



## The Mitten String

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**On one foot:** A family on their journey home from the marketplace, encounters a young mother and her baby requiring help. The two families create a bond that transcends the mother's basic need for assistance. This story evokes memories of simpler times, when it was common to trust passers-by and open your home to strangers.

### Highlighted Jewish Values:

**Each person is unique**

אָדָם יָחִיד  
A-dam ya-chid

**Learning from everyone**

לִוְיָד מִכָּל אָדָם  
Lo-med mi-kol a-dam

### Connection to Journeys

Unexpected and simple journeys can give travelers exposure to new people and ideas.

### Optional preparation for reading the story:

Bring wool and knitting supplies to class. It would be ideal if you could find unprocessed wool. Provide miniature chalk boards and chalk for writing messages.

## Before You Read

### Jewish Values and Background Information

**Each person is unique** – *Adam yachid*

Three aspects of this value to consider:

- A person's uniqueness includes their gifts and challenges.
- Be accepting of every person's differences.
- No matter a person's gifts or challenges, we are equally precious in the eyes of God.



According to the Talmud, a book of Jewish teachings, one of the most remarkable features of the world's population is that no two people are exactly the same. The Talmud notes that when a human king or government mints coins, there is a single prototype, and all the other coins come out exactly the same. But when God created human beings, even though God started out with one original mold, every human being came out different, with no one resembling the other (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a). Judaism teaches that we must learn to appreciate the diversity of human beings and honor every person's individual uniqueness.

## Learning from everyone – *Lomed mikol adam*

Three aspects of this value to consider:

- When you look carefully and observe, you can learn.
- Everyone has something to learn and something to teach.
- Even a bad situation can teach us what not to do.

Judaism values wisdom. One of the highest accolades a person can earn is to be labeled a *talmid chacham* (a wise student). We usually think of a wise person as someone who has acquired a great deal of knowledge. Ben Zoma, a Jewish sage who is quoted in *Pirkei Avot*, an ancient book of moral teachings, challenges this typical definition of wisdom. Ben Zoma notes that a wise person is someone who “learns from everyone” (*Pirkei Avot* 4:1). According to Ben Zoma, wisdom has little to do with how much knowledge one has accumulated; rather wisdom is the process through which one approaches life. If we are open and willing to learn from every person and every situation that we encounter, we are well on our way to becoming wise.

## When You Read

### Introducing the story and engaging the children

#### Set the stage with questions

Part of this story traces the journey of a mitten, detailing the steps involved in how it is made. Think about a mitten that you own. What types of things needed to happen before you could wear your mitten? (Ask this question again after you have finished reading the book.)

#### Choose a storytelling technique (optional)

1. Teach the sign for mitten and the signs for two or three other words that are listed in the Sign Language Glossary at the end of the book. Check out this video to learn how to sign “mitten”:

[Pjfor.me/signing-mittens](http://Pjfor.me/signing-mittens). Ask children to sign their new words every time they hear these words in the story.



2. A traditional story opener invites the audience to prepare themselves to hear a tale. We have all heard “Once upon a time...” The phrase signals us to listen and suspend belief. There are many of these phrases, such as “A long time ago, or perhaps it wasn’t such a very long time - there lived a...” or “In a place, neither near nor far, and a time, neither now nor then...” For more ideas see [Pjfor.me/story-starters](http://Pjfor.me/story-starters). In addition to the book’s opener, you may want to establish a story time opener that is unique for your class.

## After You Read

### Making connections and making it personal

Every person is unique	Learning from everyone
<b>Discuss</b>	<b>Discuss</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are Ruthie’s and Bayla’s unique qualities and challenges? What are your unique qualities and challenges?</li> <li>• Bayla cannot hear. How would your life be different if you were unable to hear?</li> <li>• What are examples of how Bayla uses her unique skills to care for Aaron?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did Ruthie and Bayla learn from each other?</li> <li>• Tell us about something new that you recently learned. Describe some of the steps that went into learning your new skill.</li> <li>• What is something that you could teach to a friend?</li> </ul>



Every person is unique	Learning from everyone
<p><b>Activities</b></p> <p><b>Let it snow:</b> People are like snowflakes – no two are alike. Make snowflake cut-outs with your students, and have the children write something about themselves on each of the six points, such as “I like dogs,” or “Soccer is my best sport.” Collect the snowflakes and read aloud. Can the students guess who is who?</p>  <p><b>No two fingerprints are the same:</b> Make fingerprint designs in play dough. Encourage the children to notice the uniqueness of each print.</p> <p><b>Pass it on:</b> This is a movement version of “whisper down the lane” or “telephone.” Stand in a wide circle. Ask one child to make a motion, such as waving his arms or making a funny face. The next student must try to imitate exactly what she sees, and pass the “motion” to the next person in the circle. No matter how hard we try we cannot imitate another person exactly.</p>	<p><b>Activities</b></p> <p><b>Share your talent:</b> Invite a local artist or craftsperson to visit your class and teach the students. Work together to create a class work of art.</p>  <p><b>Time for partners:</b> Divide the class into two groups. Each group will learn a new skill from the teacher or assistant. Pair students together, one from each group, to learn from one another.</p> <p><b>What can you learn?</b> Similar to charades, ask your students to write different types of people or animals, such as mom, doctor, ant, or elephant, on slips of paper. (This can be prepared ahead.) Put all papers into a hat or jar. Each child chooses a paper and says what they can learn from that person. Make sure you add the unexpected, such as liar or thief. What can children learn from misbehaviors?</p>
<p><b>Engaging families - every person is unique</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compare gloves or mittens at home. How is each pair unique? How do the unique qualities of the mittens/gloves reflect the differences of the owner? Tell a story about the mittens and their wearer.</li> <li>Take a walk around your house with your family- how are the rooms different? How do different family members’ bedrooms tell us about who they are?</li> </ul> 	<p><b>Engaging families - learning from everyone</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have a favorite joke, song or story? Teach the jokes to each other and perform them in a family talent show.</li> <li>Visit a local farm for their annual sheep shearing. Engage in activities, take pictures and share back with the class.</li> </ul> 

