



The Blessing of Being Bold

Azut d'Kedushah, Courage - Purim

PURIM

Courage

What does it mean to be courageous; to live boldly? When we are typing and want to highlight an idea, we put it in bold. It's the same old word, just made brighter, bigger, more pronounced. So too, a bold life is one that stands out. It is outstanding.

What is the Jewish vision of an outstanding life?

From when we are young, we are taught, most emphatically, what society expects of us. A constant stream of messaging instructs us on what to speak, what to silence; what to deny, what to allow; what to wear, what to fear; who to be and how to be it. As we grow older, we hardly even notice the constrictions of these conventions, as they are so essential to who we have become. After all, everyone else is doing it; it's how I've always been. Challenging societal norms based on our values can court disapproval, rejection, even punishment. We may risk our relationships and our reputations.

Not only does the society around us place expectations, conventions, and limits upon us, we must also contend with our *internal* conventions and limitations as well. We may be naturally quiet or loud, reserved or social. So often we default to chosen behaviors that are within our comfort zones. We choose them not out of conviction, but out of familiarity and ease. When a situation requires us to act outside

of our default behaviors, it can be terrifying. To break with norms, from within or without, is an awesome proposition indeed. It takes courage, boldness, and a good dose of holy *chutzpah* to make the leap.

This month we are talking about learning to live life with courage. We'll explore the value of holy boldness, known in Hebrew as *azut d'kedushah*. Sometimes called holy audacity or holy *chutzpah*, *azut d'kedushah* is when, for a purpose larger than ourselves, we overcome conventions of society or our own internal limits to move beyond our comfort zones in order to do the just and courageous thing.

We turn to the Purim story as our guiding text in living boldly. Purim commemorates a victory over our enemies – both within and without. As we will see, the heroine of the story, Queen Esther, stands out as a stellar role model for living boldly and acting with *azut d'kedushah*. She both violated the norms around her at great risk and acted in a way that defied her nature, all in order to save her people. And save them she did.

We, like Esther, use our *azut d'kedushah* when we pursue higher goals, overcoming the conventions and obstacles that stand in our way. All of us are fighting our own battles; we all contain Esther's spiritual DNA, and with

it the capacity to activate our own courage to overcome the hurdles that prevent us from living outstanding lives.

Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- *What might be an area where I can follow in the footsteps of Esther and do the right thing for myself, my family, and my people, even if it's scary or outside my comfort zone?*
- *What is the difference between arrogance and boldness?*
- *How can I teach my children to be bold but not arrogant?*
- *What are some situations in my life that require me to be courageous?*
- *How can I unlock my courage if it does not come naturally to me?*



QUEEN ESTHER AND ME

By Adrienne Gold Davis

Without doubt, the greatest changes I ever made in my largely unexamined life occurred because of Queen Esther of the Purim story. I was forty years old when I studied the story of Purim for the first time. Little did I know how significant it would become in the evolution of my personal identity. But first, let's look at the part of the story I am referring to.

Esther was born belonging to no one other than God. Her father died while her mother was pregnant and her mother died in childbirth. She was raised by her devoted uncle Mordechai and lived as a Jewish girl at a time when most Jews had assimilated into popular Persian culture. When the evil king Achashverosh called for a gathering of all the beautiful maidens in his kingdom in order to replace his banished wife, Esther was taken to the harem along with the others. Her uncle warned her to keep her Jewish identity hidden. (Even her name, Esther, comes from the Hebrew word *seter*, or hidden.) Esther was chosen from all the others and became queen. According to the Midrash, she serendipitously was able to keep eating and marking time like a Jew, even within the “belly of the beast.”

There rose to power a second in command to the king who hated the Jewish people and sought to destroy us. Upon learning of our fate, Mordechai went to Esther at the palace gates and implored her to reveal her true identity to her husband the king. She was terrified, fearing for her life if she went unbidden to Achashverosh. At that moment

Mordechai said a most telling and profound thing, which utterly shifted my consciousness about personal responsibility and bravery. He said:

“Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace. [On the contrary,] if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, while you and your father’s house will be lost. And who knows whether for a time such as this you have attained your royal position?”

(Esther 4:13–14)

Or, the way I like to think of it: Perhaps you were created for just this moment; maybe this is why God put you in this palace in the first place! In other words, this was Esther’s moment, where she was uniquely poised and positioned to be the agent of change; where she was forced to face her personal fear and take responsibility, and not delude herself into believing she could sidestep it and still actualize her true potential.

That moment came for me as I worked on live television after 9/11. As the news quickly turned to conspiracy theories and the celebrations started in the streets of Israel’s West Bank, I had my own “Uncle Mordechai” in the form of my rabbi. He basically told me that this was my Esther moment, that I needed to speak up for the Jewish people while I had such a large and unsuspecting audience. (I was a fashion expert!)



I remember feeling a combination of terror and excitement. My rabbi gave me segues for any topic our panel would be discussing, in order to make the greatest impact. On some level I knew that THIS was my moment to bring out my inner Esther. That in talking outside of my fashion mandate and taking advantage of my podium for non-requested commentary, I would be committing career suicide.

The opposition was immediate. My producers warned me to stop pushing my agenda. Viewers wrote in, some of them threateningly. Apparently, talking about God on TV is more provocative than the micro-minis and teeny bikinis I featured. And so I would “take a week off” of my commentary on Israel and the Jewish issues... and the minute they thought they had “tamed me” I would begin again. And naturally, as soon as my contract was out – so was I. But by then I had stoked my passion for our people to the extent that all I wanted to do was teach what I had been taught. And that is what ultimately brought me to Momentum!

Since those days, I have come to understand that there are many Esther moments in the course of one’s day. And they are not always so public or splashy. They occur every time we keep silent in the face of an insult rather than firing back, every time we speak softly when we truly want to scream. Every time we behave lovingly when

we are not “feeling it.” Every time we choose right over easy. It means understanding that just because we are uncomfortable or frightened to do what is right does not give us license to refrain from doing it. As the famous writer Ambrose Redmoon said, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.” May we all identify and activate our own inner Esthers, and rise to every single Esther moment.

- *Have you had Esther moments, when you found the courage to do the right thing even when it was uncomfortable or frightening?*

Writing Exercise

Take 5–10 minutes to write down your answers to the following questions. Writing in silence allows your thoughts to flow freely, unedited. When you are finished writing, discuss with your sister some of the issues and ideas that came up for you in this exercise.

- *How can I access my courage and the “Esther” part of myself to overcome my fears or misgivings and make change in my life, family, or community?*
- *How can I teach my children the value of acting with courage?*

WHAT ATTRIBUTES ARE NEEDED FOR SPIRITUAL SERVICE?

Considering spiritual service:

- Whom do you know who does inspiring works of service in your community or in the world?
- What are that person's attributes?
- If you were to select four attributes most important for doing good in the world, which would you select, and why?

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of Our Fathers) 5:20

Yehudah ben Tema says: Be bold (*az*) as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and mighty as a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven. He would say: the bold-faced (*az panim*) to Gehinnom (Hell); the bashful-faced to Paradise.

יהודה בן תימא אומר, הוי עז כנמר, וקל כנשר, וריץ כצבי, וגיבור כארי--לעשות רצון אביך שבשמיים. הוא היה אומר, עז פנים לגהינם, ובוש פנים לגן עדן.

Yehudah ben Tema was a sage who lived in the Land of Israel in the 2nd century C.E.

- What do you like of the attributes suggested by Yehudah ben Tema? Why do you think he chooses these qualities as the four key attributes for doing the will of God?
- It is crucial to note that the quote from Pirkei Avot does not end with just discussing the four animals. It ends with a cautionary line that sharpens our understanding of what exactly “*az*” is... and what it is not. Yehuda ben Tema says that we should be bold, *az*, as a leopard, yet he also says that someone who is bold-faced, *az - panim*, will go to Hell. What is the difference between being bold and being bold-faced?
- In your experience, what types of boldness have been counterproductive or misguided, and what types do you consider positive or holy? Give examples from your own life.

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of Our Fathers), is a section of the Mishnah that contains the ethical teachings of the ancient rabbis.



TWO KINDS OF BOLDNESS



Rabbi Nachman of Breslov believed that just as holy boldness, in Hebrew *azut d'kedushah*, is essential to the spiritual life of a Jew, so is non-holy boldness (*hubris*) detrimental to his or her spiritual life.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *Likkutei Moharan* 30:8

There are two kinds of boldness. There is holy boldness [and non-holy boldness]. It is not possible to receive Torah except through holy boldness, as our sages taught, “The bashful [i.e. one who is not bold] cannot learn” (Pirkei Avot 2:5). And as our sages taught, “Why was Torah given to Israel? Because they are bold” (Babylonian Talmud, Beitza 25b).

And counter to this, there is an opposite [kind of boldness, i.e. *hubris*], as it is said, “Anyone who has [such] boldness, it is known that his forefathers did not stand at Sinai” (Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 20a).

“כי יש שני מיני עזות... יש עזת דקדושה - שאי אפשר לקבל את התורה כי אם על ידי זה העזת דקדושה כמו שאמרו רז”ל לא הביטן למד (אבות ב' ה'). כמו שאמרו רז”ל (ביצה כ"ה ע"ב): 'מפני מה נתנה תורה לישראל - מפני שעזין הן...'”

וּכְנֵגַד זֶה, יֵשׁ לְהַפְיֹךְ, עֲזוּת מִן הַסְטֵרָא אֲחֵרָא... [שעל כך נאמר:]
'כִּל מִי שֵׁיֵשׁ בּוֹ עֲזוּת, בְּיָדוֹעַ שֶׁלֹּא עֲמָדוֹ רְגֵלִי אֲבוֹתָיו עַל הַר
סִינַי' (נְדָרִים כ' ע"א).

- Rabbi Nachman says that “it is not possible to receive Torah except through holy boldness,” and that Israel was specifically chosen because we are bold. What is so important about boldness? What can make it holy?
- Think of a time in your life when you or someone close to you acted with holy boldness. If there was a spark of holiness in the experience, how might you describe it?
- What is something you would like to accomplish that you would need *azut d'kedushah*, holy boldness, to make happen? If you could write an affirmation, what would it say? If you had a piece of advice for yourself about accessing this virtue when you need it, what might this advice be?
- How can you teach your children to act with holy boldness? What might help you direct them away from acting with unholy boldness?

FOUR LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES

What attributes of an individual or a team are needed to successfully envision and lead an initiative?

Rabbi Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, vol. 2, p. 255

Yehudah ben Tema says: Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and mighty as a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven (Pirkei Avot 5:20).

Our sages revealed [in the above quote] four powers needed to create and bring an initiative to wholesome implementation.

The first power is boldness – and it is holy boldness that is spoken of, which is the power of **taking initiative** – envisioning the initiative.

After committing to undertake an initiative, **being light and optimistic** is important, so as to see challenges and setbacks in implementation as opportunities. The next step is **being swift** to listen to others to understand what each person needs in order to engage and take risks, and to act with enthusiasm. The final stages often require **staying steadfast with the grit and might of a lion** in order to bring the initiative to successful completion.

הַיּוֹדָה בְּן תִּימָא אוֹמֵר, הָיוּ עַצ כְּפָמָה, וְקָל כְּנֶשֶׁה, וְרַץ כְּצִבִּי, וְגִבּוֹר כְּאַרְיֵ, לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן אֲבִיךָ שְׂבִשְׂמִימִים (אבות ה: כד).

כאן גילו לנו חז"ל את ארבעת הכחות הדרושים להשלים מעשה.

הכח הראשון הוא עזות - ובעזות וקדושה הדברים אמורים - שהוא כח היוזמה (כלומר אדם שיש לו מעוף להתחיל איזה מפעל גדול).

אחרי שקיבל על עצמו לבצע את הדבר, הוא זקוק למידה של קלות שלא ישקע בקשיי הביצוע, ולזריזות, וכדי להביא את הדבר לידי גמר צריכים גבורת ארי.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (1914–2005) was a master of *mussar* (ethical teachings for character and behavioral improvement) and the author of the *mussar* classic, *Alei Shur*.

- What are the four powers that Rabbi Wolbe feels are essential for taking and completing an action? How do these four powers work together? Would you edit this list to include any other necessary powers?
- Which of these four attributes do you possess as a strength? Which is a challenge for you?
- Do you think it is possible to develop these attributes even if you do not naturally possess all of them?
- Which attribute would you look for in a colleague to help you plan and execute a project? How can you create a team that together possesses all these attributes? What might you seek to accomplish together?



Leopard — bold and initiating



Deer — swift, attentive, and visionary



Eagle — light and optimistic



Lion — mighty and courageous

THREE KEYS TO UNLOCKING COURAGE

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

Why Unlock Your Courage?

“One isn’t necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential,” said the late Maya Angelou, American poet and activist. “Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency, we can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.”

Our children need to see us push through our own adversity and courageously face challenges, rather than merely give *them* a hand with facing *their* hurdles while avoiding our own.

Holy boldness is a path to expressing our inner greatness, inspiring others, and leaving a legacy. The Talmud teaches that when our life is over, we’ll be asked a series of questions. The final question will be, “Did you take action to help restore the world?”

Each of us has something to contribute to making the world a better place. That is the purpose of our life. The final word of the Creation story in the book of Genesis points us toward taking this type of action. The word is *la’asot*, meaning “to do,” inviting us to step forward and encounter our true destiny.

1. Conviction and Purpose

When Golda Meir served as Israeli Prime Minister, she encouraged Henry Kissinger, the U.S. Secretary of State, to make Israel a top priority. He sent her a letter: “I would like to inform you that I’m first an American citizen; second, Secretary of State; and third, a Jew.” Golda responded: “So? In Israel, we read from right to left.”

A few months before Israel’s declaration of independence, Golda raised \$50 million in one speech.¹ What gave her the holy *chutzpah* so pivotal for her success?

Jot down a few “la’asot” actions that if someone were “to do,” she would make a real contribution to the world. Consider things in your different spheres of influence, such as family, work, Jewish community, your children’s educational institutions, neighborhood, and local community, as well as the organization that brought you on Momentum or the Momentum global network.

Victor Frankl, psychologist and Holocaust survivor, said, “Success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one’s personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself.

1 At the General Assembly of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, Chicago, January 21, 1948.



The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.”

We all have moments when we think, “I don’t have the time or the skill,” or “Who am I to make a difference?” Having a mission with a compelling purpose is one key to overcoming barriers and unlocking the courage to take action.

“The #TimesUp and #MeToo movements, and the general uprising of women in Hollywood and elsewhere against systemic abuse, may seem like a groundbreaking new *zeitgeist*,” says Adrienne Gold Davis, Momentum Trip Leader, “but it was we Jewish women who first set the tone for civil disobedience.” You and Golda Meir come from the same ancestry of courageous women.

When Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt, commanded the two midwives, Shifra and Puah, to kill every male Jewish baby at birth, they refused to implement the immoral decree, putting their trust in God and giving the world its first recorded civil disobedience story.

Conviction and purpose support us to envision success. The Israelite women, hurried out of decades of slavery in Egypt into the desert,

barely had time to pack food for the journey. Yet they packed drums and tambourines, with the confidence that they’d soon be dancing as free people.²

- *Who are the role models in your life who act with conviction, vision, and holy boldness?*
- *How have you done so in your life, in small or big ways?*
- *Our sages teach that when Abraham heard God calling him to “Go forth” – “Lech lecha” – it was not a singular moment; God is also calling daily to each of us, the children of Abraham. What might God be calling on you to “lech lecha,” go forth and do, now? Which of the things on the “la’asot” list you made (see p. 278) do you have the most conviction about?*
- *What gets in the way of accomplishing your “lech lecha” goals?*

2. Attitude toward Comfort and Pain

Our comfort zone is the range of familiar behaviors where we typically act, hiding from things that seem threatening or painful, such as potential embarrassment, rejection, shame, anxiety, or loss. We limit our potential by functioning where we believe we are secure.

² Midrash Mechilta and Rashi on the story of Miriam leading the women in dance at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20–21).

- *We all have situations in which we feel insecure. Some people dread networking with new people, while others fear engaging in conflict, public speaking, questioning their own assumptions, leaving a job or taking a new job, or standing up to oppression. Are there important things you put off or organize your life to avoid?*

Helen Keller wisely said, “Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of man as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”

Moving beyond our comfort zone involves willingness to expose ourselves to the pain of breaching the barriers of that “superstition” of security. “What is to give light must endure burning,” said Victor Frankl.

The key is to face the burning fear instead of avoiding it, turning *toward* it with an attitude of “bring it on!” However, this is easier said than done. The best way to get good at facing fear is to start small: go on a walk or to the gym, talk to the new person at your office, offer thoughtful critique about an issue that’s important to you, facilitate a conversation, join an activity sponsored by a group taking a stand against oppression. Once you start overcoming small fears, you will realize that you have more power over them than you think, and executing that power actually feels really good. This confidence is what will allow you to tackle even greater fears. Courage is not something reserved only

for lion tamers. Courage is a skill that anyone can develop through doing things that are difficult, prioritizing growth over comfort.

- *In an area where you feel insecure, is there potential pain you seek to avoid? How does this confine you within a comfort zone?*
- *When did you or someone close to you face down a fear in order to take action for something important?*
- *Where in the Purim story or in other stories are there examples of turning toward the “burning” of pain or fear to step beyond one’s comfort zone?*
- *What is one small fear you might face now to build confidence?*

3. Fortifying Your Soul

Trust and Encouragement

Ruth the Moabite had tremendous trust in her mother-in-law, Naomi, leaving all she knew behind and cleaving to the older woman, heading to an unknown land. With wholehearted trust in Naomi, Ruth’s courageous actions led her to become the great-grandmother of King David.

Community and the support of people we trust can “inspire our courage” – which is the literal meaning of encouragement. Empathic and encouraging words can be a catalyst toward taking a step forward in a situation where we feel insecure.

A Positive Mindset and Faithfulness in Oneself and in God

When trying to move forward, it is important not to berate ourselves and our past actions. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook encourages us to adapt a mindset that we are doing the best we can at each moment, as are those around us. This mindset may seem contrary to reaching beyond our comfort zone. One might ask, “If I’ve been hanging out in my comfort zone and that’s the best I can do, then where’s the drive to push beyond it?” The answer is that you can actually critique your past choices without berating yourself. Instead of being angry with yourself for your previous actions, you can accept your mistakes and view them as opportunities to exercise courage and choose a steeper path toward reaching your goals. Golda Meir’s advice is, “Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement.”

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935) was the first Ashkenazic chief rabbi of pre-State Israel.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot HaKodesh* 1:65

Ascend up high, you’ve got vast strength,
You’ve got spiritual wings, grand eagle’s wings,
Don’t evade them, lest they evade you,
Seek them, and at once they appear for you.

קָו אָדָם, עֲלֵה לְמַעְלָה עֲלֵה, כִּי כַחַ עַז לָךְ,
יֵשׁ לָךְ כְּנָפֵי רוּחַ, כְּנָפֵי נְשָׁרִים אֲבִירִים,
אַל תִּכְחַשׁ בָּם פֶּן יִכְחֹשׁוּ לָךְ,
דְּרוּשׁ אוֹתָם - וְיִמָּצְאוּ לָךְ מִיָּד.

A person steeped in wonder and awe of God gains soul-strength and courage. It fills their life with meaning and big aspirations.³

הַמוֹשֵׁג שֶׁל יְרֵאת ד' הוּא מוֹסִיף עַל וְגִבּוֹרָה בְּנַפְשׁ הָאָדָם הַמִּכִּין
אוֹתָהּ בְּטַהֲרָתָהּ, הִיא עוֹשֶׂה אֶת הַחַיִּים מְלֵאִים עֵנִין וְשֵׂאִיפוֹת
גְּדוּלוֹת.

- *What fortifies your soul?*
- *As a group, consider how you might further collaborate to help each other with courage. Consider both your personal and the group’s aspirations to take courageous action. How can you leverage the differences among the members of your group?*

3 Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Middot HaRaya, Yirah* 3.

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Sima's Escape from Iran



Dr. Sima Goel was a 13-year-old girl living in Iran when Ayatollah Khomeini decreed that all women must wear the hijab, whether they were Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or Baha'i. Terrified, angry, and determined, Sima took to the streets to demonstrate for freedom under the Shah's rule. Then the Shah fled the country and the new government imposed even more oppressive laws. Blacklisted by her school, unable to continue her studies, and forced into hiding, Sima decided to escape Iran for a country where she could be free.

Today, Sima lives in Montreal and is a chiropractor, wife, mother of two grown sons, and a Momentum sister. She is also the author of the memoir, *Fleeing the Hijab: A Jewish Woman's Escape from Iran*. We spoke to Sima about her powerful return to the Middle East with Momentum, as well as the many challenges she overcame to write her memoir.

What inspired you to experience Momentum?

Growing up as a Jew in Iran, I was proud of my heritage and people, but I needed to focus on surviving under the hostile Islamic regime. Once I arrived in Canada at the age of 18, I was consumed with learning two new languages and finding a way to support myself. Later, I was absorbed with school, my career, and my family. I was grateful that the Jewish community embraced me, but I saw myself as a hybrid — an Iranian-Canadian Jew, married to the son of an Ashkenazic Holocaust survivor. I most strongly identified with people who had fled, survived, and flourished despite all odds. Then I celebrated my Canadian nephew's bar mitzvah in Jerusalem and saw what it meant to be a Jew living openly in a Jewish world. When my sister-in-law told me about Momentum, I jumped at the opportunity to return to Israel. Little did I know that one day, I would relate to my travel companions as sisters as a result of our shared experience, which was both emotional and joyous.

How did Momentum impact you?

Experiencing Israel alongside Jewish women from all walks of life and all parts of the world, I transformed from a person who saw herself on the outside of the Jewish community to a person intimately and completely engulfed within the Jewish people. Before Momentum, I was a woman with a harsh story in her past.

While in Israel, I was amazed to see that Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i, Christian, gay, and transgender people were all accepted for who they were and that no one was afraid. In Israel, everyone is a child of God. The streets are filled with many languages, diversity is celebrated, and the people are free.

On Saturday night, while celebrating Havdalah services in Jerusalem in the company of Israeli soldiers, I recognized the Muslim call to prayer. I had heard the same call every day in Iran. But in Jerusalem, I didn't feel anxious or afraid. Instead, I felt secure in my identity. I took comfort in the company of my friends, and I felt proud that in the small city of Jerusalem, all are welcome to pray. I realized that when Jews are empowered, all are equal and all are safe.

What inspired you to write about your escape from Iran?

While crossing the desert in Iran, I promised myself that I'd write my story if I survived. But I came to Canada not knowing English, so I knew that it wouldn't be easy. Then in 2004, the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada (JIAS) interviewed me for a documentary. A few years later, when I shared my story at a Women's Philanthropy event at the Jewish Federation in Montreal, everyone in the audience was in tears and urged me to document my life. I decided that it was time to share my story with more people. I want to help people understand that we can't turn a blind eye to anti-Semitism. We need to come together as a community, confront our history, and hold each other accountable. We have to teach the next generation what happened to us and leave the world a better place.

What gave you the courage to take action?

There are many people who believe we should stop talking about the Holocaust, or that anti-Semitism does not exist. Through my own experiences, I know that it's important to give people everywhere, especially young people, an understanding of what has happened to the Jewish people, and what is happening to us again throughout the world. I believe we have an obligation to understand what is happening to Jewish communities throughout the world, and that we have an obligation to our own Jewish communities. We really are a light unto the world, we can count on the Jewish community to help each other and the larger society. We should be tolerant of others, but we cannot be so tolerant that we lose our very identities. It's very important to me that young people know and understand this, which is one of the reasons I felt compelled to share my story.

What advice would you give to other women who are interested in sharing their personal stories?

Go for it. Get past the negative thoughts that stop you in your tracks – the “I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough,” and “Why me, why now?” During our lives, we witness history and come away with unique perspectives. Take your story in your own hands. Don't waste your time worrying about the things that you can't control. Writing my memoir took me thousands upon thousands of hours, and it was worth it. I've told the story of what I experienced, and I've shed light on the Jewish people who are still suffering in Iran today.

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Spotlight on Israel: Ruth Stern

Excerpts from “My Experiences as a Volunteer Nurse, 1948–1949, during the Israel’s War of Independence”⁴

Early in 1948, the excitement of recruiting people to go over to assist Israel was spreading by word of mouth across South Africa. I was at the SA Zionist Federation in Johannesburg, sitting in the office of Simie Weinstein, the former chaplain of the South African Expeditionary Forces in East Africa. He had taken time to speak to me, although he was extremely busy organizing volunteers to serve in the war that had broken out against the fledgling State of Israel which was facing attacks by five Arab States.

“Ruth,” Simie Weinstein said, and smiled, “I’m always pleased to see you, but my dear, this is about war, and not for you. Right now we are preparing to send people with military training and experience to Israel.” He looked at his watch, and I realized that Simie, in his quiet and unassuming way, was being polite. He was aware that I had spent a year in 1946 in Palestine (then under the rule of the British Mandate), one of the 30 participants in the first course for Zionist youth leaders, and now I had come to see him about returning to serve as a volunteer in the war. Despite my recent experience, his fatherly attitude to me hadn’t changed as he kindly tried to dissuade me.



Ruth Stern (right) with one of the Haganah supervisors, on board the *Kedmah* en route to Israel.

Simie interrupted me, “Okay, Ruth, I’ll see what I can do. Now off you go. I realize that your parents have a very determined and unusual daughter on their hands. Don’t forget to give them my regards.”

At last I got word that I was to join a group of volunteers, the only woman among the twenty. We were briefed on the plan to fly us to Europe, our supposed destination, where we would be met by Haganah members and from there transferred to Israel. A fictitious airline, Universal Airways, had been established by the organizers as a cover to allow us to leave SA legitimately. Each one of us was assigned a role; mine was as a student going to study in England via Italy.

I remember my parents at the airport wondering what to say, their forced smiles hiding their trepidation. Outwardly I appeared calm, hoping my inner trembling was not obvious as we walked toward the runway and into the small plane, a twin-engine Dakota.

The Haganah supervisors were friendly and curious about us, the South African volunteers, coming from so far away to join them in battle. I suppose we did seem incongruous compared

⁴ World Machal, “Ruth Stern,” www.bit.ly/3ckWGe8.

with the other passengers. “How did a young lady like you get into this group?” I was startled by the rather brash question from our blue-eyed Israeli supervisor, David. “What do you expect to do in our land, facing the dangers of war?”

What *chutzpah*. I put my book down. How dare he patronize me, I fumed. Finding me alone at last, he had found the occasion to satisfy his curiosity. I had been reluctant to show that I knew Hebrew or to speak about my experience in Palestine in 1946. Now to David’s astonishment I replied in Hebrew. “I shall quote the words of Ruth in the Bible, Your people are my people, David,” I suppose I sounded dramatic, “and I wish to share the fate of my people and do my share in the war effort. That is why I am here, and I object to your insinuations that I’m unfit to face danger.”

On September 3rd, as the boat approached the shores of Israel, the setting sun illuminated the beauty of Haifa and Mount Carmel, glowing and silhouetted against the cloudless sky. The magical scene brought cries of joy from the new immigrants. At last they were free to enter their ancient homeland. It was actually happening, their dreams and yearning becoming a reality. The sky darkened and the lights of Haifa started to twinkle while we all stood there on the decks of the Kedmah and sang Hatikvah, our national anthem. Then a voice from the newcomers rose in a prayer of thanks and we all chorused, “Amen.”

Ruth Stern served as a nurse during the War of Independence. She married Theodore (Teddy) Blumenfeld (later Ben Amar) in August 1949, whom she had met when he was lightly wounded and under her care. After living in Haifa and Netanya, they moved to Ashkelon, where Teddy accepted the position of Town Engineer. They raised two sons, Gideon and Gilad, and Ruth became a dedicated educator

and English teacher. Teddy died in 1973. A year later, Ruth moved to Jerusalem, where she earned BA and MA degrees in English literature at the Hebrew University. Eventually she became head of the English Department at Leyada (Hebrew University High School). She met her second husband, Gideon Stern, through one of her pupils. In 2003, the State of Israel and Ministry of Defense awarded Ruth Stern the Ot Hakomemiyut for her services in Machal during the War of Independence.

To read more of Ruth’s story, search “Ruth Stern” on the World Machal website.

Over four thousand volunteers from fifty-six countries came to Israel to fight in the War of Independence. Hundreds more assisted from abroad. One hundred and twenty-three of these volunteers lost their lives in the war. To watch a short film about overseas volunteers, including Ruth Stern, who came to fight in the War of Independence, see Toldot Yisrael’s “The Volunteers: Answering the Call of History.

To learn more about Israel’s 1948 generation, watch the other excellent films on the Toldot Yisrael website.

Ruth Stern



TRY IT OUT

PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Ideas for bringing the value of Azut D'kedushah, Courage, into your family life

For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on MomentumUnlimited.org.
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
 - I live boldly
 - I act with holy *chutzpah* in service of important causes
 - I identify my purpose and act with conviction
 - I fortify my soul
 - I prioritize growth over comfort
- Aleph Beta Academy is an online library of videos offering in-depth, text-based Jewish learning. To learn more about Purim, check out the video, "Purim: Why Name a Holiday after The Enemy?" (29 minutes)
- For further reading on unlocking your courage:
 - *The Courage Way: Leading and Living with Integrity*, by Center for Courage & Renewal and Shelly L. Francis
 - *The Tools: 5 Tools to Help You Find Courage, Creativity, and Willpower – and Inspire You to Live Life in Forward Motion*, by Phil Stutz and Barry Michels

- *Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Challenge, and Build Confidence*, by Andy Molinsky

For Families with Young Children

- Watch the Bimbam video, "Princess of Persia: The Purim Story," at <https://bit.ly/2GVZiOz>. Talk together about Esther's qualities, and what your family can learn from her.
- Join a Purim party or feast, or help organize one. Purim is a day for costumes. Consider what costume might allow you to dream of possibilities that cross beyond your usual comfort zone, or that reflect layers of your potential yet to be revealed – a costume of courage.
- Role-playing prepares us for those often unexpected, difficult moments by encouraging us to think ahead and plan how we will react. As a family, role-play scenarios where you might need to respond to a difficult circumstance with courage. For example:
 - Kids can act out challenging scenes in which they see another child being treated unkindly, or notice someone sitting alone in the lunchroom
 - Adults can role-play challenging scenes between parents and children, or act out how they would respond if a stranger in need asked them for help

For Families with Older Children

- Read together about Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, who makes the case that disagreeing does not make you disagreeable, in the book, *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsberg Makes Her Mark*, by Debbie Levy, available through www.pjlibrary.org.
- Together, watch the short films at www.ToldotYisrael.org about Israel's 1948 generation. Your children might especially enjoy watching "Echoes of A Shofar," which recalls the bravery of teens who blew the shofar at the Western Wall at the close of Yom Kippur in the 1930s and 1940s, violating the British decree.
- Keep a written record of those things in your life or about yourself that you would like to address with courage. Choose one or two that you believe will help move you toward being your best self.
 - Create a vision board (collage) of inspirational words and images that will embolden you to make those changes
 - Take a few moments each day to look at your collage and visualize yourself living in the ways you have envisioned
- Learn about Doña Gracia Nasi: Read Cecil Roth's biographical account of her life, *Doña Gracia of the House of Nasi*, or Naomi Ragen's fictionalized version of Doña Gracia's life, *The Ghost of Hannah Mendes*. Travel to the Doña Gracia Hotel and Museum in Tiberias, which is dedicated to honoring the 16th century Sephardic heroine through cultural and experiential activities.
- Identify and isolate one community need that requires addressing. Plan a family project using each person's individual skills to support fulfilling this need with courage:
 - Adopt a bubbe (supporting the lonely elderly). Find out from the staff of a nursing/convalescent home who among the residents do not receive regular visits and could use the love and company. Then commit to devoting a twice-monthly chunk of time to visiting them! Let your family "artist" draw pictures. Let your singer prepare a song. Let your budding aesthetician give a manicure or a combout. Gather a bouquet of flowers or a basket of treats and set a visiting time. Then stick to it. As this is a family project, there is room for the occasional "not available" among you, while not leaving the "bubbe" without anyone visiting her. (Check out www.adoptasafra.com for some inspiration!)
 - Become blood donors. As they say: "It's IN YOU to give!" If you qualify, this simple, life-giving *mitzvah* is a great family project, and helps counteract the inherent narcissism of our times.
 - Start a family WhatsApp group that is "on the lookout" for the underdog, the bullied, and the lonely. Teach your kids to push past their inherent shyness and awkwardness to be able to identify the outsider, and to approach and welcome them. In the evenings, sit down as a family and discuss what in each member's world stands out as unfair or painful. Work as a group to strategize what can be done, and put a plan together.



USE THIS CHART TO PLAN AND TRACK YOUR PROGRESS REGARDING THE VALUE OF COURAGE

Acknowledgment

Where are you now with living courageously?
What examples from your life come to mind?
What are your strengths and challenges?

Vision

What does your life lived courageously look like?
What gets in the way of realizing this vision,
and what can you do to reorient toward your
best self?

Goals

What is one (or more) small, actionable step that you can take in your daily life, that is realistic and that you could easily schedule, that will support you in growing toward your potential and vision?

Accountability

Who can help hold you accountable to your goals? How? When? What evidence can you collect to know you are making progress?

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

In this session we explore the value of azut d'kedushah, courage

The guiding questions in this unit are:

- *How can I follow in the footsteps of Esther and do the right thing for myself, my family, and my people, even if it is scary or outside my comfort zone?*
- *What is the difference between arrogance and boldness?*
- *How can I teach my children to be bold but not arrogant?*
- *What are some situations in my life that require me to be courageous?*
- *How can I unlock my courage, if it does not come naturally to me?*

Meaningful Vocabulary

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------|--|
| <i>azut d'kedushah</i> | עזות דקדושה | holy boldness or holy <i>chutzpah</i> |
|------------------------|----------------|--|

| | | |
|---|-------|--------|
| <i>megillah</i> On Purim we read the <i>megillah</i> of Esther, on Shavuot we read the <i>megillah</i> of Ruth | מגילה | scroll |
|---|-------|--------|

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|--|
| <i>mishloach manot</i> | מִשְׁלוּחַ מנות | Purim basket of treats sent to friends and family |
|------------------------|--------------------|--|

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example:

- Planning an activity to accompany the study session (see **Extra! Program Ideas**)
- Sharing Adrienne Gold Davis's Esther story
- Hosting the event
- Asking one or more of the women to share a way she brought home the learning from your last gathering

Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning, and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!

2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

Remember: You know what will best engage your participants, and we encourage you to tailor the session to their interests and needs. **Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible!

3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the room, for example, by putting out a spread of hamentaschen and other traditional Purim foods from different Jewish communities (see

<https://bit.ly/2JTITPS> for some ideas). Arrange the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need and make sure you have everything prepared.

4. Welcome and Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider engaging your participants in a short stretching exercise, or have them focus on taking deep, relaxing breaths. Invite a few women to share how they brought home the learning from the previous session.

Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

Remind everyone that they are in the Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

5. Intro and Inspiration

Invite women to share what they know about Purim or the story of Queen Esther, and a Purim question or memory they have.

6. Soul Sparks Activities

There are different activities you can try that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

Queen Esther and Me (pp. 272-273)

If a participant has prepared to share Adrienne's story, open with that. Otherwise, invite participants to take turns reading aloud Adrienne's reflections on the Purim story. Have a few women share an *azut d'kedushah* experience.

Boldness and Leadership in Spiritual Service

Review together *What Attributes Are Needed for Spiritual Service?* (p. 274). Discuss the questions together, exploring the difference between being bold and being bold-faced. Ask sisters to reflect on their own experiences, and to give examples of when they acted boldly.

Continuing with the discussion of boldness, read *Two Kinds of Boldness* (p. 275), and make note of Rabbi Nachman's distinction between holy and unholy boldness. Together, think about what holy boldness might be, and why it is so essential. Explore the questions on the right side of the page.

Have the group brainstorm ideas for a holy boldness initiative they can take on as a group, something meaningful that the group can succeed with within a one- or two-month time frame. Consider the *Four Leadership Attributes* (pp. 276-277), and plan who might take a lead with which elements of the initiative, and what steps are needed to bring it to successful implementation. Plan the next steps and put a follow-up plan in place.

Three Keys to Unlocking Courage (pp. 278-281)

Divide into three groups and have each group read and dialogue about one of the three keys for ten minutes. Afterward, redivide the group so that the three new groups will consist of one person from each initial group. (see p. 240.)

Have each woman present to her new group the topic she dialogued about in her initial group. Finally, give participants time to write individually about unlocking their courage. Invite each to create either a #hashtag reminder for themselves, or an art project to serve as a visual reminder about unlocking courage. Have each woman choose a partner to share the next steps she will take in order to unlock her courage.

7. Reflection and Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session, and create an opportunity for reflection.

Reflection Suggestion: Ask participants to reflect on the following: “What is one takeaway you’ll be going home with after our session today?” or “I would like to begin practicing courage with my family by...”

Invite sisters to respond to the prompt by writing, drawing, or thinking silently. After individual reflection time, you might ask them to re-partner and share their reflections, which can be followed by group (voluntary) sharing.

Direct the women’s attention to the “**Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families**” section (pp. 286–287). These suggestions will help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today, in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Provide an opportunity for participants to arrange a time to connect with another sister to continue exploring, reflecting, and offering each other support and accountability. This “**Learn with Your Sister**” activity (pp. 282–285) serves as an entry point for conversations that may never otherwise happen. Let all the women know when you’ll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

Extra! Program Ideas

To enhance your session, and to help each and every participant know the goals that others in the group are working on and aspiring toward, you may want to consider the following:

- Ask one or two of the women, in advance, to prepare a learning about Purim and its four *mitzvot*: hearing the scroll of Esther (*megillah*), eating a festive meal (*seudah*), donating to people in need (*matanot l’evyonim*), and giving food baskets (*mishloach manot*). Ask them to report on what local opportunities there are for community Purim celebrations, and to share how Purim is celebrated in Israel. (For video suggestions highlighting Israeli Purim celebrations, see <https://bit.ly/2YiMaPF>, <https://bit.ly/2MgAJS7>.)
- You may wish to combine this session with a *mishloach manot* (Purim gift basket) activity, where everyone brings in canned and packaged foods and together you create *mishloach manot* for needy families in your area. How might such an activity provide a concrete experience of stepping beyond one’s comfort zone?
- Alternatively, follow your session with a Purim party for the elderly. Encourage the women to overcome their natural reserve to create a joyful atmosphere and make meaningful connections.



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