

# MANGA MIDRASH

## Teaching Guide

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# Introduction

*Manga Midrash* will help students in grades 4 through 7 explore the meaning of selected biblical and rabbinic texts. Each 16-page booklet uses *manga*, a modern illustrated format, to present a key Bible story, rabbinic *midrash*, and Jewish value such as the importance of leadership or the sanctity of life. This dynamic marriage of two very different forms of expression, one contemporary and one ancient, will connect students with Jewish texts and traditions in an entirely up-to-date and highly motivating way.

*Manga* (literally, “whimsical pictures”) is a Japanese graphic-novel technique that is popular with preteens and teenagers worldwide. It features characters with saucer-size eyes and exotic hair colors who often have exaggerated facial expressions and use exaggerated language. Like many biblical characters, *manga* heroes are often portrayed as underdogs or otherwise vulnerable people who must overcome obstacles or resolve conflicts.

*Midrash* (derived from the Hebrew root meaning “to search out”) refers to the rabbinic tradition of finding ever-deeper layers of meaning in the Bible. Over two thousand years ago, the rabbis created a form of biblical commentary called *midrash*. Many *midrashim* (plural of *midrash*) were expressed as entertaining stories that deepened Jews’ understanding of the laws and values that the Bible teaches. This tradition of creative interpretation continues today.

Some *midrashim* fill in gaps. For example, whereas the Bible does not tell us about our patriarch Abraham’s youth or how Abraham came to believe in a God he could not see, one *midrash* tells how Abraham as a young man smashed a group of idols that his family had intended to sell. Thus the *midrash* lays the groundwork for the Bible’s revelation of Abraham’s monotheistic belief.

*Manga Midrash* invites students to participate in the tradition of *midrash* through a variety of activities, including the creation of their own *midrashim*. In the process, students interpret holy texts, explore Jewish values, and add their voices to the age-old dialogue among God, Israel, and Torah.

# Contents of Manga Midrash Booklets

Every *Manga Midrash* booklet includes these engaging features:

1. **Bible Classics: The Bible Tells Us** A blend of manga graphics and a faithful translation of a Bible story's Hebrew text
2. **Standing in Their Shoes** Probing questions that students will answer as the biblical characters they are studying might have
3. **Rabbinic Midrash: Our Sages Teach Us** A dynamic retelling of a traditional *midrash* based on the Bible story that the booklet focuses on
4. **Creating Midrash: What Were the Sages Thinking?** An activity that will help students reflect on the meaning of the rabbinic *midrash*
5. **My Modern Midrash: Our Generation Speaks** A lively story starter that students will complete
6. **Creating Midrash: What Do You Think?** A tool to help students plan their own ending to the *midrash* story starter
7. **Be a Jewish Leader-in-Training** A closing, values-based activity that will help students apply what they have learned

## Incorporating Manga Midrash into Your Classroom

The *Manga Midrash* booklets are designed to supplement a Bible, Jewish-ethics, or values program. For example, you may use a booklet to introduce or enrich the story of Jacob and Esau or a lesson on leadership.

Your needs and preferences will determine how many sessions you devote to each booklet. You may want to spend two or three sessions on each booklet. If you devote three sessions to a booklet, you might spend the first session on “Bible Classics” and the activities that follow it,” the second session on “Rabbinic Midrash” and “Creating Midrash: What Were the Sages Thinking,” and the third session on the rest of the booklet. If you are conducting a weekend program or a *Shabbaton*, you might cover a single booklet over the course of the event.

# General Teaching Strategies

## Introducing Students to Manga Midrash

The following teaching techniques can help you introduce students to their first booklet.

- ◆ Invite students to examine the booklet and identify its seven core features (see “Contents of Manga Midrash Booklets” on page 5 of this guide). Ask: *Which parts of the booklet do you think you will find most interesting? most fun? most challenging? Why?*
- ◆ Take a poll. Ask: *Which do you like to do best: read, write, or draw?* Tally the results. Then tell students that they will have an opportunity to do the activity they chose. Instruct students to find a place in the booklet where they can do their preferred activity.
- ◆ Have students examine the artwork. Ask: *What is different or special about the pictures? Have you seen artwork like this before?* Encourage students to share what they know about manga comics or manga cartoons (known as *anime*).
- ◆ Introduce and explain the terms *Bible* and *midrash* (see Introduction on page 3 of this guide). Explain to students that many Jews still create *midrash*—just as they are about to!

## Set Inductions

- ◆ Divide the class into small groups, and instruct students to discuss why they think the value featured in the booklet’s title is or is not an important value. Invite a spokesperson from each group to report on his or her group’s discussion.
- ◆ Ask students to name and describe people who exemplify the value featured in the booklet’s title. Encourage students to suggest fictional characters, persons from history or current events, or people they know personally. Write the names on the chalkboard.
- ◆ Before the class reads the “Bible Classics” feature, invite students to share what they know about the main characters named in the booklet’s subtitle.

## Teaching the Lesson

- ◆ Before the class reads each illustrated feature (“Bible Classics,” “Rabbinic Midrash,” and “My Modern Midrash”), ask for volunteers to dramatically read each role aloud and one to read the part of the narrator. To involve more students, divide the class into troupes. Give the groups time to practice; then allow each one to perform for the others.
- ◆ Play “Freeze Frame.” After students have read an illustrated feature, assign a group of students to read the text dramatically or to act it out for the class. Invite students in the audience to call out “Freeze” when they wish to question a character. For instance, when Shifrah and Puah defy Pharaoh’s orders (see “Bible Classics” in *The Value of Life* booklet), a student might ask, “How did you feel when you disobeyed Pharaoh?” Have the players answer the questions in character.
- ◆ Invite students to work on the writing activities in pairs or small groups. After students have completed each activity, have them share their responses.
- ◆ Have students perform their modern *midrashim* in short skits. Invite parents or other classes to view the performances.

## Booklet-Specific Teaching Strategies

### Compassion: Eliezer and Rebecca at the Well

*Summary: Genesis 24:10–27*

The Bible teaches that Abraham sent his senior servant to the land of Abraham’s family to find a wife for Isaac. Traveling with ten camels, the man arrives at the well outside the city. On his arrival, he prays to God that when he asks a maiden for water she will respond to his request by drawing water for him and for his camels. That woman, he prays, will be the woman chosen by God to marry Isaac. At the end of his prayer, the man’s hope is realized—Rebecca, daughter of Abraham’s nephew Betuel, arrives and draws water for the servant and his camels.

Students will explore the value of compassion and issues such as: *Why is compassion an important quality? How can one become a more compassionate person?*

### *Teaching Techniques*

Use these techniques to extend and enrich students' learning:

- ◆ Call on a volunteer to read the servant's words from Genesis 24:14 (see page 2 of booklet). Ask: *Why might the servant have hoped that the response he described would help to identify the woman God had chosen as Isaac's wife?* (These actions reflect kindness, compassion, and generosity.) Ask students what qualities they look for in a friend. You may want to write their responses on the board. You also may want to encourage students to ask their parents what qualities they look for in their children's friends or in their own friends, and why they think these qualities are important.
- ◆ As a class, brainstorm a list of social action projects that embody the value of compassion, for example, volunteering at a food kitchen, collecting winter coats for people in need, and donating blankets to an animal shelter. You may want to create a class project based on one of the activities and invite family members to participate.
- ◆ Invite students to describe a time when someone showed them compassion. Encourage them either to draw an illustration or to write a poem about their experience. Have students title or caption their work.
- ◆ Ask for a group of volunteers to act out the "Bible Classics" story and a second group to act out the "Rabbinic Midrash." After the class has seen both presentations, ask: *What have the rabbis added to the biblical account?* (women saying that they can't give water to the servant, Rebecca rebuking the women; the miracle of water rising up to Rebecca.)

In the Bible, Rebecca behaves with compassion; in the *midrash*, she rebukes the women for doing the wrong thing and then she does the right thing—behaves with compassion. Ask: *Why might the actions described in the midrash require not only compassion but also courage?* (It often takes courage to stand up for what is right and tell others that they are not acting properly.)



Encourage students to tell about a time when they spoke up and told others that they needed to improve their behavior. Ask: *Why do you think our tradition encourages us to speak gently when we rebuke others?* (So as not to embarrass others; to increase the chance of their hearing us rather than focusing on defending their actions)

♦ In addition to showing compassion, Rebecca demonstrates the value of welcoming guests, or *hachnasat orhim*. As a class, discuss ways to make guests in our homes and synagogue feel welcome. Consider presenting a specific scenario. For example, ask: *A youth group member from another synagogue is staying at your home for Shabbat. What could you do to make that person feel welcome and comfortable?*

## Leadership: Jacob and Esau

*Summary: Genesis 25:20–33*

The Bible tells us that our patriarch Jacob—the younger of twin brothers—was born holding on to the heel of his twin, Esau. This episode foreshadows Jacob’s effort to gain the privilege of the birthright from Esau. When the twins grow up, Esau becomes a hunter. One day, after returning hungry from a hunt, Esau demands a stew that Jacob is cooking. Jacob offers the stew in exchange for Esau’s birthright. Esau agrees to the trade.

Students will explore the value of leadership and issues such as: *What makes a person worthy of a privileged position or role as a leader? How can one develop the skills that a role of honor or leadership requires?*

### *Teaching Techniques*

Use these techniques to extend and enrich students’ learning:

♦ After students have read “Bible Classics,” point out that Jacob and Esau struggled with each other even before they were born. Ask: *Why might the story of Jacob and Esau begin this way?* (to signal or foreshadow that they will not get along with each other)

♦ After students have read “Bible Classics” and “Rabbinic Midrash,” invite them to fill in the chart below, or have them respond to a few of the items, in order to imagine how Jacob and Esau might differ if they lived today. Invite students to explain their answers.

	Jacob	Esau
1. Favorite school subject		
2. Favorite book		
3. Favorite sport		
4. Favorite movie		
5. Favorite food		
6. Favorite song or kind of music		
7. Favorite hobby		
8. Favorite place to visit		
9. Favorite food		
10. What he wants to be when he grows up		

♦ The names of Bible characters are often significant. Draw students’ attention to the significance of Jacob’s and Esau’s names as described in the “Free Talk” boxes (page 2).

*Ask: Do you know the meaning of your name? Were you named for someone? If you were, do you want to share with the class what you know about that person?* Have students find out more about their names and invite them to report what they learn to the class.

♦ Invite students discuss the following question as a class or in small groups: *What would Esau have had to do to become a worthy leader?*

## The Value of Life: Pharaoh’s Daughter and Miriam Save Moses

*Summary: Exodus 1:15–2:10*

The midwives Shifrah and Puah defy Pharaoh’s order to slay all newborn Israelite boys. Pharaoh’s daughter rescues an Israelite baby boy from the Nile. The boy’s sister, Miriam (who is not referred to by name in the text), arranges for their mother to nurse and care for the baby. Some time later Pharaoh’s daughter adopts the child and names him Moses.

Students will explore the value of preserving life and issues such as: *What are some of the choices one can make as a human being—a creature made in God’s image, or b’tzelem Elohim? Why is self-respect an important aspect of valuing human life?*

### *Teaching Techniques*

Use these techniques to extend and enrich students’ learning:

- ◆ Ask students: *Can you name some women who appear in the Bible?* (Among others, students may name Eve, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam, Ruth, Naomi, and Esther.) Record students’ responses on the chalkboard. Invite students to share one fact they know about each woman. Then tell students that in this *Manga Midrash* booklet, they will learn about five heroic women in the Bible.
- ◆ You may want to develop a tzedakah project around the theme of the value of life. For example, your students might participate in a walkathon or charity race. In that way they can show concern both for the lives of others by raising money for people in need and for their own lives by exercising.
- ◆ In addition to the value of showing compassion and concern for human life, Jewish tradition teaches the value of *tza’ar ba’alei hayyim*, showing compassion for animals. Ask: *What are some of the ways in which we can show kindness to animals?* (We can walk our dogs, feed our pet fish, clean our cats’ litter boxes.) Invite students to create drawings that illustrate ways to show concern for and kindness to animals. They may wish to caption their drawings. Post the pictures on a bulletin board or scan them digitally and post them on your synagogue’s Web site.
- ◆ Tell students that the Mishnah (the oldest postbiblical collection of Jewish laws) teaches: “Whoever saves one life, it is as if that person saved the entire world.” Have students discuss with a partner these questions: *What does the Mishnah teach about the value of human life? Which characters in the story of Pharaoh’s daughter and Miriam might agree with the Mishnah’s teaching? Why?* Invite students to share their thoughts with the class.

◆ Explain that the mitzvah (the sacred commandment) of *bal tashhit* (literally, “do not destroy”) teaches us to take care of the natural environment. Ask: *How might human, plant, and animal life be affected if we do not observe the mitzvah of bal tashhit?* Have students give concrete examples. (For instance, we will run out of drinking water. We will not be able to heat or air-condition our homes or drive places because we will have used up our energy resources.) Then encourage students to brainstorm ten ways in which they can perform the mitzvah of *bal tashhit*. Students might create lively posters that promote their suggestions.

◆ Point out that Moses was drawn from the water by Pharaoh’s daughter. Ask: *Can you think of other experiences that Moses had with water later on in his life?* (He led the Israelites through the Sea of Reeds; he struck a rock in order to bring forth water.) Introduce the Hebrew word for “water,” *mayyim*. You may want to invite your cantor to teach the class the traditional Israeli folk song and dance “Mayyim.”

## Courage: Moses, the Israelites, and the Golden Calf

*Summary: Exodus 32:1–14*

The Bible describes how, after Moses had been on Mount Sinai for forty days, the Israelites became anxious and demanded that Aaron make a god for them. Aaron instructed the Israelites to bring him the gold rings from the ears of their wives, sons, and daughters. The Bible then says that all the people broke off the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron, who made a golden calf from the earrings. The Israelites bowed down to the golden calf and made sacrifices to it. Enraged, God planned to destroy the Israelites, but Moses persuaded God to withdraw the harsh punishment.

Students will explore the value of courage and issues such as: *What might have given Moses the courage to speak up before God? What are the differences between physical, emotional, and ethical courage?*

### *Teaching Techniques*

Use these techniques to extend and enrich students' learning:

- ◆ Have students turn to Exodus 32:12 on page 3. Ask: *How does Moses persuade God not to destroy the Israelites?* (Moses indicates that if God destroys the Israelites, it will encourage the Egyptians to say that God's intentions were evil in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt.) Ask: *How can we apply Moses's approach when we try to persuade others to reconsider actions that we think will be harmful?* (Help the person see the full—sometimes indirect—consequences of his or her actions.)
- ◆ Invite students to describe people whom they admire for their courage. (Remind students that the people need not be famous. They can be friends, relatives, or neighbors.) Have students explain what the people have done, why they think it took courage, and what they can learn from that person. Consider creating a class poster, complete with captioned drawings and/or photographs, called "Portraits of Courage."
- ◆ Invite a volunteer to be a newscaster reporting the incident of the golden calf as told in the rabbinic *midrash*. Have another volunteer be an on-the-scene reporter and several other volunteers play the roles of "people on the street." Have the reporter question the people about what they think of the women's refusal to contribute their jewelry to the making of the golden calf.
- ◆ Consider celebrating Rosh Hodesh by telling the class about influential Jewish women. Readings on women such as Zionist Henrietta Szold and activist Zivia Lubetkin, can be found in *Women of Valor* (Behrman House).