

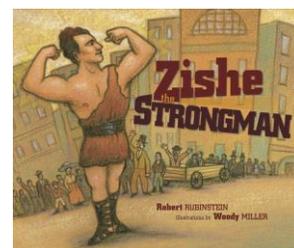


Zishe the Strongman

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On one foot: Zishe was a real-life performing “Iron King” in Europe and the United States in the early 1900s. Zishe was raised in an observant family, and he was conscious that his behavior, both on and off the stage, would reflect on his family and the Jewish people. He was widely known for his kind demeanor, and often took time to visit with hospital patients during his theatrical tours. Some say he is the inspiration for Superman.

Highlighted Jewish Values:

Strength

גְבוּרָה
Ge-vu-rah

Acts of loving kindness

גְּמִלוֹת חֶסֶדִים
Ge-mi-lut cha-sa-dim

Connection to heroes (theme)

Zishe is what we might traditionally think of as a hero: a person with great physical strength. Zishe earned his living with his physical strength, yet maintained his strength of character.

Optional preparation for reading the story:

Display vintage strongman/strong woman posters in the classroom such as those featured on our Pinterest board, [here](#).

Create a physical strength/mental discipline Venn diagram template to be filled in as your class discovers the differences and similarities between physical and inner strengths.

Before You Read

Jewish Values and Background Information

Gevurah - Strength

Three aspects of this value to consider

- Strength can be shown physically, or be a hidden, inner strength
- Self-control and mental discipline are manifestations of strength
- Strong people are not brutes, but are often gentle and calm



Pirkei Avot, an ancient book of Jewish ethical teachings, asks, “Who is strong?” and immediately answers, “the one who controls his/her desires” (4:1). Strength, according to Judaism, is measured not by the size of one’s muscles, but by the type of life that one leads. A strong individual is a self-disciplined, reflective person who engages in ethical and spiritual pursuits. Before he dies, Moses blesses Joshua with the words *chazak v’ematz*, “be strong and courageous” (Deut 31:7). The strength that Moses bestows on Joshua involves not physical power but strength of character. Moses urges Joshua to remain strong in his beliefs and to continually study Torah so that he can firmly and skillfully guide the Jewish people.

Gemilut chasidim - Acts of loving kindness

Three aspects of this value to consider

- Participating in gemilut chasidim is inherently action-based
- Loving kindness means giving more than money, but also time and care
- There is no expectation of anything in return when doing gemilut chasidim

Judaism cites acts of loving kindness, *gemilut chasidim*, as one of the three pillars that support the world (*Pirkei Avot* 1:2). The Talmud, a book of Rabbinic teachings that expands upon the teachings of the Torah, defines gemilut chasidim as benevolent acts, such as visiting the sick, comforting mourners, and burying the dead, that are performed without the expectation of receiving a reward (*Shabbat* 127a). Abraham Joshua Heschel, an important 20th century theologian, notes that performing “leaps of action” and filling the world with kindness is even more important than executing “leaps of faith” and trying to strengthen one’s spiritual beliefs.

When You Read

Introducing the story and engaging the children

Set the stage with questions

What do you think of when you think of strength?

What are the characteristics of a strong person?

Choose a storytelling technique (optional)

1: Step right up to the greatest show on earth! Ladies and gentleman, children of all ages, the story you are about to hear is true! Start your storytelling like a circus show. Display one or two vintage circus posters ([PJGtS Pinterest](#)). You might even serve popcorn.

2: Read this story in the playground. After Zishe shows off his feats of strength, encourage your students to do the same. When Zishe exhibits acts of kindness, challenge students to imitate those, too.



After You Read

Making connections and making it personal

Gevruah/strength	Gemilut chasidim/acts of loving kindness
Discuss	Discuss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Zishe show physical strength? • Our rabbis and sages say that real strength is inner strength and being able to control yourself. When have you shown inner strength? • Let’s look through the book together and see what kinds of strength Zishe exhibits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind acts did Zishe do? • An important Jewish value is gemilut chasidim – doing acts of kindness. What do you think the difference is between being kind and doing acts of kindness? • What acts of loving kindness do you/can you do?



Gevurah/strength	Gemilut chasidim/acts of loving kindness
<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inner and outer feats of strength: Set up a station where children can experiment with their own physical strength. How many squats can they do? How long can they stand on one foot? Then create another station where the children can exercise their inner strength and self-control. How long can they look at a piece of candy before eating it? How many deep breaths can they take?  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zishe Day: Create a carnival-like field day of activities, complete with egg and spoon relays and sack races. To culminate the day, put together opportunities for the class to help the greater community by packing bag lunches for a soup kitchen or putting together toiletry sets for a local shelter. 	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass the torch: Create a chain reaction of acts of loving kindness throughout your school by doing something nice for another class and then encouraging that class to pass it along. See if it makes its way through your whole school!  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts of kindness posters: Using your Voices & Visions posters as inspiration, create posters that highlight Jewish text about acts of loving kindness. Discuss student interpretations of a few choices, and then have them artistically represent their ideas. Have each student complete a kindness contract. • Action plan for kindness: Make a plan to help others in your school community and beyond in the next week. Act out in small groups what you intend to do and then follow up with more dramatic play the next week to see how it went.
<p>Engaging families – gevurah/strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families are sure to want to participate in your “Zishe Field Day.” Set up activities where parents and children can compete against one another and others where families have to work together to accomplish their goal. • Invite a yoga instructor (a class parent might even be one!) to lead your class in a session. Yoga is a wonderful example of needing both physical and mental fortitude. 	<p>Engaging families – gemilut chasidim/kindness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome families into the classroom to complete projects that will benefit the greater community. Set up stations where they can make blankets for those in need, sandwiches for a soup kitchen, or bags to pass out to hungry or homeless people their families may encounter.  <p>Check out http://www.projectlinus.org/ to donate your blankets. Examples of easy to make, no-sew, fleece blankets: Pjfor.me/no-sew-blankets “Blessing bag” for those in need: Pjfor.me/blessing-bag</p>

