



THE BLESSING OF

Being Bold

Courage
Purim

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PURIM: COURAGE

What does it mean to be courageous; to live boldly? When we are typing and we 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 the time that 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, they are so essential to who we have become. After all, everyone else is doing it. After all, it is how I have always been. To challenge societal norms, based on one's values, can court disapproval, rejection, even punishment. We may risk our relationships or 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 ways of being that are within our comfort zones. We chose these ways of being not out of calling, but out of comfort. When a situation asks us to act outside of our default ways of

being it can be terrifying for us to do so. To break with norms, from within or without, is a fearful proposition indeed. It takes courage, boldness, and a good dose of holy *chutzpa* 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 in the society around us, or our own internal limits to move beyond our comfort zones 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. 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 get in our way.

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

- *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 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?*



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 40 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 where 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 of 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, that utterly shifted my consciousness about personal responsibility and bravery.

He said (Esther 4:13-14):

“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 then Mordechai said: “And who knows whether for a time such as this you have attained your royal position?”

Or, the way I like to think of it: Perhaps you were created for just this moment . . . maybe this is why God placed you in this palace in the first place! In other words, this was Esther's moment . . . the time 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 September 11th. As the news quickly turned to conspiracy theories and the celebrations started in the streets of the West Bank of Israel, 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. (Remember, I was a fashion expert!). I remember feeling a combination of terror and excitement. My Rabbi gave me segues on 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 I would be committing career suicide talking outside of my fashion mandate . . . taking advantage of my podium for non-requested commentary. And the push back 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, the minute 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 someone's face off. 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 it. As said by the famous writer Ambrose Redmoon: "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?*

Share your story with me and your Momentum sisters on the "Momentum Call to Action" Facebook page (<https://bit.ly/2ZfkBE6>). I look forward to reading it.

Writing Exercise

Give yourselves 5-10 minutes to write down your answers to these 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?



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

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

Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Sages 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 (purgatory); the bashful-faced to Paradise.

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

- What do you like of the attributes suggested by Yehudah ben Tema? Why do you think Yehuda ben Tema chooses these qualities as the four key attributes to do 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. The quote ends like this: 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 Purgatory. What is the difference between being bold and being bold-faced?
- In your own 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 Sages, is a section of the Mishnah that contains the ethical teachings of the ancient rabbis.

TWO KINDS OF BOLDNESS

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

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likutei 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 via holy boldness, as our sages taught, “The bashful [i.e. one who is not bold] is not the one who learns (Avot 2, 5).” And as our sages taught “Why was Torah given to Israel? Because they are bold (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 had not stood at Sinai (Talmud Nedarim 20a).”

”כִּי יֵשׁ שְׁנֵי מִינֵי עֲזָזוּת... יֵשׁ עֲזָזוּת דְּקִדּוּשָׁה - שְׂאִי אֶפְשָׁר לְקַבֵּל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה כִּי אִם עַל יְדֵי זֶה הָעֲזָזוּת דְּקִדּוּשָׁה כְּמוֹ שְׂאִמְרוּ רַ”ל לֹא הִבִּישְׁן לְמֹד (אֲבוֹת ב’ ה’). כְּמוֹ שְׂאִמְרוּ רַ”ל (בִּיצָה כ”ה ע”ב): ‘מִפְּנֵי מָה נִתְּנָה תּוֹרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל - מִפְּנֵי שְׂעִזּוֹן הֵן’... וּכְנֶגֶד זֶה, יֵשׁ לְהַפּוֹךְ עֲזָזוּת מִן הַסְּטֵרָא אֲחֵרָא ... [שְׁעַל כֵּךְ נֹאמְרוּ:] ‘כֹּל מִי שֵׁישׁ בּוֹ עֲזָזוּת, בְּדִדּוּעַ שְׂלֹא עֲמִידוֹ רִגְלֵי אֲבוֹתָיו עַל הַר סִינַי’ (נִדְרִים כ’ ע”א).

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) was a Chasidic master and founder of the Breslover Chasidic movement.

- *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 you are close to acted with holy boldness. If there was a spark of holiness in the experience, how might you describe it?*
- *What is something that you would like to accomplish, that you would need azut d'kedushah, holy boldness, to make happen? If you had an affirmation you could say, what would it be? 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 II, 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 of implementation as opportunities. Next step is being **swift to listen** to others to understand what each person needs in order to engage and take risks and **acting with enthusiasm**. Final stages often require, **staying steadfast with the girt and might of a lion** in order to bring an initiative to successful completion.

הוֹדָה בְּן תִּימָא אוֹמֵר, הוּא עַד כְּנִמָּה וְקַל כְּנֶשֶׁר, וְרַץ כְּאַיִל, וְגִבּוֹר כְּאַרִּי, לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן
אֲבִיךָ שְׂבִשְׁמִימִים (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 to take and complete 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 area 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?*



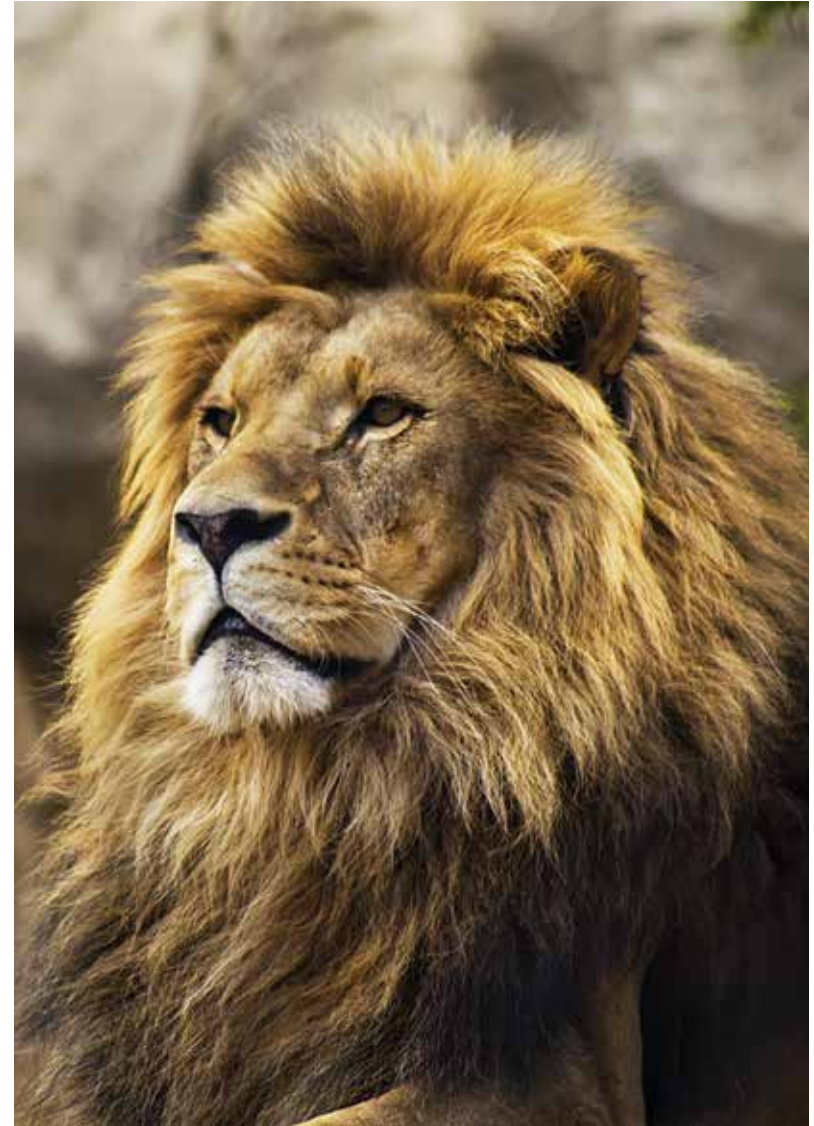
An eagle - light and optimistic



A deer - swift, attentive and enthusiastic



A leopard - bold and initiating



A lion - mighty with grit

THREE KEYS TO UNLOCKING COURAGE

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger¹

Why Unlock Your Courage?

“One isn’t necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential,” says 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?”

We each have something to contribute to making the world a better place. That is the purpose in our life. The final words of the creation story in the Book of Genesis point us toward taking this type of action. These words are “to do - *la’asot*,” inviting us to step forward and encounter our true destiny.

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, in one speech Golda raised \$50 million². What gave Golda the holy *chutzpah* pivotal for her success?

Jot down a few actions that if someone were to do “la’asot,” would offer a real contribution to the world.

In making your list, consider things in your different spheres of influence, such as family, work, Jewish community, educational institutions of your children, neighborhood and local community, as well as the organization that brought you on Momentum, or the Momentum global network.

¹ Adapted from Ronit Ziv-Kreger © 2015

² At the General Assembly of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in Chicago on January 21, 1948.



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.”

“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 have thoughts such as “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 movement and the #MeToo movement and the general uprising of women in Hollywood and elsewhere against systemic abuse may seem like a groundbreaking new *zeitgeist*,” says Adrienne Gold, 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 the Pharaoh, ruler of Egypt, commanded the two midwives, Shifra and Puah, to kill every male Jewish baby at

birth, they refused the immoral order, 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, rushed 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 confidence that they’d soon be dancing as free people³.

- *Who are your role models who act with conviction, vision and holy boldness?*
- *How have you done so in your life, in small or big ways?*
- *Jewish sages teach that when Abraham heard God calling him to “Go Forth,” “Lech lecha,” it was not a unique moment, but rather, 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 list you made earlier do you most have conviction about?*
- *What gets in the way?*

3 Midrash Mechilta and Rashi on the story of Miriam leading women in dance at the Red Sea.

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 all have areas of our lives where we limit our potential by functioning where we believe we are secure.

- *We all have areas where we feel insecure. Some people dread networking with new people, engaging in conflict, public speaking, questioning their 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 pain that defines 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 of a group taking a stand against oppression. Once you start overcoming small fears, you will realize that you have more power over your fear 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 only reserved 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? Is there a way this keeps you in a comfort zone that confines you?*
- *What is a time in which you or someone close to you faced 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 are a small fear you might face now to build confidence?*

Fortify 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 Naomi,

heading to an unknown land. Trusting 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 when we would otherwise feel insecure.

Spiritual nourishment can also fortify our soul in this way.

A Positive Mindset and Faithfulness in Oneself and in God

It is important not to berate ourselves and our past actions when trying to move forward. Rav Kook encourage 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?" Well 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 an opportunity to exercise courage and choose a steeper path towards 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."

4 Orot HaRaaya, Yirah, 3

Rav Kook, Orot HaKodesh 1:65

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

בְּנוֹ אָדָם, עֲלֵה לְמַעַלְהָ עֲלֵה, כִּי כַחַד עֹז לָהּ,
יֵשׁ לָהּ כִּנְפֵי רוּחַ, כִּנְפֵי יְשָרִים אֲבִירִים,
אַל תִּכְחַשׁ בָּם פֶּן יִכְחֹשׁוּ לָהּ,
דְּרוֹשׁ אוֹתָם - וְיִמָּצְאוּ לָהּ מִיָּד.

A person steeped in wonder and awe of God gains soul-strength and courage;

It fills one's life with meaning and big aspirations⁴.

הַמוֹשֵׁג שֶׁל 'יֵרֵאת ד' הוּא מוֹסִיף עֹז וְגִבּוּרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם הַמִּבִּין אוֹתָהּ בְּטַהֲרָתָהּ, הִיא עוֹשָׂה אֶת הַחַיִּים מְלֵאִים עֵנִין וְשִׂיפוֹת 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 group aspirations to take courageous action. How can you leverage the differences among members of your group?*

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER SIMA'S IRAN ESCAPE STORY



Dr. Sima Goel was a 13-year-old girl living in Iran when the Ayatollah Khomeini decreed that all women must wear the hijab, whether they were Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or Bah'ai. Terrified, angry, and determined, Sima took 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 recent 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 Ashkenazi 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 G-d. 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 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 that, 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. The experience of 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 DOÑA GRACIA NASI

Doña Gracia Nasi (c. 1510–1569) was a fierce, female Sephardic Jew who lived in the 16th century (Sephardi Jews are descendants of those who left Spain or Portugal after the 1492 expulsion). She was born in Portugal to Jewish parents who had been baptized against their will in a time when being outwardly Jewish was an existential threat. Despite these difficult circumstances, Doña Gracia Nasi grew up to become an accomplished businesswoman and leader among the Sephardi diaspora, earning herself the nickname, “La Señora.”

The details of La Señora’s younger years are difficult to confirm, but we do know that Doña Garcia Nasi was born Beatrice Nasi, around 1510. In 1528 she fell in love and married a wealthy merchant in Lisbon. Sadly, her husband died in 1535, leaving Beatrice a widow with an infant daughter at a time when the young family was threatened by developing tensions in Portugal. For decades, the Nasi family most likely secretly practiced Jewish traditions while being careful to appear as practicing Catholics to the outside community. On May 23, 1536, however, when the Pope initiated the Portuguese Inquisition, the Nasi family found themselves in the cross hairs of the violent decree.

Under these circumstances, Beatrice and her daughter fled Lisbon. It wasn’t long before her ability to negotiate menacing

cultural and political environments was put to the test, however. Over the next 20 years, she would flee persecution three more times — from Lisbon to Venice to Ferrara and finally to Constantinople. With each new home, Beatrice remained committed to protecting her fellow Jews and supporting the growth of Jewish life. Her success as a businesswoman and sharp diplomatic skills enabled her to be a generous benefactor who worked on behalf of Jews across the Sephardic world, providing assistance to Jewish refugees and captives, as well as subsidizing rabbinic scholars, hospitals, and synagogues in their communal work. In Ferrara, Beatrice celebrated her Judaism openly for the first time in her life. Not long after publicly embracing her Jewish identity, she became known as La Señora, Doña Gracia Nasi.

Bolder than ever, in 1556, La Señora personally challenged the new Pope, Paul IV, in an effort to save the Jews in Ancona, Italy. Shortly after his appointment, Pope Paul IV launched an Inquisition against the Jews of Ancona, placing them all under arrest. When Gracia Nasi got word, she worked tirelessly to save them, lobbying the Sultan to intervene. The Sultan did indeed appeal to the Pope. It was to no avail, however, as the Pope refused to release the Jewish prisoners, executing 24 of them instead, including Gracia Nasi’s personal agent. In protest, La

Señora financed a commercial boycott of Ancona in support of those who had died rather than deny their Judaism.

For the rest of her life, Gracia Nasi remained a maverick and activist. She devoted herself to supporting the creation of a self-sustaining settlement for Spanish and Portuguese Jewish refugees in the Holy Land and by 1566, the new settlement blossomed on the land where the ancient city of Tiberias once stood.

La Señora died in 1569, and the weight of her loss was felt across much of the Jewish world. She was a legendary Jewish woman—a grand dame who proudly owned her identity despite the threats of the intolerant world in which she lived, triumphing over great adversity and remaining intensely devoted to Jewish life.

In October 2010, on behalf of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres officially recognized Doña Gracia Nasi for her contributions to the Jewish people.

- *Who are some of your role models?*
- *What do you appreciate about them?*
- *In what ways are those qualities also in you?*



Stamp image courtesy of the Israeli Philatelic Service, Israel Postal Company

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.”²

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.

Simie interrupted my outburst, “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.”



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

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 air line, 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 run way and into the small plane, a twin-engined 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

2 World Machal. “Ruth Stern.” Machal: Association of Overseas Volunteers. Web. http://machal.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=251&Itemid=345&lang=en (accessed February 8, 2017).

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 chutzpa. I put my book down. How dare he patronize me, I fumed. Finding me alone at last, he has 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, see: <http://bit.ly/2lqQlm2>.

Over 4,000 volunteers from 56 countries came to Israel to fight in the War of Independence. Hundreds more assisted from abroad. 123 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” at <https://bit.ly/2qvBWbF>.

To learn more about Israel’s 1948 generation, watch the other excellent films at <https://bit.ly/2HkDVTz>.



Ruth Stern

TRY IT OUT PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Ideas for bringing the value of courage into your family life

For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on [MomentumUnlimited.org](https://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 Jewish learning based in text. To learn more about Purim, check out the video "Purim: Why Name A Holiday After The Enemy?" (29 minutes) <https://bit.ly/2Y4zgFF>
- For Further Reading on Unlocking Your Courage:
 - *The Courage Way: Leading and Living with Integrity* by Center for Courage & Renewal and Shelly L. Francis, 2018.
 - *The Tools: Transform Your Problems into Courage, Confidence and Creativity*, by Phil Stutz and Barry Michels, 2012.
 - *Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Challenge and Build Confidence*, by Andy Molinsky, 2017.

For Families with Children of All Ages

- 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 choose to react. As a family, role-play scenarios when 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 treated unkindly or notice someone sitting alone in the lunchroom.
 - Adults can role-play challenging scenes between parents and children or 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, recalling the bravery of teens who blew the shofar at the Kotel in the 1930s and 1940s, violating the British decree.
- Commit to journaling (or making a list if you prefer not to journal) 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 towards being your best self.
 - Create a vision board (collage) of inspirational words and images that will embolden you to have the courage to make those changes.
 - Take a few moments each day to look at your collage and visualize yourself living the ways in which you have envisioned.
- Consider what gave various famous people the holy *chutzpah* to move forward after rejection. Watch this short Youtube clip with a child or a friend: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ydeyl0vXdP0
- Learn more 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 & Museum in Tiberias dedicated to honoring the 16th century Sephardi heroine through cultural and experiential recreations. (<https://bit.ly/1aITSM5>)
- 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 Bubbie (supporting the lonely elderly): Find out from the nursing/convalescent home staff whom 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 manicures or comb out hair and beautify. Gather a bouquet of flowers or a basket of treats and set a visiting time. Then stick to it. As a family project this allows for the occasional 'not available' among you, while not leaving the person without anyone visiting her. (Check out www.adoptasafta.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 watch' for the underdog, the bullied, 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 of your worlds is 'standing 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 courage

Acknowledgment (*Vidui*)

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

Vision (*Kavanah*)

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 (*Kabbalah*)

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

Accountability

Who can help hold you accountable on 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 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?*

Meaning-ful Vocabulary

Holy boldness or holy <i>chutzpha</i>	<i>azut d' kedushah</i>	עזות קדושה
Scroll	<i>megillah</i> In Purim we read the megillah of Esther, in Shavuot the megillah of Ruth.	מגילה
Purim basket of treats sent to friends and family	<i>mishloach manot</i>	משלוח מנות

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

In advance, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading the session such as:

- Planning an activity to accompany the study session (see **Extras! Program Ideas.**)
- Sharing Adrienne Gold's Esther story.
- Hosting the event
- Asking if one or more of the women would like 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)

You know what will best engage your participants and what their personal and parenting goals are for growth and development, so 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 helping the hostess prepare the room or put 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 & 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 focusing on 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 you are in your Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

5. Intro & 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 several different activities in the session that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest you begin with Adrienne's reflection on the Esther story, ideally with a group

member retelling her story and then choose whether to focus on unpacking (i) the notion of holy-boldness and the group planning a holy-boldness initiative or (ii) the notion of keys to unlocking courage.

Purim and Queen Esther and Me

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

What Attributes are Needed for Holy Service? and Two Kinds of Boldness

Review together *What Attributes are Needed for Holy Service?* Discuss the questions together, exploring the difference between being bold and boldfaced. Ask women to reflect on their own experiences, and to give examples of when they acted in a bold way.

Continuing with the discussion of boldness, read *Two Kinds of Boldness*, and make note of Rabbi Nachman's distinction between holy and unholy boldness. Think with participants about what holy boldness might be, and why it is so essential, exploring the questions.

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* and plan who might take a lead with what element of the initiative and what steps are needed to bring the initiative to successful implementation. Plan next steps and how to follow up.

Three Keys to Unlocking Courage

Divide into three groups and have each group read and dialogue about one of the three keys for 10 minutes – (1) Conviction and Purpose (2) Attitude toward Comfort and Pain (3) Fortify your Soul. Re-divide the group (to jigsaw) such that the new three groups each have someone who had discussed each of the three topics.

Have each woman present to others in her new group about the topic she had dialogued about in her initial group. Finally, provide women time for individual writing about unlocking their courage and invite each to create either a #hashtag reminder for herself or art resources to create a visual reminder about unlocking her courage. Pair women to for attentive listening from a sister to share what she'd like about her next steps with unlocking courage.

7. Reflection & Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session.

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 them to respond to the prompt by writing, drawing, or thinking silently. After individual reflection time, you may ask your women to partner and share their reflections, which can be followed with group (voluntary) sharing.

Direct the women’s attention to the “**Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families.**” These suggestions will help them bring the learning they have done today home to their families in interesting and fun ways. Encourage them to choose at least one

thing they will do with their families and come back next time and report on how it went. 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 serves as an entry points for conversations that may never otherwise happen. (See pages XXXXXX) 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 to prepare learning about Purim and its four mitzvot: hearing the scroll of Esther (the *Megillah*), eating a festive meal *Seudah*, donating to people in need *matanot l’evyonim*, and giving food baskets, known as *Mishloach Manot*. Ask them to share what local opportunities there are for community Purim celebrations, and to share with the women 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 you create *Mishloach Manot* food baskets for needy families in your area.
- Alternatively, follow your session with a Purim party for the elderly, and encourage the women to overcome their natural reserve or shyness to create a joyful atmosphere with meaningful connections.



The sales of Year of Growth are used entirely to cover costs of creating, producing, distributing, and supporting the successful use of this educational resource.

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