

Long Ago but Not *Too* Far Away:

Jewish Identity and Community Building through Storytelling

Shabbaton Family Education
Temple Israel of Hollywood
2013-2014

Course Rationale

We Jews are a people of stories. Who we are, what we do, our place in the world; all are rooted firmly in the stories of our heritage. We tell them with pride, with anguish, and often with humor. Our stories have carried us through generations of persecution and success, alienation and redemption. From the pages of Torah to the lines of screenplays, from the streets of Tzfat to the shtetls of Eastern Europe, from the Lower East Side to the hills of Hollywood; we are our stories, and our stories are *us*.

This curriculum seeks to accomplish two main feats: one is to connect Shabbaton learners with the stories selected: to enrich participants' fluency with Jewish storytelling writ large. Through this act of retelling heavily saturated Jewish stories, connections will be made. Bonds will be formed. Families will grow together and as a community. The second feat is to dig deeper into those stories and explore what makes them so instinctively "Jewish." Where are Jewish values present in a well-known story like "Challahs in the Ark?" How does a story serve to connect Jews to their Jewishness? What can a story's morals teach us – adults and children alike – about living our lives Jewishly in the present day?

As Rabbi Ed Feinstein writes in his book *Capturing the Moon: Classic and Modern Jewish Tales*, "Telling a story is an act of spiritual generosity. It is a sharing of life. Stories convey our hopes, our dreams, our fears, our experiences, our wisdom, and our humor.... Stories make life meaningful." The goal of this curriculum is to enrich the lives and learning of Shabbaton participants through the very act of storytelling. Through looking back towards the stories of the past, we enable future generations to create, write, implement, tell, and retell stories over and over again.

Course Enduring Understandings

- Jewish stories possess powerful opportunities for connections between individuals and their heritage, individuals and their families, and families and their community
- Embedded in classic and modern Jewish stories are timeless values, morals, and lessons applicable to children and adults alike
- Centuries of Jewish storytelling produce and reinforce bridges between past, present, and future generations

Curriculum Overview (Revised August 24, 2013)

Unit 1: Introduction

Lesson 1: Introduction, Sukkot, and Ushpizin

Unit 2: Heroes and Leaders

Lesson 2: Samson

Lesson 3: Deborah

Lesson 4: Ezekiel

Lesson 5: Jonah

(Retreat)

Lesson 6: David and Goliath

Lesson 7: Elijah / the Still Small Voice

Lesson 8: Maccabees/Chanukkah

Lesson 9: Ezra and Nehemia

Unit 3: Doing What's Right

Lesson 10: Honi the Circle Maker (Tu B'Shevat)

Lesson 11: The True Artist

Lesson 12: Challah in the Ark (Breed Street Shul Visit)

Lesson 13: Two Brothers

Lesson 14: Wise Men of Chelm

Unit 4: TaNaKh Tales

Lesson 15: Esther (Purim)

Lesson 16: Moses and the Burning Bush (Pesach)

Lesson 17: Exodus from Egypt and the Ten Commandments (Pesach)

Lesson 18: Complaining and "Send us Back to Egypt!" (Pesach)

Unit 5: Rabbinic, Hasidic, and Mystical

Lesson 19: Ba'al Shem Tov

Lesson 20: TBD

Lesson 1: Introduction, Sukkot, and Ushpizin (Offsite)

EQs: Why are “stories” the theme of our learning this year? How is the legend of the *Ushpizin* an important element of the holiday of Sukkot? What are the stories we wish to tell one another?

Lesson Goals:

- To introduce learners to the theme of this year’s learning
- To introduce learners to the story of the *Ushpizin* and connect that to the celebration of Sukkot
- To convey to learners the significance of Jewish storytelling
- To help learners explore the connection between storytelling, Jewish identity, and community building
- To encourage learners’ involvement in one another’s lives for the sake of building community and fostering relationships
- To teach careful listening so that learners can listen fully to the stories of their peers and friends

Lesson Objectives: (By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to...)

- Identify how and in what ways storytelling is a significant Jewish act
- Recall a story shared with them by a peer or fellow learner
- Recall the communally-told story of *Shabbaton*
- Articulate the role of the *Ushpizin* in one’s celebration of Sukkot
- Articulate at least one way storytelling is a significant element of living a Jewish life
- Connect with one new person in their age group / classroom

Text Message for Sicha Yomi: *What is one new thing you learned about someone in Shabbaton today?*

Materials Needed:

Portable Sukkah, if possible
Blank storybooks (or save them for the first day back at TIOH)
Plastic Ball
Scratch paper
Pencils
Markers

Introduction

Invite all members of Shabbaton to gather in one giant circle. Instruct families to clump together; the circle does not need to be a perfect sphere. Once families have become situated, leader should say the following:

This year is all about telling stories – the Jewish stories that we have told and retold over generations. Each week we will focus on a different Jewish story: some will be familiar, others will be brand-new. But we will tell them, and we will learn from them, and we will

uncover together what makes these stories Jewish. Why do they matter? What do they continue to teach us year after year after year?

Before we begin our learning this year, we are going to tell a story together. It's the story of Shabbaton. Now, many of you have been a part of Shabbaton since the beginning. Some of you have been a part of this community for only a year or two. And for some in this circle, today is your very first day. No matter how long you've been in Shabbaton, we are all a part of this learning community. And so, we will tell its story together, one word at a time, demonstrating both the power of storytelling and the idea that it is a community effort. The story belongs to us all.

Leader should then explain how the activity works: one person at a time (or one family at a time, to expedite the process) will say *one* word and only one word in the story. Whoever starts the process also finishes it; the story will be told in a circle. People can say whatever they want, but the topic is the loosely-told story of Shabbaton. The goal of this exercise is not to tell the story word-for-word. Rather it is to demonstrate the power of storytelling; that each family brings their own understanding of how they got to that very place and time, and that it is a community effort.

Suggested Learning Activities:

Note – If a portable sukkah is available, please use that space for Activity 3: telling the legend of the Ushpizin and its connection to Sukkot. The four activities should go in a rotation format, depending on the space available. You may want to have everyone begin with Activity 1, then rotate through Activities 2-4.

Activity 1: Break into Classrooms / Meet the Teacher / Play the Name Game

Each grade level should gather together and do introductions. Teacher should introduce him or herself. Here are a few suggestions for name games:

Younger Grades:

- Alliteration – My name is Jaclyn and I love Jellybeans, my name is Sarah and I love Sour Patch Kids ... etc. To challenge the students, have them do the alliteration of the person who went before them *and* do everyone in the circle at the very end.
- Name Toss (Younger) – Arrange a group circle. One person starts off by holding a ball and saying their name and tossing the ball to another person in the circle. That person says the name of the person who threw them the ball, then says their name. Then they pass it. Then that person has to say the name of the person who threw them the ball, the person who threw it first, and their own name. And so forth.

Older Grades

- Name/Interest/Motion - Everyone in the group stands in a circle. The first person says, "My name is and I like to _____ (insert hobby and act out a motion from that hobby.) The rest of group then says, "(Person's Name) likes to (hobby) and acts out motion. Example, "My name is Dave and I like Fish (action out casting a reel). The next person repeats the process. The rest of group then says that person's name, hobby, and motion and the moves onto the first person's info. This continues until the last person goes, at which the entire group calls out the last person's info and moves along through the whole group and repeats everyone's info.
- Name Toss/Reverse Name Toss - Arrange a group circle. One person starts off by calling out the name of someone in the circle and tossing the ball to them. That person then calls out another name and tosses the ball to that person. (And so forth, until all names have been called) Once this has been completed, have the group do the exercise in the exact reverse order. (Teacher should be paying attention to help guide students, who may not remember who tossed it to them or to whom they tossed)

This can be a time for each classroom to create their *brit*, or it can be reserved for the first session back at TIOH.

Activity 2: Careful Listening

Invite students to pair up with someone in their class; preferably someone they do not yet know. Once everyone has a partner, (and teacher will likely need to assist with this) have them face one another.

Teacher should say, *this is an exercise in “careful listening.” Careful listening is a specific kind of listening – what do you think it means?* (Listening fully, hearing every word, paying close attention, etc.) *Why do you think careful listening is an important element of telling stories, our theme for the year?* (When we tell stories, we have to listen carefully; when we listen carefully, we fully absorb what’s being told)

What we are going to do right now is practice careful listening. First, I am going to ask everyone a question to think about. Then I will give you thirty seconds – and I will time you – to think silently about that question. Then one of you will respond and the other will listen silently. After thirty seconds of sharing, you’ll stop. Then your partner will repeat that story back to you. Pay attention to how closely your partner was following your words. Were they listening closely and carefully?

Repeat as many times as time allows. Remind students that this year, our goal is to listen as closely and carefully to our stories – and to each other – as we possibly can.

Activity 3: The Ushpizin story (Grades 3 and 4 version, Grades 5 and 6 version)

Gather students in the portable sukkah or around a picnic table. Due to space issues, I’ve chosen not to have teachers act out the story; I’ve instead written it in the format of

questions and narrative. However – it may work for students to act out the story themselves through the guidance of their teachers.

Third and Fourth Grade Version:

Have any of you ever had a guest in your home?

Did you know that Judaism teaches us that it's a great *mitzvah* – a commandment – to welcome guests into our homes? It's a Jewish value called *hachnasat orchim* – welcoming guests. And today's story is all about welcoming guests.

Who knows what Jewish holiday it is this week? (*Sukkot*)

On the holiday of Sukkot, we remember when our ancestors lived and slept temporary dwellings – little booths or huts – with branches on the top so they could see the stars. And for many Jews around the world, Sukkot is such an important holiday that they spend all their time at home in the Sukkah – eating and drinking and sleeping and enjoying. It's a time of *great rejoicing!*

One of the commandments during this holiday is to welcome *Ushpizin* into our Sukkot. Who has ever heard the word *Ushpizin*? Does it sound like an English word? (*No.*) It's actually Aramaic, an ancient language of our sacred Jewish texts, and *Ushpizin* is a word that means guests. But not just any guests – *special* guests who come back, year after year after year.

We are taught that the *Ushpizin* of Sukkot are very, very important people. So important that we must welcome them year after year, Sukkot after Sukkot, into our booths. Now, the *Ushpizin* are actually very specific people. They are literally the most famous of people in our whole TaNaKh! Every night we welcome a different person into the Sukkah. On the first night, we welcome Abraham. The next night we welcome Isaac, his son. Then the third night, we welcome Jacob. Following him, the fourth night we welcome Moses. On the fifth night we welcome his brother Aaron, on the sixth night we say hello to Joseph, and finally, on the seventh night, we welcome King David, builder of the city of Jerusalem.

So why do you think it's important to welcome these people into our Sukkah? (*They have a lot to teach us, they're our ancestors, they remind us of the holiday*) It's also important to remember that Sukkot is a holiday that we share with others. A major part of the holiday involves welcoming people in; not just our ancestors from the Torah and the Prophets, but also guests from our greater community, so that all may enjoy the gift of living under the stars for a week.

So, if you were to have more *Ushpizin* – guests – in your home Sukkah for a week, who would they be? Why would you want them there? What could they teach you?

Finally – we just told our first story of the year. What do you think is Jewish about storytelling? What’s Jewish about *this* story? Why is it important to tell stories to one another?

Fifth and Sixth Grade Version:

Can someone tell me what Jewish holiday we celebrate right around now? (*Sukkot*)

And what do we celebrate during the holiday of Sukkot? (*We recognize the elements of our natural world – we live outside in little booths with palm fronds on the tops so that we can see the stars – we relax and enjoy ourselves*)

The holiday of Sukkot is also about welcoming guests – the Jewish value of *hachnasat orchim*. Why do you think it’s important to welcome guests into our *Sukkot*? (*It’s good hospitality, it helps us bond with the community*)

On Sukkot, we tell a legend, a story, of the Ushpizin. Now, Ushpizin is not an English word, nor is it Hebrew. Does anyone want to guess what language it might be? (*Aramaic, the language in which the Talmud is written*)

Ushpizin are guests; holy, spiritual guests. And the legend of the Ushpizin and Sukkot goes something like this: every Sukkot holiday, when a family builds their Sukkah in their backyard or on their balconies, as many of them do in Israel, they are instructed to welcome guests into their Sukkahs each night. Why? Because while the holiday is wonderful, it is not complete unless we welcome others to celebrate with us.

Each night of Sukkot we are told a different spiritual guest – a different holy *Ushpiza* – comes to dwell with us within the Sukkah. And that guest brings with him a different reminder, a different value, for us to ponder.

On the first night, we welcome Abraham. Abraham reminds us of *chesed* – of lovingkindness. Abraham loved welcoming guests into his tent, and we remember his charity and his welcoming attitude.

On the second night, we welcome Isaac. Isaac reminds us of *gevurah* – of restraint and dedication.

On the third night, we welcome Jacob. Jacob exemplifies *tiferet* – beauty, harmony, and truth.

On the fourth night, we welcome Moses – *netzach* – victory, endurance.

Fifth night – we welcome Aaron, Moses’ brother – who exemplified *hod* – splendor and humility.

On the sixth night, we welcome Joseph, with his coat of many colors – Joseph, who showed us *yesod* – a foundation and a connection.

And on the seventh night, we welcome King David, *malchut* – who reminds us of sovereignty, receptiveness, and leadership.

Each night, we welcome these spiritual guests as we welcome our own physical guests. They teach us and they guide us, and we can fully enjoy Sukkot with them.

Now, why do you think it's important to welcome guests into our Sukkah? What can these attributes teach us about how to live our lives today? What do the Ushpizin help us learn to do today, in the modern world?

Finally – now that we've just told our first “story” of the year, I invite you to reflect on what it means to tell a Jewish story. What's “Jewish” about telling stories? Why is it an important aspect of living a Jewish life?

Activity 4: Story Book Entries

Depending on space, this is either going to be a time to introduce the idea of the story books, sketch out an idea for the first entry, or pass out the books and have students actually put in their day's entry. (Hence, the call for scratch paper, pencils, markers, and story books)

The storybooks should be explained as follows: just as this year is all about stories, we Shabbaton learners are going to tell our stories. Each day that Shabbaton meets, some time will be devoted to writing in the storybooks. It will be a chance for students to reflect on and process the learning they did that day. It can be done in the form of words, in the form of art, in a poem, maybe even a collage once in awhile. (Depending on teacher's willingness to set up materials, etc.) The only requirement is that students must reflect in some way on the day's content.

At the end of the year, students will be able to look back on their storybooks and tell the story of their Shabbaton year. It will be a physical, hard-copy way of retelling their Shabbaton 2013-14 adventure for years to come.

Lesson 2: Samson

EQs: Who was Samson? What was the source of his extraordinary strength? What can the story of Samson teach us about strength, patience, and devotion?

Lesson Goals:

- To introduce students to the character Samson, found in the book of Judges
- To present to students an idea of the Samson character: a unique prophet with unusual gifts, a hot temper, and a very specific devotion to God
- To introduce or re-introduce students to the concept of the “Nazir”
- To present to students how the prophets – Ne’vi’im – were a variety of individuals with their own unique stories
- To help students articulate how “strength” can encompass both physical strength and emotional strength

Lesson Objectives: (By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to...)

- Identify Samson as a Nazirite with a hot temper and extraordinary strength who was duped by the character Delilah
- Articulate how Samson’s impulsive behavior was a negative attribute
- Describe who and what a Nazirite was: a special subset within the greater group of Israelites who demonstrated devotion to God by growing out their hair, abstaining from alcohol, and not coming into contact with a dead body
- Connect the story of Samson with a story from their own memory about strength, passion, or devotion; a story featuring physical or emotional strength or a combination thereof
- Write the next chapter in their personal “story book”

Text Message for Sichat Yomi: *Today we learned about Samson, a prophet from the Book of Judges. Name one thing you discovered about Samson’s personality. What made him so unique? Would you have wanted Samson on your baseball team? Why or why not?*

Materials Needed:

Story Books

Fake Barbells

Paper

Pencils / pens

Storybooks

Markers

Old-school “Milk: It Does a Body Good” advertisements

Introduction:

Today’s introduction will be a skit of sorts, made to look like a “test your strength” booth at a carnival. One person will be the host, encouraging people to step forward to test their strength, lifting up a (faux) giant set of barbells. (This can be purchased at a costume store or made using a long rod and blacked-out toilet paper/paper towels)

(Prior to the skit, a teacher should identify a few parents who can come up and pretend like the barbells are too heavy to lift) All other participants should be children.

When the skit starts, the host of the booth should say “Step right up, ladies and gentlemen! Test your strength! How strong do YOU think you are? Now is the time, now is the place, to check out your ultimate power! Step! Right! Up! Ladies! And! Gentlemen!!” (Host should then identify volunteers, including the ringers picked before the start of the skit)

The parents picked ahead of time will show that the barbells are too heavy. The kids who come forward to try to lift will either show that the barbells weigh nothing OR they will try to be funny and get the joke. Either way, have 8-10 people test their strength on the barbells, showcasing that some people can lift them and others can't.

Once 8-10 volunteers have gone, the host should say: *ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, today you saw that some people in our Shabbaton community possess great strength. Others? Not so much. But – what do we mean when we say strength? What is strength even all about? Perhaps strength is more than just physical strength – perhaps it means a lot more than being able to lift a silly pair of barbells...* (host may want to try to pick up the barbells here, but pretend not be able to do it)

... Today we are going to head the story of Samson, a Prophet from the book of Judges. Samson was known for his unbelievable strength, as well as his hot temper and his rivalry with the enemies of the Israelite people, the Philistines. But just like with all of us, there was much more to Samson's strength than what met the eye ... Today, we are going to learn the deeper meaning behind the strength in Samson's story...

Dismiss to same-age learning.

Suggested Learning Activities:

Below you will find the suggested learning activities for third grade only (including a 3rd-grade-level version of the Samson story) and 4-6 grade only. As this is the second day of class and the first day onsite, I recommend instructors devote at least 10-15 minutes to doing name games, icebreakers, and team builders with their class.

3rd Grade:

Story – to be read out loud, acted out by volunteers, or one then the other for reinforcement.

Once upon a time, as we read in the Book of Prophets, there lived a man named Samson. Now, Samson was a truly special leader. Before he was born, his parents did not think they would be able to have a child. They were worried and scared that they would never create a family. Yet one day, an angel of God appeared and said to them, “*one day, in the not too distant future, you will have a son! Take good care of your body, make sure to*

only eat fresh veggies and fruits, nothing too spicy, and when your son eventually arrives, make sure never to cut his hair, ever. Because he will be a Nazir, and he will be the first to deliver the people Israel from their enemies, the Philistines.”

Samson’s mother and father were overjoyed. They knew that the Nazirs were a special group of people dedicated to God. They could not cut their hair, drink wine, or come into contact with a dead body. They were special, and so they knew their son Samson would be special, too.

When Samson was born, his parents knew that the angel of God was right. Samson was so strong! He was the strongest baby they’d ever met. Because he was a Nazir, dedicated to God, they never cut his hair. His hair made him unbelievably strong! It gave him extraordinary physical power and so, he took great care of it.

But as Samson got older, his parents learned that he had a quick temper. Samson had very little patience. He loved to be around beautiful women and sometimes, he could get violent. He would beat people up for no other reason than he was angry! One time, as a way of showing off his strength, he tied the tails of *three hundred foxes* together and tied a flaming torch to their tails. He sent the foxes into the fields of the Philistines, his enemies. No one ever forgot that!

Tales of Samson’s strength reached far and wide. One day, a woman named Delilah came into his life. Samson quickly fell in love with her. Only, Delilah was sort of a *spy*. The Philistines told her that she had to make Samson fall in love with her, tell her the source of his power, and then they could finally defeat him!

Delilah pleaded with Samson several times to tell her the source of his unbelievable strength. Time after time, he lied. Not wanting to give away his secret power, he made something up. Each time, Delilah realized he was lying. But finally, one day, he told Delilah: *what makes me strong is my long, long hair. If it ever gets cut, my strength will go away!”*

Delilah knew that this was the truth. While Samson slept, she cut off his precious locks of hair and his strength was gone. When the Philistines came for him, he was unable to fight them off. They took him as their prisoner; they tortured him for all the bad things he had done to them, like setting those foxes with flaming tails out into their fields.

After a long period of time, Samson was so miserable and felt so guilty for ever telling Delilah the secret of his strength. One day, he was placed in the grand palace of the Philistines to entertain them. There were three thousand Philistines in the grand hall. His hair had started to grow back. And Samson prayed out to God and said, *God, God, please listen to me. Just this once, please restore my strength to me so that I might get my revenge on our enemies, the Philistines.*

God brought Samson’s strength back to him and in one final act, he pushed on the columns of the grand hall and the entire place came crashing down. Samson perished

with the Philistines, the people who captured him and scared him and his family. In that moment, Samson's strength prevented future generations of Israelites from being hurt or bullied by the Philistines.

Follow Up Questions for Discussion:

- Describe a Nazir in your own words. What is a Nazir? What makes them unique?
- Why do you think God wanted to set the Nazirites (as they were called) aside from the rest of the community?
- Does Samson remind you of anyone in your life? (Should remain anonymous) What are their "strengths?" What are their "weaknesses?" Are they physical, emotional, or both?
- Delilah spied on Samson for the Philistines. Did she do the right thing by cutting off Samson's hair? Why or why not?

Instructor may need to devote more time to explaining what a Nazir was. Samson is among the most recognizable Nazirites in the TaNaKh. In the time of the Torah and Prophets, a Nazir was someone who was an extra-special subset of the group of Israelites. Their power was in their hair; the hair could even be an offering to God, shaved off within the vicinity of the Mishkan and offered as an *oleh* or burnt offering to God. The Nazirites took a very clear, very direct vow saying that they would forever be in allegiance to God, until that vow was broken.

Activity: Reacting vs. Responding – A Closer Look at Samson's Power

Instructor should say, "*Samson was a character in our book of Prophets who often acted really quickly, without thinking too much through his thoughts. Some words to describe him are brash or impulsive. Many people would say he reacted instead of responded when confronted with a problem. What do you think is the difference between those two things? Can any of you give me an example of a time when you reacted instead of responding; when you acted really quickly, without thinking something through?*" (Give students a few minutes to share)

Next, instructor should say: *each of us has had a time or two in our lives when we acted without thinking – perhaps it was because of something our sibling did to us, or a friend, or maybe something made us really really angry and we reacted. Well, there's something to be said about reacting really quickly; there is much more power in stopping, thinking, and pausing before we act.*

Next, instructor should put students in groups of 3-4 and distribute a list of scenarios. With this list, those groups will be asked to act out the scenario for one another two ways: first, reacting quickly and without much thought. Second time through, they will respond rather than react. The group should dissect and discuss their scenarios.

Scenarios:

- Your sibling tells you he borrowed the new toy you got for Hanukkah without telling you first. He comes to you with it broken in his hands. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- You're raising your hand in class because you are certain you know the answer to the teacher's question. Your teacher doesn't call on you, but calls on someone else instead. That person gets in wrong, but the teacher moves on without giving you the chance to answer correctly. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- Someone in your grade at school is being mean to the kids around you; you know his behavior isn't right, but you don't say anything for fear of being made fun of. Then one day, he makes fun of you on the playground in front of all your friends. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- You're about to leave the house, dressed up fancy and ready for the big spring concert. Out of nowhere, your sibling's gum falls into your hair, getting trapped. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- It's the championship baseball game, the last of the season. You're coming down to the final few seconds of the game and the score is tied. Suddenly, the opposing team hits a home run, winning the game and the championship for the entire league. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?

After students have had some time to act out the scenarios and discuss the difference between reacting and responding, instructor should point out that in many ways, Samson could have benefited from this exercise. While Samson did indeed save the people of Israel from further destruction by the Philistines, he went about it in a way that was often *reactive*, rather than *responsive*. Imagine how powerful he would have been had he thought through his response before reacting impulsively. Imagine how powerful we would *all* be if we thought through and *responded* to something, rather than *react* impulsively.

Activity: What Makes Me Strong

For this activity, present students with a series of "Milk: It Does a Body Good" advertisements from the late 90s / 2000s. (I believe they're still in production, but not sure) Have students examine the ads and determine what makes them "work" or "not work." Are they a convincing advertisement for milk? Are they implying that people who drink milk are automatically cool? Are these ads about strength? Inner or outer?

Have students discuss the ads and their relationship to strength for a few minutes. Then ask students to brainstorm in small groups what makes *them* strong. First, start by asking: what do they put into their bodies? How do they get the proper nutrients to grow big and strong? Do they have food allergies? If so, how do they avoid them and get the proper nutrition they need to develop their physical selves?

Next, have students address the following question: *how do you get strong internally? What types of activities do you do to nourish your soul and your mind?* Have students discuss in small groups what they do to make themselves strong on the inside. If time allows, have small groups share with the class their findings.

Final Activity – Story Books

For the final piece of class, make sure students contribute to their story books: recapping the material from that day's learning and telling its story in whatever creative way they choose.

4-6th Grade:

Story – to be read aloud or acted out by volunteers; instructor may want to read story first to students and then assign them roles and act it out.

Samson was a unique Prophet. Before he was born, his parents did not think they would be able to have a child. They were worried that they'd never get the chance to have a baby. Yet one day, an angel of God appeared and said to them, "*one day, in the not too distant future, you will have a son! Take good care of your body, make sure to eat well, stay away from alcohol, and when your son eventually arrives, make sure never to cut his hair, ever. Because he will be a Nazir, and he will be the first to deliver the people Israel from their enemies, the Philistines.*"

Samson's mother and father were overjoyed. They knew that the Nazirs were a special group of people dedicated to God. They could not cut their hair, drink wine, or come into contact with a dead body. They were special, and so they knew their son Samson would be special, too.

When Samson was born, his parents knew that the angel of God was right. Samson was so strong! He was the strongest baby they'd ever encountered. Because he was a Nazir, dedicated to God, they never cut his hair. The angel of God told them not to. It gave him extraordinary physical power and so, as he got older Samson took great care of it.

But also as Samson got older, his parents learned he had a quick temper and little patience. He loved to be around beautiful women and sometimes he got violent. He would beat people up out of anger; something that was certainly not becoming of a Nazir. One time, as a way of showing off his strength, he tied the tails of *three hundred foxes* together and tied a flaming torch to their tails. He sent the foxes into the fields of the Philistines, his enemies, setting aflame acres and acres of farmland.

Tales of Samson's strength reached far and wide. One day, a woman named Delilah came into his life. Samson quickly fell in love with her. Only, Delilah was a spy for the Philistines. The Philistines told her that she had to make Samson fall in love with her, tell her the source of his power, and then they could finally defeat him.

Delilah pleaded with Samson several times to tell her the source of his strength. Time after time, he lied. Not wanting to give away his secret power, he made something up. First he told her it was the cords that tied his hands together. But he was lying. Then he said that it was the way his hair was woven together. That was a lie too. Each time, Delilah realized quickly that he had been lying. But finally, one day, he told Delilah the

truth: *what makes me strong is my long, long hair. If it ever gets cut, my strength will go away!*”

Delilah, knowing he was telling the truth, took matters into her own hands. While Samson slept, she cut off his precious locks of hair. When the Philistines came for him, he was unable to fight them off. His strength was completely gone. The Philistines took him as their prisoner; they tortured him for all the bad things he had done to them, like setting those foxes with flaming tails out into their fields. They gouged out his eyes and made him a prisoner in their palace.

After a long period of time, Samson was so miserable and felt so guilty for ever telling Delilah the secret of his strength. One day, he was placed in the grand palace of the Philistines to entertain them. There were three thousand Philistines in the grand hall. His hair had started to grow back. Samson prayed out to God and said, *God, God, please listen to me. Just this once, please restore my strength to me so that I might get my revenge on our enemies, the Philistines.*

God brought Samson’s strength back to him and in one final act, he pushed on the columns of the grand hall and the entire place came crashing down. His final words were, “[*God*], *let me die with the Philistines!*” Samson perished with the Philistines, the enemies of his family and his people. In that final moment of his life, Samson’s strength prevented future generations of Israelites from being tortured or captured by the Philistines.

Follow-up Questions / Discussion:

- Describe a *Nazir* in your own words. Why do you think our tradition had a group set apart from the rest of the community, devoted to God in a specific way?
- How was Samson a unique prophet? What was his contribution to the people of Israel? Was it a positive or negative contribution?
- How do you understand Delilah’s actions? Was she all “good” or all “bad?” Why or why not?
- At the conclusion of the story, Samson cries out to God, “*let me die with the Philistines!*” How do you interpret this final quote from Samson? Do you think this demonstrates his “giving up” and giving in to the Philistines? Or is there a deeper meaning here, perhaps conveying Samson’s allegiance to God?

Instructor may need to devote more time to explaining what a Nazir was. Samson is among the most recognizable Nazirites in the TaNaKh. In the time of the Torah and Prophets, a Nazir was someone who was an extra-special subset of the group of Israelites. Their power was in their hair; the hair could even be an offering to God, shaved off within the vicinity of the Mishkan and offered as an *oleh* or burnt offering to God. The Nazirites took a very clear, very direct vow saying that they would forever be in allegiance to God, until that vow was broken.

Activity: Inner Strength / Outer Strength – Analyzing Samson’s Power

Instructor should introduce the activity in the following manner: Samson is often looked to as a man with great physical strength and power. His power, we are told, came from the long locks of hair he was forbidden to cut due to his status as a Nazir. Samson’s strength was ultimately taken from him when he told Delilah its true source. However, his final act of physical strength, tearing down the house of the Philistines, demonstrates that perhaps that his human strength was not purely physical; it may also have come from a place deep inside him, as well.

First, instructor should ask students to articulate the difference between physical and emotional strength. Physical strength: typically, doing something involving one’s body, such as lifting a heavy object, rowing a boat, etc. Emotional: demonstrating patience, compassion, kindness, etc.

Instructor should pass out a piece of paper and a pencil to every student. On this paper, students will be assessing their own physical/emotional strength and sharing it with a partner. The objective of this exercise is for students to grasp that all of life involves some emotional and some physical strength; nothing is ever one or the other. (The same as it was for Samson in his final act)

Students should fold their paper into four quarters, then assign each quarter a quadrant:

Total Physical Strength	Mostly Physical/Some Emotional Strength
Mostly Emotional/Some Physical Strength	Total Emotional Strength

Instructor should ask students to identify two different stories from their own past. One story has to fall within one of these four squares, the other has to fall within a totally separate square. (For example, a student can identify one story that involves “total physical strength” and one story that involves “mostly emotional / some physical strength.”)

Next, give students a length of time, no more than ten minutes, to write out a basic outline for their two stories. Have them do this silently.

After students have done this, put them in groups of 2-3. Instruct students to share and analyze their stories and the stories of their peers. Pay attention to the following questions. (Instructor should project these or write them on the board)

- When did this story happen to you? How long ago?
- What about this story made an impact on you? What made it such a powerful story?

- In each of these stories, did you see what was happening as a showing of “strength” when it was happening? Physical or emotional strength?
- How might your stories connect with or relate to the story of Samson? In what ways were his stories displays of emotional strength? Physical strength?
- In your day-to-day life, which do you think is a more important attribute? Physical strength or emotional strength?

The conclusion to this activity should involve a brief discussion recapping the smaller discussions had by each group.

Activity: Freewrite

For this activity, pass our paper and writing implements to students. Ask them to address the following question, written on the board:

The story of Samson is largely about strength. Samson’s strength, as we’ve learned, came from his hair. When his hair was taken from him, his strength was lost. Where does your personal strength come from? When do you have to draw on that strength? In happy times? In sad times? Write for a few moments about the personal strength you possess and where you believe it originates.

Upon completion of the freewrite, you may want to ask students to share some highlights with a peer, small group, or the entire class. Allow this to generate a conversation on the sources of strength we all draw from – whether they be our friends, our family, the food we eat, the sports we participate in, our involvement with TIOH, our community, etc.

Activity: Reacting vs. Responding – A Closer Look at Samson’s Power (same as 3rd grade activity)

Instructor should say, “*Samson was a character in our book of Prophets who often acted really quickly, without thinking too much through his thoughts. Some words to describe him are brash or impulsive. Many people would say he reacted instead of responded when confronted with a problem. What do you think is the difference between those two things? Can any of you give me an example of a time when you reacted instead of responding; when you acted really quickly, without thinking something through?*” (Give students a few minutes to share)

Next, instructor should say: *each of us has had a time or two in our lives when we acted without thinking – perhaps it was because of something our sibling did to us, or a friend, or maybe something made us really really angry and we reacted. Well, there’s something to be said about reacting really quickly; there is much more power in stopping, thinking, and pausing before we act.*

Next, instructor should put students in groups of 3-4 and distribute a list of scenarios. With this list, those groups will be asked to act out the scenario for one another two ways:

first, reacting quickly and without much thought. Second time through, they will respond rather than react. The group should dissect and discuss their scenarios.

Scenarios:

- Your sibling tells you he borrowed the new toy you got for Hanukkah without telling you first. He comes to you with it broken in his hands. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- You're raising your hand in class because you are certain you know the answer to the teacher's question. Your teacher doesn't call on you, but calls on someone else instead. That person gets in wrong, but the teacher moves on without giving you the chance to answer correctly. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- Someone in your grade at school is being mean to the kids around you; you know his behavior isn't right, but you don't say anything for fear of being made fun of. Then one day, he makes fun of you on the playground in front of all your friends. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- You're about to leave the house, dressed up fancy and ready for the big spring concert. Out of nowhere, your sibling's gum falls into your hair, getting trapped. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?
- It's the championship baseball game, the last of the season. You're coming down to the final few seconds of the game and the score is tied. Suddenly, the opposing team hits a home run, winning the game and the championship for the entire league. How do you *react*? How do you *respond*?

After students have had some time to act out the scenarios and discuss the difference between reacting and responding, instructor should point out that in many ways, Samson could have benefited from this exercise. While Samson did indeed save the people of Israel from further destruction by the Philistines, he went about it in a way that was often *reactive*, rather than *responsive*. Imagine how powerful he would have been had he thought through his response before reacting impulsively. Imagine how powerful we would *all* be if we thought through and *responded* to something, rather than *react* impulsively.

Final Activity – Story Books

For the final piece of class, make sure students contribute to their story books: recapping the material from that day's learning and telling its story in whatever creative way they choose.