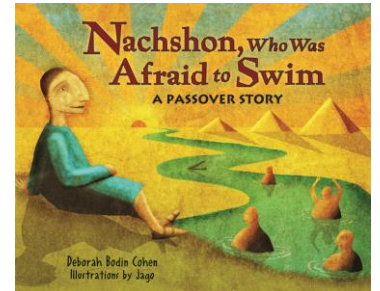


Nachson, Who Was Afraid to Swim

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Illustrated by Jago

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On one foot: This book is based on a *midrash* (Jewish legend) that describes part of the Exodus from Egypt. Nachshon, according to Rabbinic lore, was the first person to plunge into the Red Sea. His faith in God helped to split the waters, allowing the Jewish people to escape to freedom. In some versions of the tale, Nachshon spoke the words “מִי־כִמְכָה בְּאֵלִים יי - *Mi chamocha ba-elim Adonai*” even as his mouth filled with water.

Highlighted Jewish Values:

Courage

אִמְץ לֵב

Om-etz lev

Do not stand idly by

לֹא תֵעָמַד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ

Lo ta-a-mod al dam re-e-cha

Connection to heroes (theme)

Being a hero often involves conquering one's fears in order to help others.

Optional preparation for reading the story:

Gather squares of sandpaper for a desert atmosphere and a large cloth for the Red Sea. You might also gather rolled paper, tissue paper, and other art materials (don't forget the fish) to create the Red Sea on two side by side tables that will eventually part.

Before You Read

Jewish Values and Background Information

Ometz lev – courage

Three aspects of this value to consider

- Courage involves pushing away ones fears
- Willingness to try something new
- One way to gain courage is to look at the situation from a new perspective



Like Abraham, who leaves the security of his home to travel to an unknown land, and Queen Esther, who bravely informs the king of her Jewishness, Biblical heroes typically display great courage by conquering their fears in order to ensure the future of the Jewish people. Ometz lev, the Hebrew phrase for courage, literally means a strong heart. Jewish sources offer suggestions on how to strengthen one's heart. Queen Esther fasted and prayed to God; King David wrote songs and psalms. Rav Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Israel, suggests learning to view one's fears through a new lens (*Middot, ha-Ra'aya Pahdanut* 4).

Lo tachmod – Do not stand idly by

Three aspects of this value to consider

- This statement requires individuals to protect others from harm
- At times, preventing injury may require physical actions, such as running for help
- Saving/helping others can also involve speaking up and voicing one’s opinions

The Talmud, a second century volume of Rabbinic commentary and law, interprets the Biblical injunction “Do not stand idly by the blood of your fellow” (Lev. 19:16) to mean that every individual must go to great lengths to protect others from harm (*Sanhedrin 73a*). Whether a person is about to be injured physically, or whether a life is being threatened in a more subtle way through poverty, slavery, or illness, etc., “all individuals are obligated to help those in need” (*Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Gifts to Others 8:10*).



When You Read

Introducing the story and engaging the children

Set the stage with questions

Ask children to free-associate the word “courage.” List their answers. What does it mean have courage or act bravely? Can they describe book, movie characters or real life individuals who have displayed courage? When is courage needed?

Choose a storytelling technique (optional)

1. Explain that the Hebrew phrase for courage, *ometz lev*, really means strength of heart. Ask the class to create a hand motion for this Hebrew phrase. Make that motion each time Nachshon shows courage. They might also hum a slavery song such as “*Avadim Hayinu*” or “Work, Work, Work Every Day and Every Night” whenever slavery is depicted in the text.






2. Create the sand and the sea with sandpaper and cloth. Use sandpaper squares to scratch out a warning when danger comes on the scene, or act out bathing, and parting the sea. Students might shout words of encouragement to Nachshon, such as “You can do it!” or “We’re in this together!”

After You Read

Making connections and making it personal

Ometz lev/courage	Lo tachmod/don’t stand idly by
Discuss	Discuss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now that we’ve read our book, are there any words that you’d like to add to our courage list? • When did Nachshon display courage? • What ideas about courage does Nachshon learn from Moses? • In what ways are you brave? How do you help others be brave? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than quietly watching while others were in danger, what actions did Nachshon take? • The Torah teaches that it is a mitzvah (a commandment) to protect others from harm. Can you describe a time when you tried to prevent someone from getting hurt? • What might get in the way of taking action when you see an opportunity to do the right thing?



<p>Activities - courage</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drum it out: Singing and drumming can be excellent ways to chase away fears and acquire courage. Challenge students to compose chants or songs that inspire bravery. Create drums from empty oatmeal canisters or other recycled containers so that students can experience the calming effects of drumming while chanting. • Medal of courage: Design courage badges that students can personalize, decorate, and wear. • Courageous guests of honor: Invite members of your community to visit your class to tell stories about challenges they have overcome and/or moments when they exhibited bravery. 	<p>Activities - do not stand idly by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race to the rescue: Design relay races for the class that require students to perform rescue actions as quickly as possible. For example, see how quickly team members can pass a bucket from hand to hand to put out a pretend fire. • Imagine: Play a scenario game, where mildly dangerous or anxiety-inducing situations are described and students are asked to offer suggestions for possible responses. For example: What would you do if you heard one of your friends teasing someone else? • Be prepared: Go on a safety tour of your school building, paying attention to the location of fire extinguishers, emergency exits, defibrillator equipment, etc. Ask students what they would do in specific situations (e.g. if they smell smoke or a gas odors or see a classmate fall while going down the stairs). 
<p>Engaging families – courage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a classroom <i>kol hakavod</i> wall by asking families to send in pictures or notes describing their children’s most recent courageous acts, such as tasting new foods, looking a new person in the eye and shaking hands, or petting a dog. Be sure to set aside a few moments each week to explore the growing wall with your students. • Hold a bravery brunch. Have families invite one guest who is willing to share a story about a time when they acted courageously. 	<p>Engaging families – do not stand idly by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In conjunction with your local Red Cross, schedule a family first aid training course at your school. • Bullying is a hot topic in our communities today. Perhaps families will work together on an anti-bullying campaign. 