying natural and human-caused disasters around the world. It is increasingly difficult to be optimistic and hopeful, two virtues that have contributed to Jewish survival and creativity/innovation over the millennia. Psychologists and counselors are talking more about managing stress and building resilience in students and families.

Galinsky believes "that the real essential skill is "taking on challenges," being proactive rather than reactive when difficulties arise. She then describes 13 strategies to encourage youth and adults to take on challenges. Training our learners to make use of the Jewish stories, rituals, and mitzvot that give us the "muscle memory" for responding to life with *gevurah* (personal strength) or *ometz lev* (courage of heart) is a critical component to a healthy and meaningful Jewish education.

For holiday enrichment, the *Gevurah* unit coincides with the *Hanukkah* season. This gives us the opportunity to revisit the Maccabees both as leaders of an armed revolt *and* as models for spiritual resistance and defenders of religious freedom (both to be revisited around the Holocaust Remembrance Day season in Spring).

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Developmental Lens: Peer Relationships

Ten year olds are in a calm oasis between the anxious nine year old and the pre-adolescent elevens. Adults who relate to them still have great leverage, and they appreciate rules and logic. They are willing to reach out to others, cross gender lines without tension, and they are ready for clubs, sports teams, and whole-class activities. They are both competitive and cooperative; they are quick to anger but also willing to forgive quickly; and while they can listen well, they also enjoy talking and explaining - all traits that can create flashpoints within the peer groups. Because they are open to problem solving and mediation skills, this age presents an important window of opportunity to train toward a life of *gevurah*.

Gevurah for ten year olds means having the courage to stand up for what you believe in even at personal risk in peer situations. Their abilities to appreciate scientific principals and rules that govern meetings and social groups make them receptive to learning checklists that govern good decision-making and situational ethics. [Adapted from Yardsticks, Child Development Pamphlets by Chip Wood, published by Northeast Foundation for Children, www.responsiveclassroom.org] (5.3.1 *Gevurah* Introduction Resources)

Popular culture in the United States offers a model of *gevurah* that emphasizes physical strength and the resulting popularity for being a hero. Real courage and heroics are not as compelling as the myth, since it involves standing out from the crowd, taking a stand that may go against the group, and taking personal risks to your standing in the group. The one current illustration that may work for students is the new re-telling of the Spiderman mythology, where we hear the hero repeat [“With great strength comes great responsibility,”](#) (5.3.1 *Gevurah* Introduction Resources) and he takes social risks to battle for justice.

Another definition of a hero is given in Spiderman 2. Throughout the movie, Peter Parker is torn between the desire for his own happiness with Mary Jane and his responsibility to society as a hero. Experience has proven that he cannot have both. He quits, but [his aunt gives a speech that persuades him to resume life as Spiderman:](#) (5.3.1 *Gevurah* Introduction Resources) *...kids like Henry need a hero. Courageous, self-sacrificing people, setting examples for all of us. Everyone loves a hero. People line up for them, cheer them, scream their names, and stand in the rain for hours just to get a glimpse of the one who taught them to hold on one second longer. I believe that there is a hero in all of us that keeps us honest, gives us strength, makes us noble, and finally gives us the ability to die with pride. Although it is hard to give up the things we want the most. The things we love.*

The point we want to make with the students and their parents is that there is both inner and outer strength and that this courage/strength is not shown just at a point of conflict, but is an incremental behavior that gets reinforced every time we need to make a decision. Judaism as a system that encourages value-based behavior and uses rituals and blessings to highlight important moments can be a great framework where humans can practice being strong of mind, heart and body.

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Developmental Lens: Peer Relationships

Overview

This unit marks the third month that these students and families are learning together. An overarching goal for the year is to nurture a sense of community in the classroom or in any learning environment. This includes the recognition that it is safe to voice opinions, disagree respectfully, and stand up to people on principle. As you assess how you are doing on the specific *know/feel/do goals* for this unit, you must also evaluate the health of your classroom community including parental engagement and support. You may construct an online survey, conduct "check-in" interviews, or observe the students as they work in groups or as individuals.

Enduring Understandings

- In situations where you are being pressured to behave in ways you believe to be wrong, it takes courage to stand up for what you believe to be right.
- It is important to stand up for your beliefs in the right way.
- Being a good friend requires courage and selflessness.
- Showing bravery and courage doesn't mean you are not afraid, rather it means that you do it anyway.

Essential Questions

How can my social choices demonstrate courage?

Unit Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will:

- **Know:** The Jewish virtue of *gevurah* is an attribute of character, not necessarily tied to a measure of physical strength.
- **Feel:** Students will feel empowered to make decisions that may go against the decisions of the group but are based on personally held values and beliefs.
- **Do:** Students will practice respectfully confronting an individual whose behavior is causing discomfort or distress to others. They will experience the art of dignified and constructive debate.

Unit Vocabulary

Hebrew	Transliteration	Translation
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גבורה	<i>gevurah</i>	Personal strength, courage of the heart and body
סופגניה	<i>sufganiyot</i>	Jelly donut
פשרה	<i>peshara</i>	compromise
מחלוקת	<i>machloket</i>	argument
חלק	<i>chelek</i>	Part, piece of (truth)

Kickoff Questions

Students should take the unit Kickoff Questions survey online or in class.

Week 1: *Gevurah* (5.3.1)

***Havurah* or Online Class**

To understand the significant difference between the popular notion of heroic strength and the Jewish strength of being courageous, and how that understanding can alter our view of historical figures, including the Maccabees.

Teachers: The links to the resources in ShalomLearning will work from this document when you are concurrently logged in. Otherwise, the name of the resource is given.

Suggested Settings

For a *havurah* session, choose a venue where you can host a Hanukkah party (if seasons work out) and where you can have a Maccabiah competition. Create a Hanukkah party with latkes and *sufganiyot*, jelly doughnuts, dreidel playing and with competitive/[cooperative games](#) (5.3.1 Cooperative Games) that include *both* physical and cognitive challenges (puzzles, riddles). Frame the activity by linking these competitions (traditionally called Maccabiah games, Jewish and Israeli Olympics) to the physical and spiritual courage of the Maccabees.

For an online class, start off the class with the G-dcast Movie and Discussion module, as seen below.

Learning Goals

- Students will become more aware of how peer pressure affects their choices.
- Students will restate the Hanukkah story using the lens of spiritual courage (rather than simply the heroic use of force).
- Students will bring examples of what “courage of spirit” means, especially within a group.

Activities and Guiding Questions

Peer Pressure Definition and Skits

Time Allotment: 20 minutes

Class: *Havurah* and Online

1. Ask students to define the term “peer pressure.”

Peer pressure is social pressure by members of one’s peer group to take a certain action, adopt certain values, or otherwise conform in order to be accepted. (Source: dictionary.com).

Peer pressure can also be thought of as a way we are influenced by others. Bear in mind, being pressured to do something is different than to be encouraged and influenced positively to do something.

Take something seemingly positive - getting good grades, winning sports team, giving *tzedakah*. When there is peer pressure to do these things, when people feel they must succeed 'at all costs,' it can create an environment of anxiety and stress and perhaps one can go beyond their abilities and hurt themselves just to fit in or meet perceived expectations.

2. Ask students to share examples or act out when they have felt "peer pressure"
 - a. Students should first share an example when they felt peer pressure for a good cause, e.g. giving *tzedakah* like the rest of the class, studying for a test because their friend did so.
 - b. Students should then share an example when they felt peer pressure in a negative way, e.g. to give a substitute teacher a hard time because the rest of the class was doing so, or to gossip in order to participate in lunchtime conversation or an extreme version of studying for a test / getting good grades.
 - c. Hot Seat: Ask for a volunteer who shared an example to take the hot seat and get questioned by the group about his or her behavior and motivation.
 1. The volunteer should "stay in character" and if this class is in person, have the volunteer sit on a chair in front of the group while the other members of the group sit in a semi-circle around him or her.
 2. The rest of the group should question the character about s/he felt when subject to peer pressure and how s/he decided what to do.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you confront a lot of peer pressure in your daily life?
2. What are some ways that negative peer pressure affects you?
3. Which types of pressure are hard for you to resist?
4. What are some strategies for steering clear of negative peer pressure?

How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understandings: It takes courage to stand up for what you think is right.

Tags: peer pressure, drama, skits, hot seat, *havurah*, online

G-dcast *Spins Chanukah Movie and Discussion**

Time Allotment: 20 minutes

Class: *Havurah* and Online

This G-dcast video shows the pressure the Jewish people were facing by how the Syrio-Greeks tried to spread their Hellenism and outlawed Jewish practices, causing the Jews to revolt against them. See how many types of *gevurah* you can find.

Additionally, [David Brooks' article The Hanukkah Story¹](#) (5.3.1 The Hanukkah Story) has a nuanced description of the story. Consider this as an attachment with your weekly email to parents.

Discussion Questions:

¹There is no one "correct" spelling for the word Chanukah (or Hanukkah or Chanukkah) because it is a phonetic version of the Hebrew.

1. What kind of peer pressure do the Jews face in the Chanukah story?
2. What gives the Jews the strength to resist the peer pressure from the Greeks?
3. What do you think gives the Jews the strength to fight against the Greeks, the most powerful army in the world at that time?
4. Do you ever feel negative peer pressure about your Jewish identity and practices? Do you ever feel negative peer pressure about Israel? Give an example.

Take a topic from your discussion and have students act is out to practice respectful confrontation and to strengthen their abilities in dignified and constructive debate.

How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understandings: The Maccabees had to stand up for their tradition and way of life. Standing up for what you believe in takes courage.

Tags: Lights, video, peer pressure, Chanukah, Maccabees, *havurah*, online

Hero - Think, Pair, Share

Time Allocation: 15 minutes

Class: *Havurah* and Online

Divide students into pairs (if this is a *havurah*, you may wish to have students and parents as hevruta pairs). Participants should think about someone they know or have heard about who they consider to be a hero, and then share with their hevruta: 1) the name of the hero; 2) what makes that person a hero. The class should then gather again, and each hevruta should present to the group (in 3-4 sentences) the hero that their partner chose, and what is so special about that hero.

Discussion Questions:

1. Were there some common ideas or themes that came up when participants thought of heroes?
2. Based on the heroes that were chosen, can we come up with a definition of a hero?
3. What makes it hard to be a hero in the way we have described in this discussion?
4. In what way do you think you can be a hero?

How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understandings: Being a hero often involves making choices that you believe in even when they are unpopular.

Tags: hero, *hevruta*, *havurah*, online

Dreidel

Time Allocation: 10 minutes

Class: *Havurah* and Online

According to legend, Jews at the time of Hanukkah would grab a *dreidel* and start to play in order to warn those engaged in the prohibited activities of Torah study and prayer that the Syrio-Greek soldiers were approaching. How did their *dreidel*-playing show *gevurah*? Give out *dreidels* and teach the *dreidel* game.

Online classroom: Have each student try this game, <http://joi.org/dreidel/>. (5.3.1 Dreidel Game) Set a time limit of 5 minutes and you may want to turn your speaker volume down.

How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understandings: We can learn from the Chanukah story how to have courage and act according to our beliefs.

Tags: *dreidel*, Chanukah, *havurah*, online

Week 1: Parent Education (5.3.1)

Middle school may bring with it exposure to peer pressure and bullying. Students need to feel that they ‘belong,’ and as they enter pre-adolescence, they want to belong to peer groups, not only to their family. Families play an important role in preparing children to find the inner strength they need to resist engaging in bad behavior. This session will sensitize parents to the importance of building strong/courageous character in their children and reinforce the idea that Jewish stories and rituals can be used as tools to discuss and surface the challenges faced by their children.

Learning Goals

- Parents will recognize the effects of peer pressure on their children, as individuals and as members of groups (an issue of growing importance to 5th graders).
- Parents will express the wisdom from Jewish texts as “parenting tools.”

Activities and Guiding Questions

1. Have parents share examples of when they felt “peer pressure” as adults (good and bad), and when they perceive that their children have been subject to peer pressure and influenced to do inappropriate things and new things they otherwise may not have done.
2. A troubling but important Biblical story involving the dynamics of the group against the individual is the story of Joseph and his brothers. Study [Bereishit 37, especially verses 18-30](#). (5.3.1 Joseph Story) What were the limits of Reuven’s intervention? Why didn’t Reuven (the eldest of the brothers) save Joseph? Why was Reuven so upset when he saw that Joseph was no longer in the pit?
 - See Rabbi Sacks’s analysis of [Reuven’s actions](#) (Resource: ShalomLearning 5.3.1 Rabbi Sacks Analysis of Reuven’s Actions) and whether it really was courage or not.
 - Another way to use the text as a mini- lesson on speaking out is found [here](#) at Avodah Weekly Torah Teachings.(5.3.1 Avodah Weekly) Compare the actions of Reuven to those of Yehuda. Which one showed more courage and why? What are the levels of risk they took, especially in terms of their standing within the family? Note that the Torah text may actually make a judgment about the two brothers; the first born status of Reuven did not boost him to later leadership; instead it is Yehuda who becomes the tribe of the Israelite kings.
3. Read and discuss [Psalm 1](#) (“Fortunate is the person who has not followed the counsel of the wicked...”).(5.3.1 Psalm 1) This Psalm is written less as liturgy and more in the style of ancient wisdom literature, like the book of Proverbs. Read and discuss the Psalmist’s wisdom. Does it work for you? Can you think of illustrations in your life or your family’s life? Allow for discomfort at the use of extreme poles (righteous vs. wicked) but such is Biblical wisdom literature’s style. Explore Torah (instruction) as a metaphor for a person being like a tree planted by a running stream. How can parents impart instruction so that their children will be independent thinkers, rooted in their heritage and fed from healthy sources?
4. As an additional or alternate text read and discuss the “[Yehi Ratson](#)” meditation in the daily siddur after the morning blessings (Resource:

ShalomLearning 5.3.1 Yehi Ratzon) In what ways may prayers and meditations such as this one serve as reminders and reinforcement for being spiritually courageous during each day? What does the meditation suggest are the dangers lurking around us? (Focus on the social ones mentioned.) How may we help our children reflect upon, question and share the challenges they and we face in daily life? How may we prepare our children to have the courage to face these and other challenges?

5. Join students for a *Hanukkah* party.

Car Talk

What does it mean to be spiritually courageous? In what ways were the Maccabees spiritually courageous? Can you name someone you know who you think is spiritually courageous?