

Subject / Holidays – Chanukah, Israel Education, Swords of Iron War

Grades / Middle School and High School

Pedagogies / Whole Class Discussion, Small Class Discussion, Cooperative Learning (Havruta)

Required Materials / Projector, Internet Connection, Paper Handouts

Activities / Think-Pair-Share, Havruta, Exit Ticket

Lesson Summary



This lesson will introduce two classical rabbinic texts on Chanukah focused on heroism. Each text demonstrates very different types of heroic acts both coming from – in their day from unlikely sources – women. One has a focus on the military struggle against the Greek-Syrians while the other text presents a spiritual/religious stand against the enemy. The student will compare and contrast different types of heroism and consider a broader definition of heroism. Students will 'meet' heroes from the Swords of Iron War and reflect on modern day acts of heroism. Finally, students will consider ways that they may take action in ways that could be considered "ordinary acts of heroism."

Big Ideas



- Heroism takes on many forms
- Heroism is carried out by ordinary and exceptional people alike

Essential Questions

- What are the elements that make someone a hero?
- What turns an ordinary act into a heroic act?
- In what ways can you be heroic?

Part 1 – Introduction ⌚ (10 min)

Before discussing the heroism found in the Chanukah story, the teacher should introduce the lesson by showing the following clip of Baruch Cohen who fought to protect his kibbutz Magen located in the Gaza Envelope that was part of the Oct 7th Massacre.

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB77HXpTM4s>

Ask students

- 💬 **How does hearing the story of Baruch Cohen make you feel? Explain**
- 💬 **Would you define Mr. Cohen as a hero? If yes, explain what about what he did, in your opinion, makes him a hero.**

After this short discussion explain to students that in this lesson they will be comparing and contrasting two classic rabbinic Chanukah texts that exemplify very different kinds of heroic acts. The lesson will also consider modern day acts of heroism and ways that they may be able to participate in acts of heroism.

Part 2 – The Story of Yehudit ⌚ (10 min)

Note to teacher:

Provided are the English and Hebrew versions of the text both for this midrash and the next Talmudic Aggadah as well. Depending on how much time the teacher wants to spend and the students' ability to decipher rabbinic texts from the original, she can decide to work with the Hebrew text or the translated text.

The teacher should **divide the students into study pairs (chavruta)** and distribute the Yehudit text (Source 1) to them. Direct them to read the story out loud to each other and together answer the following questions **using the Think-Pair-Share technique**:

- 💬 **Do you think Yehudit is a hero? What made her so, in your opinion?**
- 💬 **What made Yehudit, in our story, exceptional from other Jews of Jerusalem at the time?**
- 💬 **Did Yehudit have to compromise herself in this situation?
If yes, was it justified in your opinion?**

Part 3 – Hana and her Seven Sons [Gittin 57b] ⌚ (8 min)**Notes to teacher:**

1) This aggada on the women and her seven sons has in Jewish tradition been associated with the Chanukah story even though not all the facts and characters appearing in it historically line up. The historicity of the aggada is not our concern in this lesson but, should students raise this, the teacher can point out that Jewish tradition has connected the story with Chanukah and that there are different versions of the story.

2) The aggada never mentions the name Hana in the story itself but Jewish tradition has identified her by the name Hana. It may be due to the verse quoted from Psalms 113 at the very end "A joyful mother of children" that The Rabbis associated with biblical Hana who was barren much of her life and then had her prayers answered with the blessing of a succession of 7 children.

Continuing in pairs, have students read the story of the women and her seven children. Have them answer the following questions using **the Think-Pair-Share technique**:

- 💬 **Why did the women in the aggada refuse to follow the directions of the emperor?**
- 💬 **Why does the women in the aggada always use a different biblical verse to justify her refusal to bow down?**
- 💬 **Once the women saw that the emperor would execute her children one-by-one, she still refused to bow down to his idol. Why in the face of that did she still refuse to bow down? Are their things, in your opinion, worth giving your life for? What are they?**
- 💬 **Do you think the women is a hero? What made her so, in your opinion?**

Part 4 – Compare and Contrast the Two Stories ⌚ (10 min)

Bring the students together for a full class discussion.

Assemble all the students to lead a full class discussion comparing and contrasting the two rabbinic stories.

Ask students:

- 💬 **Did you note something that was common to both stories that might be considered out of the ordinary for the times that the stories took place?** (A. Both stories have women as the hero. In those days men would be the expected heroes of our stories. One must assume, that the writers of these stories intentionally used this technique of irony to better highlight the heroic nature of their actions.)
- 💬 **In what ways would you say our two main characters in their respective stories are heroes?**
- 💬 **Characterize the quality of heroism in each of our two characters? Describe it.**

The teacher should **try to tease out from students** that there are different forms of heroism. Some is through fighting and defeating an enemy (Yehudit). Others may be in standing up for a principle (the women of seven sons). Sometimes heroism results in victory and other times not – yet the act still may be one of heroism

The teacher may want to point out the similarity between Hana and how many Holocaust victims knowing that their fate was sealed died singing "Ani Maamin" or "Shema Yisrael."

- 💬 **Do you see any parallels between the women of seven sons and some Jewish victims during the Holocaust?**
- 💬 **In your opinion, were both women heroes? Defend your position.**

Part 5 – Modern Day Heroes During the Swords of Iron War • • ⌚ (7 min)

Similar to the trigger film that opened this lesson, below is a series of short videos that highlight extraordinary acts of heroism during the Oct 7th Massacre. You can divide students into small groups assigning a different video for each group or select from the films and show the entire class.

Ask students:

- Describe what is it about these people and their actions that made them heroes.
- How can these heroes be compared to the heroes of our Chanukah story?
- How did hearing these modern stories of heroism make you feel?

Playlist: The Spirit of Israeli Heroism

<https://www.youtube.com/@UnitEdJewishEducation>

- **Dudi Laniado**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFTAb6YojTM>
- **Ofek Mishal**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9lkoX_fEnU
- **Sivan Auneri**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPEfRrISICc>
- **Tali Haddad**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6d_4724bhl

Part 6 – Conclusion ⌚ (5 min)

The teacher should summarize the main points from the lesson above describing and emphasizing lessons learned:

- 1) Heroism comes in many different forms – physical fighting, standing and sacrificing for principles, etc.
- 2) Chanukah was a physical war and one based on a fight over ideas and principles.
- 3) Heroism is demonstrated often by ordinary people stepping up when the hour requires action.

מקור 1 Text

אוצר מדרשים (אייזנשטיין) יהודית [המתחיל בעמוד 204]

מעשה שבא מלך הגוים על ירושלם עם ארבעים אלף גבורי חיל ויצר עליה ימים רבים. ויקוצו בני ישראל מפניהם במצור ובמצוק ויהיו בצרה גדולה. והיתה בירושלם נערה מבנות הנביאים. וכראותה כי גדל השבר ועצם הצער ותשם נפשה בכפה ותצא עם שפחתה ותגע עד שערי העיר. ותאמר לשוערים: פתחו השערים ואצא אולי יעשה לי הקדוש ברוך הוא אות ופלא ואהרוג את הכופר הזה ויושעו ישראל על ידי. ויאמרו לה: לא נפתח שאנו מפחדים שמא אהבת אחד מפרשי המלך להנשא לו או שמא תעשי תחבולות על העיר ללכדה. ותאמר ח"ו אלא אני בוטחת ברחמי שמים שיעזרני על האויב הזה. ותשבע להם בי"י אלהי ישראל. ויפתחו השוערים ותצא עם שפחתה ותלך עד אהל המלך. ותבא לפניו והנערה יפה עד מאד. וכראות אותה המלך מצאה חן בעיניו ותשא חסד לפניו. ויאמר לה: המלך מי את בתי, ואי מזה באת, ואנה תלכי? ותאמר לו: מבנות הנביאים אנכי ושמעתי מאבי שתכבוש את העיר ותתפוש אותה. ואבא לבקש על נפשי ונפש בית אבי למלטם כשתקח העיר. ויאמר לה המלך: אני אעשה כדבריך ואני רוצה לקחתך לי לאשה. ותאמר לו: אדוני המלך הנני כאחת שפחתך עשה הטוב בעיניך. אבל אודיעך אדוני המלך, שאנכי נדה ובערב אנכי ראויה לטבילה. צוה את עבדך בערב כשיראו שתי נשים הולכות למעיין שלא יפגעו בנו ואל ידברו עמנו מטוב ועד רע ואלך ואטבול ואשוב אליך. ויצו המלך להעשות כן, וישמח שמחה גדולה בנערה ובבשורה שבשרה למלך, ויאסוף כל שריו ועבדיו ויעש להם משתה ויאכל וישת מן היין וישכב וירדם, וילכו כלם איש לאהליו ולא נשאר עם המלך זולתי הנערה והשפחה. ותכון הנערה את לבה לשמים ותקם ותשלוף את החרב ותכרות בה ראש המלך. ותשא ראשו בין דדיה ותלכנה שתיהן ותעברנה במחנה ואין דובר להם דבר עד שהגיעו לשערי ירושלם. ותקרא לשוערים ותאמר להם: פתחו השער כי הקדוש ברוך הוא עזרני והרגתי את האויב. ולא האמינו לדבריה. ויהי למלך שר אחד משריו והיה אומר למלך חדל מאומה זו אל תצורם ואל תתגר בם מלחמה כי אלהיהם עמם ואוהבם ולא יסגירם בידך, ראה מה עשה לאשר היו מלפניך למלכים הראשונים ולשרים שצרו על ישראל מה היתה אחריתם והיה מרבה תוכחות למלך עד שקצף עליו המלך ויצו לקשרו ולתלותו חי אצל שער העיר. וכראות הנערה כי אינם רוצים לפתוח השער אמרה להם: אם לא תאמינו לי הנה השר התלוי

יכיר את ראשו.

והאמינו לדברי הנערה ויפתחו השער ויראו את הראש לשר התלוי ויכירוהו השר ויאמר: ברוך ה' אשר הסגיר אותנו בידכם והציל אתכם מידו. וישמע הדבר בעיר ויתקבצו בחורי ישראל וגבוריו ויקחו את חרבותם בידם ויבואו עד המחנה והיו קוראים בקול רם שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד. ויראו אנשי המחנה אותם וילכו לאהל המלך ויראו כי מת גבורם וינוסו ויעזבו את אהליהם ואת סוסיהם וכל חילם וימלטו את נפשם. וירדפו ישראל אחריהם עד אנטוכיא וישבו בשלום ויבזזו בהם ביזה הרבה מאד. ויתקבצו זקני ישראל והחכמים ויבואו בית ה' ויברכו ויהללו את ה' המניח להם מכל אויביהם והמושי עם בארץ אויביהם וכו'! הוא ברחמיו יעשה נסים ונפלאות עמנו בעת ובעונה הזאת כאשר עשה עם אבותינו. תם מעשה יהודית.

English Translation

The Story of Yehudit

When the King (Antiochus) laid siege on Jerusalem a long time with 40,000 of his soldiers, the Children of Israel were very distressed over their dire situation. There was a young Jerusalem woman, an offspring of the prophets. When she saw how terrible this situation was, she took her life in her hands and, with her maid servant, she approached the city gates. She addressed the gate keepers: Open the gates and I will depart – maybe the Holy One, Blessed be He, will do a great sign and wonder that I should kill this heretic and Israel will be saved through my efforts. They responded: We will not open the gates because we fear that perhaps you are motivated by your love for one of the king's soldiers or maybe you have some pretext to bring about the capture of the city. She answered: God forbid. I place my trust in the mercies of Heaven that will help me against this enemy. She swore such in the name of the God of Israel. The gate keepers agreed and she left the city with her maid servant until reaching the king's tent. She presented herself to the king. The maiden was exceedingly beautiful. When the king saw her, she was very pleasing to him.

The king said to her: Who are you, my daughter? From where have you come, and where are you going?

She responded: I am from prophetesses. I heard from my father that you will conquer the city. I have come to plead with you for the sake of myself, and the house of my father that they will escape the fate of the city when you take it.

The king said to her: I will comply with your wishes and I desire to marry you.

She responded: I will do as you wish, because I am as one of your maid servants. Do with me what is good in your eyes. However, I must share with you that I am a nidda (ritually impure from menstruation) and tonight the time arrives for me to immerse in the mikve (a ritual bath through which immersion in, one transitions from ritual impurity to a state of ritual purity). Direct your servants tonight that when they see two women going to the spring that they should not delay us nor speak with us about anything so that I may immerse (in the waters of the spring) and immediately return to you.

The king so directed his servants. The king was exceedingly happy with the girl and her tidings. The king gathered all his officers and servants and made a great feast. He ate, drank wine, lied down, and fell into a deep sleep. Everyone returned to their respective tents and no one remained with the king except for the maiden and her servant.

She readied herself in service of God un sheathed a sword and decapitated the king. She carried the king's head between her breasts and the two of them walked through the camp without anyone speaking with them until they arrived at gates of Jerusalem.

She called out to the gatekeepers: Open the gate for The Holy One, Blessed be He helped me and I killed the enemy.

They didn't believe her.

Now the king had a certain servant who advised the king – Seise from laying siege and war against this nation (Israel) because their God is with them and loves them and will not deliver them into your hands. Take heed of what preceeded you. The earlier kings and officers that persecuted Israel – what became of them? He rebuked the king many times over until the king's angered kindled against him and he commanded that he be crucified next to the city gate.

When the woman saw that the gate keeper refused to open the gate for her, she said: If you will not believe me, behold, the king's crucified servant will recognize the king's head.

They believed her (now) and opened the gate for her so that she could show the head to the servant. He said: Blessed is God who has delivered him into your hands and saved you from his hand.

The word spread throughout the city and all the young men and warriors gathered

taking up their swords and approached the enemy encampment calling out loudly – Shema Yisrael, HaShem is our God, HaShem is One!

The men of the encampment saw them (the army of Israel) and went to the king's tent. They saw that their hero was dead. They fled, leaving their tents and horses, their belongings, and ran for their lives.

Israel pursued after them until Antioch returning in peace. They took with them large quantities of booty.

The elders and wisemen assembled near the House of God blessing and praising God who delivered them from their enemies and Savior in the land of their enemies...

He, in His mercies does miracles and performs wonders with us at the time of need as He has done with our fathers.

So ends the story of Judith.

מקור 2 Text

מסכת גיטין דף נו, ב

(תהילים מד) "כי עליך הורגנו כל היום נחשבנו כצאן טבחה" ורב יהודה אמר זו אשה ושבעה בניה. אתיוהו קמא לקמיה דקיסר אמרו ליה פלח לעבודה זרה. אמר להו: כתוב בתורה (שמות כ) "אנכי ה' אלהיך". אפקוהו וקטלוהו. ואתיוהו לאידך לקמיה דקיסר. אמרו ליה: פלח לעבודה זרה. אמר להו: כתוב בתורה (שמות כ) "לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני". אפקוהו וקטלוהו. אתיוהו לאידך. אמרו ליה: לעבודה זרה. אמר להו: כתוב בתורה (שמות כב) "זבח לאלהים יחרם". אפקוהו וקטלוהו. אתיוהו לאידך. אמרו ליה: פלח לעבודה זרה. אמר להו: כתוב בתורה (שמות לד) "לא תשתחוה לאל אחר". אפקוהו וקטלוהו. אתיוהו לאידך. אמרו ליה: פלח לעבודה זרה. אמר להו: כתוב בתורה (דברים ו) "שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד". אפקוהו וקטלוהו. אתיוהו לאידך. אמרו ליה: פלח לעבודה זרה. אמר להו: כתוב בתורה (דברים ד) "וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך כי ה' הוא האלהים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד". אפקוהו וקטלוהו. אתיוהו לאידך. אמרו ליה: פלח לעבודה זרה. אמר להו: כתוב בתורה (דברים כו) "את ה' האמרת וגו' וה' האמירך היום" - כבר נשבענו להקדוש ברוך הוא שאין אנו מעבירין אותו באל אחר ואף הוא נשבע לנו שאין מעביר אותנו באומה אחרת. א"ל קיסר: אישדי לך גושפי נקא וגחין ושקליה כי היכי דלימרו קביל עליה הרמנא דמלכא. א"ל חבל עלך קיסר חבל עלך קיסר על כבוד עצמך כך - על כבוד הקב"ה על אחת כמה וכמה! אפקוהו למיקטליה. אמרה להו אימיה: יהבוהו ניהלי ואינשקיה פורתא. אמרה לו: בניי לכו ואמרו לאברהם אביכם: אתה עקדת מזבח אחד ואני עקדתי שבעה מזבחות. אף היא עלתה לגג ונפלה ומתה. יצתה בת קול ואמרה (תהילים קיג) "אם הבנים שמחה".

English Translation

Yea, for thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Rab Judah, however, said that this refers to the woman and her seven sons. They brought the first before the Emperor and said to him, Serve the idol. He said to them: It is written in the Law, I am the Lord thy God. So they led him away and killed him. They then brought the second before the Emperor and said to him, Serve the idol. He replied: It is written in the Torah, You shall have no other gods before me. So they led him away and killed him. They then brought the next and said to him, Serve the idol. He replied: It is written in the Torah, He that sacrifices unto the gods, save unto the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed. So they led him away and killed him. They then brought the next before the Emperor saying, Serve the idol. He replied: It is written in the Torah, You shall not bow down to any other god. So they led him away and killed him. They then brought another and said to him, Serve the idol. He replied: It is written in the Torah, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. So they led him away and killed him. They then brought the next and said to him, Serve the idol. He replied; It is written in the Torah, Know therefore this day and lay it to your heart that the Lord He is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is none else. So they led him away and killed him. They brought the next and said to him, Serve the idol. He replied: It is written in the Torah, You hast avouched the Lord this day ... and the Lord hath avouched thee this day; we have long ago sworn to the Holy One, blessed be He, that we will not exchange Him for any other god, and He also has sworn to us that He will not change us for any other people. The Emperor said: I will throw down my seal before you and you can stoop down and pick it up, so that they will say of you that you have conformed to the desire of the king. He replied; Fie on thee, Caesar, fie on thee, Caesar; if thine own honor is so important, how much more the honor of the Holy One, blessed be He! They were leading him away to kill him when his mother said: Give him to me that I may kiss him a little. She said to him: My son, go and say to your father Abraham, You bound one [son to the] altar, but I have bound seven altars. Then she also went up on to a roof and threw herself down and was killed. A voice thereupon came forth from heaven saying, "A joyful mother of children." (Psalms 113)