

Unit 2: B'tzelem Elohim (6.2)

Why B'Tzelem Elohim?

The underpinning of the Jewish value system is the notion that humans were created “*B'Tzelem Elohim*,” in God’s image. This unit explores how we can honor the image of God in ourselves and in others and how that affects the way we behave in the world. The goal is to keep our consciousness of *b'tzelem Elohim* always available to help influence our behavior even as it enhances our self-image and dignity. Rabbi Akiva put it this way ([Avot 3:14](#)) “Beloved [of God] are humans, for they are created in God’s image; but greater still was the love shown to humans in that it was made known to them that they were created in the image of God...” As Kravitz and Olitzky comment on this passage (in their book “*Pirke Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics*”): “...if our bond to God is one of love, it is incumbent upon us to relate lovingly to one another, as human beings, as fellow images of God.”

Beyond self-esteem and love for the other, *B'Tzelem Elohim* also raises the bar on all human potential. If we call God “Creator,” then the bar is raised on our behavior to also be a “creator.” At the very least, we should be productive partners with God in the stewardship of creation. If God feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick, shows mercy, raises the bent over (physically and spiritually) then we must also perform these acts. The prayers (especially the [birkot hashachar](#)) are given new meaning, both praising God and reminding humans of our obligation to follow God’s lead to the best of our abilities.

This unit is building the argument that humanity, and particularly the Jewish people who have embraced this aspect of their master creation story, have a purpose and mission to their lives of divine proportions. **This value underlies the units that we will study the rest of the year - our status as images of God will help us summon the courage to act when needed, will clearly point to our responsibilities towards others, will remind us of the power in speech and words, and will make us seekers of peace and wholeness.**

Younger students will need some introduction to the language of metaphor. They will need guidance distinguishing how an image differs or is similar to the actual object. The phrase “partners with God” is helpful. ‘God discussions’ may also surface issues for parents. You may want to reiterate that you are not really teaching theology, rather a focused look at how our behavior and values are influenced by embracing the tradition of *b'tzelem Elohim* and that we are taking the definition of God’s image from mainstream biblical and liturgical texts. The book “[Teaching about God and Spirituality](#)” by Goodman and Blumberg (ARE/Behrman House) is a great resource for background and responses to “teachable moments.” Rabbi Harold Kushner’s “[When Children Ask About God: A Guide for Parents Who Don’t Always Have All the Answers](#)” (Schocken) and “[When Your Child Asks Why: Answers for Tough Questions](#)” by Olitzky, Rosman, and Kasakove (Ktav) are also good resources for you and for parents who express concern or desire to know more about handling this potentially touchy topic for parents. Two web sites that might prove useful are:

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/how-to-teach-metaphors-to-children.html> or

http://www.proteacher.org/c/76_Figurative_Language_-_similes,_metaphors_and_more.html

Unit 2: B'tzelem Elohim (6.2)

Developmental Lens: Self-Empowerment

Overview

Eleven year olds begin experiencing the physical and emotional changes of adolescence. Their behavior may become awkward or rude. At times they may seem moody or self-absorbed. Sensitivity to their changing bodies aggravates their being easily embarrassed and the need to "save-face" in front of peers. Girls may especially form cliques and worry about who is "in" or "out."

Eleven year olds need a lot of time to process with peers, while they challenge rules, argue, and test the limits of authority. They can do more abstract thinking (understanding value terms such as justice) but will challenge adult explanations with their own assumptions. They are more capable of solving puzzles and brainteasers with thinking skills, and they enjoy being assigned "adult" style work like researching, interviewing, footnoting (even if they fuss on the outside). [Adapted from Yardsticks, child development pamphlets by Chip Wood, published by Northeast Foundation for Children www.responsiveclassroom.org.]

Eleven year olds can use their new abilities of challenging and arguing to partner with God in repairing the world by standing up, and speaking up, for justice. Students will see in Abraham a model for speaking up and arguing for justice. The commentators say that unlikechutzpah, Abraham's arguing used the very characteristics of God as an argument against God ("How can the Judge of the world NOT do Justice?"). Empowerment to argue is natural for sixth graders, but empowerment based on a platform of values that adults endorse is a new skill to acquire. The ability to do the "adult tasks" like research and interviews can empower students (through data and not just emotion) to advocate for a cause and speak out for the cause and the institutions that support it.

Enduring Understandings

Being created in God's image requires me to speak up and act for justice.

Essential Questions

What can I do to make the world a better place?

Unit Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will:

Know: We imitate God by standing up – and speaking up -- for justice. Our tradition is full of stories with characters who spoke up for justice, even when it was uncomfortable or dangerous.

Feel: We are responsible for helping to care for the world as partners with God.

Do: We find ways to invest our time and effort helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves; we support organizations that are working to make the world a better place for all.

Kickoff Questions

The students should take the Unit Kickoff Questions survey online

Week 1: B'tzelem Elohim Havurah (6.2.1)

In the first class of the 6th grade *b'tzelem Elohim* unit, we focus on the holiness of our speech. We begin with breathing exercises to become aware of our own breathing. We then move to the text study of God's creation of Adam with the "breath of life" and question how we can use our breath, a gift from God, in holy ways and to become partners with God. We end by learning about the creation of the organization Jewish World Watch, and how it works to act *b'tzelem Elohim* as partners with God.

Suggested Settings

This month we suggest that you engage in a social action or volunteer project. You may wish to visit/ join an activity with your local Hebrew Home, Interages through Jewish Council for the Aging, a Jewish Group Home, [Kids Enjoy Exercise Now](#), a Friendship Circle, or another group that honors the image of God in all people. Alternatively, the Jewish month of Heshvan is [Jewish Social Action Month](#), and you may wish to use the havurah to participate in your community or synagogue's social action project. After you engage in the volunteering activity, parents and children should attend their separate study sessions, coming back together at the end.

Learning Goals

- Students will recognize that one way to appreciate the gift of the breath of life is to use it in a sacred way.
- Students will re-tell the story of the creation of Adam.
- Students will feel empowered as "partners with God" to repair the world.
- Students will be inspired to imitate other Jews who sought to partner with God and repair the world.

Activities & Guiding Questions

Breathing Warm-Up

Time Allotment: 10 minutes

The following breathing activity will help students begin to relate to their breath as a sacred tool. The activity also gives the participants a tool for controlling emotions, toning down anger, and a group relaxation activity to diminish stress.

Lead students in a yoga style breathing activity, such as the following activities taken from ["Breathing Techniques to Relax Your Child" by Patti Teal.](#)

1. Belly breathing: have students lie on their backs and put a hand on their bellies, taking slow, deep breaths, and feel their bellies rise and fall.
2. Elevator breathing:
 - (a) Students should sit in a comfortable, cross-legged position or lie down on their backs.

- (b) Begin by having students observe the natural inhalation and exhalation of their breath without changing anything, then proceed with the directions.
- (c) **Directions:**
Your breath is an elevator taking a ride through your body.
Breathe in through your nose and start the elevator ride.
Breathe out and feel your breath go all the way to the basement, down to your toes.
Breathe in and take your elevator breath up to your belly.
Hold it. Now, breathe out all your air. (Pause)
This time, breathe in and take your elevator breath up to your chest.
Hold it. Now breathe out all your air. (Pause)
Now breathe in and take your elevator breath up to the top floor, up through your throat and into your face and forehead.
Feel your head fill with breath. Hold it.
Now breathe out and feel your elevator breath take all your troubles and worries down through your chest, your belly, your legs, and out through the elevator doors in your feet.
(Repeat)

Discussion Questions:

1. How did this exercise make you feel?
2. Are you usually aware of your breath? When are you most aware of your breath? (e.g. after exercise, while swimming, seeing someone for whom breathing is difficult)
3. Do you ever feel grateful for your breath?
4. When do you feel like you are using your breath in the right way?
5. When do you feel like you are using your breath in the wrong way?

How this activity relates to the enduring understanding: Our breath is precious and should be used in the right way.

Tags: yoga, breathing, set induction, in-person, virtual, havurah

Bereishit 2:7 Text Study*

Time Allotment: 20-25 minutes

1. Remind students of the Biblical story of creation and challenge them to see if they remember what was created on each day of creation. (Day 1: light; Day 2: the firmament to separate the heavens above and water below; Day 3: the water was pooled together to reveal the land; grass and trees; Day 4: sun, moon and stars; Day 5: water creatures and sky creatures; Day 6: land animals and humans; Day 7: Shabbat.)
2. Ask students: According to the Torah, how was the first human created?
3. Study Breishit 2:7 together.

Discussion Questions:

1. What questions do the students have about this *pasuk* (verse)? Brainstorm and write down all of the class's questions about this *pasuk*.
2. Focus on God creating the human using the "breath of life." Why do you think God created the first human through the breath of life?

3. What is so significant about breath? Besides breathing, what other actions does breath help us with? (If students don't come up with the connection between breath and speech, ask for a volunteer to hold his/her breath and sing the first line of their favorite song or say the first line of a poem at the same time.)
4. The interpreter Onkelos translates the words "living creature" as "speaking spirit" (רוּחַ מְדַבֵּר). God breathed life into the first human, who then (as a result of that breath) became a creature able to speak. In Onkelos's view, what makes us human is our ability to speak – and this ability is holy. Ask students: why do you think Onkelos thought the ability to speak was so important? Do you think speech is holy? Do you think some kinds of speech could be holy?
5. Look at Bereishit 1. What does God do with speech in this chapter? (God creates the world through speech.) Why do you think speech is so important to the creation of the world?

How this activity relates to the enduring understanding: Our speech is holy and should be used for holy purposes.

Tags: Torah story, text study, Creation, in-person, virtual, havurah

*Partners Story**

Time Allotment: 10-15 minutes

Read or act out [the story Partners](#) (from *Does God Have A Big Toe* by Marc Gellman and Oscar de Mejo) to introduce the idea of humans as partners with God. (Note: In order for students to understand this story, you will first need to introduce the idea of Midrash. Midrash (MID-rash) comes from a root meaning "to study," "to seek out" or "to investigate." They are stories that elaborate on incidents in the Bible, to derive a principle of Jewish law or provide a moral lesson. For more information, click [here](#).)

Discussion Questions:

1. When have you been a partner with someone? Did you enjoy that experience? How did you feel knowing that the other person was counting on you? How did you feel counting on someone else?
2. Looking at our world today – what are some problems that you see? If we are supposed to be partners with God, how can we work to solve those problems?
3. How can we use our power of speech to be partners with God? What are some practical ways we can use our speech to partner with God?
4. Who are some people you know or know of who use their speech to be good partners with God to make the world a better place?

How this activity relates to the enduring understanding: We should use our speech to act as partners with God.

Tags: partners, story, drama, contemporary Midrash, in-person, virtual, havurah

Values In Action: Jewish World Watch

Time Allotment: 15 minutes

On Rosh Hashana 2004, Rabbi Harold Schulweis of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California called upon his congregation to establish a new organization: Jewish World Watch. Jewish

World Watch works to mobilize synagogues, their schools, their members and the community to combat genocide and other egregious violations of human rights around the world.

Watch [this video about JWW in action](#) and study together this excerpt from Rabbi Schulweis' sermon arguing for the creation of a Jewish World Watch.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Rabbi Schulweis, why was it important *as Jews* to start this organization?
2. How does his decision to start Jewish World Watch relate to our creation *b'tzelem Elohim*?
3. What does it mean to be partners with God? How does JWW working to help others make us partners with God?
4. What is the distinction that Rabbi Heschel makes between being guilty and being responsible? Can you think of examples in your life where you may not be guilty, but you might be responsible? What can you do to live up to that responsibility?

How this activity relates to the enduring understanding: Our partnership with God requires us to stand up and speak out for justice for all people.

Tags: Jewish World Watch, justice organization, partners, sermon, Heschel, values in action, havurah, in-person, virtual

Week 1: B'tzelem Elohim Havurah Parent Education (6.2.1)

The parents will contrast the story of Noah - an obedient servant who obeys God without argument, to Avraham, who speaks out and becomes for us the model of hospitality and instruction. It is important to end the session with parents asking the question "For what causes would you like to speak up in your personal/family/work/community life? How can we teach our children to be people who speak up for the right cause in appropriate ways?" As parents of emerging adolescents the guidance from these stories and rituals should include managing emotions and channeling anger towards appropriate causes.

Learning Goals

- Parents will recognize that a sacred use of our "living breath" is to speak up for justice.
- Parents will consider how to teach their children to speak up appropriately.

Activities & Guiding Questions

Text Study: The Noah and Avraham Stories

Time Allotment: 40 minutes

1. Read the story of Noah and the flood ([Bereishit 6:5-7:24](#)).
 - a. Why do you think Noah is silent in this entire story?
 - b. Would you consider Noah to be a hero?
2. Contrast the story of Noah with the story of Avraham and Sodom ([Bereishit 18](#)).
 - a. What enables Avraham to speak up even against a divine decree?
 - b. Are there any clues in the text that indicate that God wanted Avraham to argue for Sodom?
 - c. What is the power of the argument: "How can the judge of the world not do justice?"

Discussion Questions:

1. Are you more like Noah or Avraham?
2. What would you like to speak up for in your personal/ family/ work/ community life?
3. Avraham not only spoke up – he also knew how to shape his arguments. Consider the topic that you would like to speak up for in your own life. Working with a hevruta (learning partner), figure out how to best cast your argument so that it is successful.

Bringing It Home: Teaching Our Children to Argue the Right Way

Time Allotment: 15 minutes

Note: You may wish to bring a social worker or parenting expert to speak with parents about this topic.

Read the article excerpt together about teaching kids to argue.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we teach our children to be people who speak up for the right causes in appropriate ways?
2. What can we learn from the stories of Noah and Avraham about how to teach our children to argue?

Car Talk

What is a cause you would like to speak out about? What are some ways you can speak out about issues in today's world?

Week 2: B'tzelem Elohim (6.2.2)

It is a sacred duty to speak out for justice.

This week's class is ambitious. Students will contrast the stories of Noah and the Flood, and Avraham and Sodom, specifically focusing on whether – and how – one should speak up. They will engage in a defense of Avraham for his “insubordination and heresy” in “arguing” with God.

We begin with the “What Would You Do?” clip to model a modern day situation where people have to choose whether to speak up or act for justice. With this clip, we also introduce the idea that the stories of Noah and Avraham may have been “What Would You Do?” opportunities to see what course of action they would pursue. Did Noah and/or Avraham pass the test?

Learning Goals

- Student will re-tell the story of Noah and the flood.
- Students will brainstorm why Noah was silent, and whether this was an appropriate response.
- Students will re-tell the story of Avraham and Sodom.
- Students will consider whether Avraham was correct to “negotiate” with God for the fate of Sodom.
- Students will know the phrase "How can the Judge of the World NOT do justice?" and be able to explain how we can imitate God as a model towards achieving justice.
- Students will contrast Avraham's pleading for Sodom with Noah's silence at the time of the flood.

Activities & Guiding Questions

What Would You Do? Video clip and discussion

Time Allotment: 15 minutes

Primetime: What Would You Do? is a hidden camera television show. In the series, actors act out scenes of conflict or illegal activity in public settings while hidden cameras videotape the scene, and the focus is on whether or not bystanders intervene, and how. (Source: Wikipedia). In the following clip, a woman does not have enough money to pay for her groceries in the checkout line. What do the other customers do?

Watch the [first four minutes of the video](#).

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think some of the customers do not help out the woman in distress?
2. Why do you think some of the customers help out the woman in distress?
3. What do you think you would do in this situation?
4. Besides giving the woman money for her groceries, what else could the customers have done to help the woman?
5. How can we make sure that we are people who do the right thing in situations like this? When we want to make sure that we perform well in a play or in a sport game, we practice. What are some ways we could practice for situations like this?

How this activity relates to the enduring understanding: It is important to speak up/ act to help others in need.

Tags: What Would You Do, television show, poverty, set induction, in-person, virtual, havurah

*Noah Skit and Discussion**

Time Allotment: 20 minutes

Act out the story of the Flood using Torah Aura's [Experiencing the Torah, 17-23](#). (Students will have watched two videos about the Noah story on their MyShalomLearning page prior to class.) When assigning parts, ask the students what they think the main role is, and they will probably say Noah. Make a big deal out of assigning the Noah role.

Discussion Questions:

1. Now that we have finished acting out the skit, who do you think was the main character in this story?
2. Ask the student who played Noah: "Were you surprised by anything about your role?" (Student will probably say that s/he did not have any lines to say.) Tell the students to look through the Noah story in [Bereishit 6:5-7:24](#) to see if Noah speaks in the actual Torah text. (It is a long story, so you may want to divide students and assign them each a part of the text.) Students will discover that Noah does not speak to God at all during the Flood story.
3. Brainstorm with students: What could Noah have said? Who could he have spoken to? (Possible suggestions: warned the people around him to do teshuvah, invited other people onto the Ark with him, asked God to forgive the people or give them another chance.)
4. Why do you think Noah is silent in this story? Why don't we hear anything from Noah? (Possible suggestions: he is too scared to speak up, he doesn't care about the other people, he doesn't think that he can speak to God, he is afraid of what the people will do to him, etc.)
5. In what way is Noah a hero in this story? Do you wish that he had done more? What more could he have done?
6. What are we supposed to learn from Noah? Do you think that sometimes we are supposed to learn what we should *not do* from Biblical characters?

How this activity relates to the enduring understanding: Noah does not speak up to save the world from the Flood.

Tags: Noah, speech, Flood, havurah, skit, drama, Torah story, text study, in-person, virtual

*Avraham Arguing With God –In-Person Option**

Time Allotment: 40 minutes

Note to teacher: The story of Avraham arguing for Sodom is an important master story for the human/God relationship in Jewish tradition. When Avraham "argues" with God over the fate of *Sodom* he does so within a 'God-arranged' teachable moment (which you can compare to the "What Would You Do" video clip that students viewed at the beginning of class). God sets up the moment by saying "How can I not tell Avraham [who understands the idea of equitable justice, *tzedek u'mishpat*, and will surely pass it along to his children (verse 19)] what I am about

to do!" God prompts Avraham to be a true *ezer k'negdo*, an oppositional force for good, a true partner with God on matters of justice. This is why Avraham realizes that he must argue with God to measure up to God's own standards. The key phrase is "How can the judge of the world NOT do justice?" It is important to note for participants that it is not the "haggling" to get God down to 10 righteous people that is Abraham's success, it is the empowerment to speak up, to speak truth to power on behalf of others. That is the model of righteous empowerment that we want for these 6th graders in their lives.

1. Read the story of Avraham "arguing" with God over the fate of Sodom ([Bereishit 18: 16-33](#)). (Torah Aura, Experiencing the Torah, pp. 37-39)
2. Tell students that they are a group of defense attorneys. A potential client, Avraham, has just come into their office and showed them the complaint filed by the Society of Extremely Righteous People accusing him of insubordination and heresy. Avraham has asked them to defend him in this case.
3. Students should present their defense to the judge. (You may wish to serve as judge, or you could invite a member of the clergy, another teacher or a parent to serve as the judge). Divide students into three groups that will:
 - (1) present an opening statement that explains their theory of why Avraham is innocent;
 - (2) examine 1-2 Biblical witnesses for the defense;
 - (3) present a closing statement.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think back to the "Partners" story we read last week. How does Avraham act as God's partner here?
2. How does Avraham use his speech in a holy way?
3. Think back to the "What Would You Do?" clip that we saw in the beginning. Do you think that God was giving Avraham a chance to see what he would do? Do you think Avraham did the right thing?
4. Are there ever times in your life when you need to choose whether to act as a partner to someone else to enable them to do the right thing? How does thinking of yourself as a "partner" rather than an opponent change your perception of the situation?

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

Avraham is a model for using our power of speech to speak out for justice.

Tags: Avraham, Sodom, text study, Torah story, trial, courtroom, partners, drama, havurah, in-person

Avraham Arguing With God – Virtual Class Option*

Time Allotment: 25 minutes

Note to teacher: The story of Avraham arguing for Sodom is an important master story for the human/God relationship in Jewish tradition. When Avraham "argues" with God over the fate of *Sodom* he does so within a 'God-arranged' teachable moment (which you can compare to the "What Would You Do" video clip that students viewed at the beginning of class). God sets up the moment by saying "How can I not tell Avraham [who understands the idea of equitable justice, *tzedek u'mishpat*, and will surely pass it along to his children (verse 19)] what I am about

to do!" God prompts Avraham to be a true *ezer k'negdo*, an oppositional force for good, a true partner with God on matters of justice. This is why Avraham realizes that he must argue with God to measure up to God's own standards. The key phrase is "How can the judge of the world NOT do justice?" It is important to note for participants that it is not the "haggling" to get God down to 10 righteous people that is Abraham's success, it is the empowerment to speak up, to speak truth to power on behalf of others. That is the model of righteous empowerment that we want for these 6th graders in their lives.

Read the story of Avraham "arguing" with God over the fate of Sodom ([Bereishit 18: 16-33](#)). (Torah Aura, Experiencing the Torah, pp. 37-39)

Tell students that they are a group of defense attorneys. A potential client, Avraham, has just come into their office and showed them this complaint filed by the Society of Extremely Righteous People accusing him of insubordination and heresy. Avraham has asked them to defend him in this case.

Students should work together to create a defense opening statement that explains their theory of why Avraham is innocent. Ask students to brainstorm their best defenses for Avraham and list them on the virtual whiteboard. Make sure students address all the issues in the complaint. Then together create a 1-2 paragraph statement defending Avraham arguing that he in fact did the correct thing.

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

Avraham is a model for using our power of speech to speak out for justice.

Tags: Avraham, Sodom, text study, Torah story, trial, courtroom, partners, drama, virtual

Think About It

Consider your talents and abilities. What can your role be right now as God's partner in making our world a better place for all living beings?

Week 3: B'tzelem Elohim (6.2.3)

In this class, students will first review the stories we have covered in this unit so far in the “Press Conference” game. They will study the story of the daughters of Tzelofchad as Biblical models for speaking up for justice. They will then explore Jewish responses to slavery in America, and consider the case of Rabbi David Einhorn who spoke out against slavery and had to flee his home as a result. You may wish to invite a parent or member of your congregation to speak with the class about how he or she speaks out for justice, or you can end with a journaling activity for students to consider how they can speak out for justice.

Learning Goals

- Students will re-tell the story of the daughters of Tzelofchad.
- Students will articulate a Jewish argument for speaking out for justice.
- Students will appreciate the heroism of Jewish figures in history who spoke out for justice even when it was dangerous.
- Students will consider how they can speak out for justice in their future professions, the causes they commit to, and in their everyday lives.

Set Induction: Press Conference

Time Allotment: 10-15 minutes

This game is modeled on the “Press Conference” game in the TV game show “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” and is meant as a review of the stories and ideas we have covered so far in this unit. One student (“the presenter”) gives a press conference while the other students ask questions as reporters. The presenter does not know who s/he is portraying in the press conference, and must deduce it from the questions that the reporters ask. (The students will have watched [a version of Press Conference on MyShalomLearning before class](#) – this is a modified version of that game.) In our version, the presenter will only need to guess his or her name.

1. Choose one student to be the presenter.
2. Inform all the other students (by whispering in their ears or chatting them privately) of the presenter’s identity, so that the presenter is the only one who doesn’t know who s/he is portraying.
3. The presenter should start giving the press conference, call on the other students, and answer their questions. The presenter should deduce his or her identity from the questions that the reporters ask. Even when the presenter does not know his or her identity, s/he must try to answer the questions.
4. Play a few rounds of this game. Use a mix of people in the news, and some of the Biblical characters we have studied in this unit such as Avraham, Noah, Adam, the people of Sodom, an animal on the ark, etc.
5. At the end of the game, remind students that we have been talking about using our speech to pursue justice. Which of the characters you portrayed in the press conference today acted or spoke up for justice? In today’s class, we will discuss other figures in Jewish history who spoke up for what is right.

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

Review of the Biblical characters and stories we have studied so far in this unit.

Tags: Set Induction, Whose Line Is It Anyway, Press Conference, Game, Havurah, Virtual, In-Person

Daughters of Tzelofchad Video and Discussion

Time Allotment: 15 minutes

In [BeMidbar Chapter 27](#), the daughters of Tzelofchad approach Moshe because their father died, leaving five daughters and no sons. According to the Israelite system, only sons were allowed to inherit property. They tell Moshe that they want to inherit their father's property.

[Watch the G-dcast video about the daughters of Tzelofchad.](#)

Discussion Questions:

1. Look closely at the argument the daughters of Tzelofchad present to Moshe. How would you explain their argument in your own words?
2. What is Moshe's reaction?
3. How does God respond?
4. The rabbis wonder why we learn this law of inheritance from the daughters of Tzelofchad. Why wasn't the law originally this way? Study Rashi's answer. Does Rashi think it was good or bad that they spoke out for their rights?
5. Think back to our discussion about being partners with God in the world. How were the daughters of Tzelofchad partners with God in the creation of the laws of inheritance? Do you think that this law is presented through the daughters of Tzelofchad to show how important it is, as partners with God, to speak up for the right thing?

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

The daughters of Tzelofchad spoke up for justice, and God told them they were correct.

Tags: video clip, G-dcast, Torah story, daughters, women, gender equality, arguing, havurah, in-person, virtual

*Values in Action: Speaking Out Against Slavery in America**

Time Allotment: 30 minutes

1. Slavery in America began in 1619 when the first African slaves were brought to Jamestown, and continued until the end of the Civil War (1861-65) [when the nation's 4 million slaves were freed](#). Remind students of [this clip from the film Amistad](#) that they watched on MyShalomLearning in preparation for class where a slave demands his freedom.
2. Jews in America were divided in the Civil War – on the whole, Northern Jews supported the North, and Southern Jews supported the South. Watch [this video from Passages through the Fire: Jews and the Civil War](#) that explains how Jews related to slavery (show just the first 4-minute clip about Jews and slavery).

Discussion Questions:

1. Why didn't more Jews speak out against slavery?

2. The video talks about Rabbi Morris Raphall of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York who delivered a widely-reprinted sermon, "A Bible View of Slavery" that stated that slavery was not a sin because people in the Torah had slaves. How would you respond to his argument?
3. Rabbi David Einhorn of Baltimore's Congregation Har Sinai was horrified by Rabbi Raphall's sermon and wrote a response arguing that slavery is a violation of the Torah. Read these excerpts from Rabbi Einhorn's article.
 - (a) What arguments does Rabbi Einhorn use to show that slavery violates the Torah?
 - (b) How does the Torah's statement that we are all created *b'tzelem Elohim* prove to Rabbi Einhorn that slavery is forbidden?
4. Read the excerpt from Rabbi Einhorn's obituary about the reaction of people in Maryland to his sermon against slavery. (Remind students of the map in the beginning of the video, showing Baltimore just below the Mason-Dixon line and Philadelphia just above it.) What happened to Rabbi Einhorn for speaking out against slavery? Why do you think Rabbi Einhorn spoke out even in the face of danger?

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

Believing that we are all created in the image of God compelled some rabbis to speak out against slavery (even though it was dangerous).

Tags: Civil War, slavery, American Jewish history, David Einhorn, Morris Raphall, abolition, video clip, havurah, in-person, virtual

Guest Speaker

Time Allotment: 10-15 minutes

Invite a parent or member of your community/ synagogue who is a judge/ lawyer/ activist to speak (briefly) to the class about why and how to speak up for justice, so that students get a real world feel for the mitzvah of speaking up. These professions are ways to partner with God on a daily basis. The speaker could be prompted to talk about the challenges of speaking up and the courage it takes to stay the course for justice. This would help foreshadow the next unit of *gevurah*.

Before your guest arrives, brainstorm with the class 5 questions you have for your speaker (see Jeffrey Salkin's *Partner With God at Work* for great interview questions for your guests). When your guest finishes, students should politely ask the speaker these questions.

Note: This is a good opportunity for students to learn how to show *kavod* (honor) and express their *hakarat hatov* for the speaker, who is taking time out to spend with them. Make sure to prep students beforehand on how to welcome and thank the speaker.

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

We can partner with God by choosing professions or causes where we speak up for justice.

Tags: speaker, profession, community engagement, havurah, in-person, virtual

Bringing It Home: Journaling or Discussion

Time Allotment: 5-10 minutes

Journal or discuss: Think of a time when you noticed someone in distress or being mistreated. What was your reaction? Did you stay silent or speak up? When is it better to stay silent and when is it better to speak up? What will you do next time you see something that you know is wrong?

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

How can we speak up for justice in our own lives?

Tags: journaling, discussion, bringing it home, havurah, in-person, virtual

Week 3: B'tzelem Elohim Home Study Option

Learning Goals

- Students will re-tell the story of the daughters of Tzelofchad.
- Students will articulate a Jewish argument for speaking out for justice.
- Students will appreciate the heroism of Jewish figures in history who spoke out for justice even when it was dangerous.
- Families will commit to a social action project this month.

This week, students will learn about two episodes from Jewish history where people spoke up for justice. They will then, together with their families, select an appropriate project to do for Jewish Social Action Month. The hope is to make this an annual family activity that much like a 'regular holiday' becomes a sacred occasion for the family that reinforces the relevance of Jewish practice. If appropriate for a student or family, they can also do advocacy work on behalf of an institution or cause, using their language skills for sacred purposes.

Daughters of Tzelofchad Video and Discussion Board

In [BeMidbar Chapter 27](#), the daughters of Tzelofchad approach Moshe because their father died, leaving five daughters and no sons. According to the Israelite system, only sons were allowed to inherit property. They tell Moshe that they want to inherit their father's property.

[Watch the G-dcast video about the daughters of Tzelofchad.](#)

Discussion Question:

Do you think the daughters of Tzelofchad did the right thing or the wrong thing by challenging the laws of inheritance? Explain your answer.

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

The daughters of Tzelofchad spoke up for justice, and God told them they were correct.

Tags: video clip, G-dcast, Torah story, daughters, women, gender equality, arguing, home study

Values in Action: Speaking Out Against Slavery in America

Slavery in America began in 1619 when the first African slaves were brought to Jamestown, and continued until the end of the Civil War (1861-65) when the nation's 4 million slaves were freed.

Jews in America were divided in the Civil War – on the whole, Northern Jews supported the North, and Southern Jews supported the South. Watch [this video from Passages through the Fire: Jews and the Civil War](#) that explains how Jews related to slavery. (The clip ends at the 4:46 mark; if you are interested you may wish to see the other two clips as well: On Anti-Semitism and the Civil War and On the Jewish Legacy of the Civil War.)

Discussion Question:

The video talks about Rabbi Morris Raphall of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York who delivered a widely-reprinted sermon, "A Bible View of Slavery" that stated that slavery was **not a sin** because people in the Torah had slaves. Using a story or idea that we have studied together this year, explain how you would respond to his argument from a Jewish perspective.

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding:

Believing that we are all created in the image of God compelled some rabbis to speak out against slavery (even though it was dangerous).

Tags: Civil War, slavery, American Jewish history, David Einhorn, Morris Raphall, abolition, video clip, home study

Family Social Action Project/ Table Talk

Have a family discussion about a social action project that you would like to participate in together. Choose a social justice project and commit to participating in one during this Jewish month of Heshvan. Websites such as [Religious Action Center](#) or [JConnect](#) have suggestion for activities and projects, or you may wish to join an activity in your synagogue or community. In the discussion board below, tell your friends what social action activity your family has decided to do.

How this Activity Relates to the Enduring Understanding: In our own lives, we need to act and speak out for justice.

Tags: social action, social justice, table talk, Heshvan, bringing it home, home study

Week 4: B'tzelem Elohim (6.2.4)

Tzedakah Allocations Process (TAP)

*Tzedakah Allocations Process (TAP) Activity**

Time Allotment: the entire class period

In our previous classes in this unit, we have discussed the imperative to speak out for justice, and studied stories of people who chose to speak out – or not speak out – for justice. In our class today, students will engage in an abridged TAP to decide to which of six Jewish organizations that act or speak out for justice they should give their tzedakah money. The activities today are based on the excellent AJWS guide: [“Where Do You Give? Making It Real: Guiding Students Through A Tzedakah Allocations Process \(TAP\)”](#) edited by Lisa Exler.

Step 1: Introducing the TAP

A Tzedakah Allocations Process (TAP) is a process by which people decide to which organizations they will donate. As the AJWS Guide notes: “Students in Jewish educational contexts often have an opportunity to give tzedakah regularly, such as through their class’s weekly tzedakah collection or a school-wide fundraiser. Often, many students’ experience of tzedakah ends there, with the clink of the coin in the tzedakah box or the act of handing a check to the teacher. However, determining where to give the money—referred to in this guide as the “tzedakah allocations process” (TAP)—is arguably as important for the students’ developing understanding of their awesome responsibility as philanthropists as is giving the money itself.”

Today, students will engage in their own TAP to determine where to donate their tzedakah money.

Note to teacher: What money should you use for the TAP? In consultation with your education director, you may choose: 1) to ask students to bring in \$18 (or another amount) for tzedakah for this purpose; 2) have students raise money at the Chanukah party/ Maccabiah games in next week’s havurah for the organization that you choose; 3) use the tzedakah money that you collect at your school this month.

Step 2: Students Choose Organizations to Research

Divide students into groups of two or three to research and present on an organization that acts or speaks up for justice. We have here information and videos about four organizations; you should also feel free to add any organizations that are close to your heart or with which your synagogue or institution is affiliated [that act or speak up for justice](#). Allow students to choose which of these organizations they would like to research.

1) Aware: Adolescents Working for Awesome Relationship Experiences

Website: <http://www.awarenow.org/www>

Prezi about Aware: JCADA’s Youth Prevention Initiative:

<http://prezi.com/h5v0zzdn9nrb/aware-jcadas-youth-prevention-initiative/>

Facts about dating safety: <http://www.awarenow.org/www/docs/1>

2) Mazon

Website: www.mazon.org

Video Overview of Mazon: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nZ0SoDyQ0g>

Mazon Strategic Initiatives: <http://mazon.org/our-programs/strategic-initiatives/>

3) Peres Center for Peace: Twinned Peace Sports Schools

Website: http://www.peres-center.org/sport_current

Video: The Story of Muhammed and Yossi -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxSi0U4JRL0>

About the Twinned Peace Sports Schools:

http://www.peres-center.org/twinned_peace_sports_schools

4) The Birthday Angels Birthday Party Project

Website: http://birthday-angels.org/site/index.asp?depart_id=70698&lat=en

Video: Welcome to Birthday Angels:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Fo2kphfjGjU#at=50

Birthday Angels: How Can You Help: <http://birthday-angels.org/70698/How-Can-You-Help->

Step 3: Students Research Organization and Prepare Presentations

Research your organization using the links above. Prepare a 5 minute presentation for the class about your organization, along with a visual (a powerpoint or document that you can share with the class online if this is a virtual class, and a poster if this is an in-person class) explaining what the organization does and why it is important. Make sure to address:

- What does this organization do?
- Why is there a need for this organization?
- How much money does the organization need?
- What would our tzedakah money be used for?
- How does this organization's mission relate to acting or speaking up for justice?

Step 4: Students Present to the Class About their Tzedakah Organizations

Students should give a 5 minute presentation explaining their organization and why it is a worthy recipient of the tzedakah money. Encourage the other students in the class to ask questions if they would like more information.

Step 4: Students Consider their Priorities

Students should engage in a discussion to consider their priorities. The teacher should guide the discussion but let the students grapple with the issues without giving any answers.

Topics for discussion might include:

- Do we want to donate to local or Israeli organizations?
- Should we donate to organizations that serve people with the most acute need or should we think about building for the future?
- Where can our money have the most impact?

- Should we give all the money to one organization or divide the money between different organizations?

Step 5: Decision Time!

In order to make their decisions, students should engage in a consensus activity or a ranking activity. Remind students to speak out and advocate for the organization they think is most deserving, but to do so with *kavod* (respect).

- **Consensus Activity** – Consensus is an activity where “[s]tudents engage in a process of discussion that results in a mutual agreement that addresses all legitimate concerns. All students support the decision even if they think it might not be the best possible decision.” (AJWS Guide) This activity is preferred but requires enough time. Make sure you have at least 20-30 minutes for students to engage in discussion and reach a decision that everyone agrees with, even if it is not necessarily all the students’ top choice. Tools for arriving at consensus can be found here.
- **Ranking Activity:** Give students five stickers. Students should stick the stickers on the poster for the organization that they believe is most deserving. Students may choose to award all five stickers to one organization or divide their stickers among the organizations they feel are most deserving (e.g. 3 stickers to one organization, and 1 sticker each to two organizations). Instead of stickers, you can give each student a pen or marker and tell them they can make 5 check marks on the posters.

Step 6: Write a Letter or Email to the “Winning” Organization(s)

As a class, draft a letter or email to the organization informing them of your gift and why you decided to donate to them.

How this Activity Connects to the Enduring Understanding:

- Highlights organizations that are working to act or speak up for justice
- Exposes students to different areas of justice (tzedakah) work where they can get involved
- Challenges students to prioritize between different highly worthy organizations
- Gives students an opportunity to speak up and argue for their preferred organization in a respectful and persuasive manner

Tags: Tzedakah, Allocation, Consensus, Israel, America, justice, in-person, virtual, havurah, videos, hunger, poverty, dating, relationships, Israel-Arab conflict

Wrap-Up Questions

The students should take the Wrap-Up Questions survey online