

# Megilat Esther

## Courage in Crisis: Middle School and High School

### ABSTRACT:

In this lesson, we will discuss leadership, responsibility, and courage in times of crisis. The students' study will focus on chapter four in which Esther is empowered to use her unique position to take positive action to help others in a time of danger. Students will meet contemporary Israeli women who have similarly used their unique role or skill to help save and provide for others during the current war in Israel.

### LESSON GOALS:

- Understand the transformation that Esther made when faced with a moment of crisis.
- Meet two examples of contemporary Israeli women who acted courageously during the current crisis.
- Consider that every person has a unique contribution to make in times of crisis.
- Feel inspired by the courage of women - both biblical and contemporary - to move beyond their personal comfort in order to take an active and vocal stand for what they believe is right.

### LESSON PLAN:

#### I. Introduction - The Spirit of Israeli Heroism video and Havruta (15 minutes)

1. Pass out cards with texts and questions, explaining that they relate to the one-minute video they are about to watch. After watching Tali's [video](#) - divide students into pairs to do [Havruta](#) using the texts and questions that appear on the cards.
2. Pass out cards with texts and questions, explaining that they relate to the one-minute video they are about to watch. After watching Michaela's [video](#) - divide students into pairs to do [Havruta](#) using the texts and questions that appear on the cards.
3. Discussion: What do Tali's and Michaela's stories have in common? (They both acted under fire, risked their lives, saved other people's lives, took responsibility during a crisis, and used their skills). Can you think of other examples of people who have acted particularly courageously during a crisis? (students can write examples on back of their card - examples: righteous gentiles in Shoah, firefighters on 9-11, defending someone against a bully)

## II. Esther's Courage in Crisis (15 minutes)

### Review:

1. What is the crisis in the Megillah?  
Haman's decree to obliterate all the Jews on Adar 13 (Esther 3:13)
2. How did Esther act courageously during this crisis?  
Approaches the king without being called, reveals her Jewish identity, gets the people to fast, accuses Haman.
3. Hang each verse that they studied in their Havruta in different corners of the room. Either assign or allow students to choose which verse they feel best reflects Esther's actions in the Megillah. The students can then have a brief **debate** or peer discussion to defend their choices based on Esther's actions and the results described in the Megilah.

## III. Moment of Truth: From Ordinary to Extraordinary (15 minutes)

All of the women we have learned about so far could be described as "ordinary" and could have made "ordinary" choices. Esther, for example, until chapter 4 is described as young, she is "taken," she is an orphan, she doesn't speak, there are no divine miracles, she hides her identity, etc.

### What could each of them have done instead of their courageous act?

- 💡 **Tali** could have stayed with her son instead of going back to save more injured.
- 💡 **Michaela** could have stayed in her safe room with her children.
- 💡 **Esther** could have continued to claim that she could not go to the king because she had not been summoned to do so and used her position as queen to only save herself.

But, there is a famous point of transformation ("venahafoch hu") in which Esther goes from being scared, powerless, and passive to bold, active and empowered,.

#### Mordechai's Message:

***"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 in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis."***

***Esther 4:13-14***

וַיֹּאמֶר מְרֹדֶכַי לְהִשָּׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־תְּדַמִּי בְּנַפְשֶׁךָ לְהַמְלִיךְ  
בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים כִּי אִם־יִחַרְגֶשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי־בְּעַת הַזֹּאת  
הַחַו וְהִצְלָה יַעֲמֹד לַיהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ  
תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לַעֲת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעְתָּ לְמַלְכוּת

Have students re-write Mordechai's speech in their own words using no more than 10 words (examples:)

- 💡 Don't think that you can just save yourself!
- 💡 Don't stay silent. Do something!
- 💡 This is the whole reason you are in this position!
- 💡 This is your calling!
- 💡 Use your gift responsibly!
- 💡 Rise to the hour!
- 💡 What side of history do you want to be on?
- 💡 What kind of person do you want to be?
- 💡 Will you use your position to only save yourself or to save the nation?

Students' messages can be hung on the wall of the classroom and other students can vote or choose which ones they like the most.

**How does Esther respond to Mordechai's appeal?**

***"Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!" So Mordechai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.***

***Esther 4:16-17***

וְתֹאמַר אֶסְתֵּר לְהִשִּׁיב אֶל־מֶרְדֵּכָי  
לִךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוֹשַׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי  
וְאֶל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶל־תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה יוֹם גַּם־אֲנִי  
וְנַעֲרֹתַי אֲצוּם כֵּן וּבִכֹן אָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעַת  
וְכִאֲשֶׁר אֲבַדְתִּי אֲבַדְתִּי וַיַּעֲבֵר מֶרְדֵּכָי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל  
אֲשֶׁר־צִוְתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר {ס}

1. She commands
2. She rallies people
3. She leads by example
4. She risks her own life
5. She has faith



#### IV. Empowerment Poster Wall (can be done in class or as homework)

Teenagers sometimes feel young and powerless to make a real difference or impact. Visual aids can help them feel empowered to act responsibly and courageously. Students should design a poster using PDF that will be printed and hung together to create an "empowerment wall". Each poster must include a visual image, a Jewish quote, and can also include a secular or modern saying. The posters can be about general empowerment or can connect to a specific crisis of student concern (bullying, climate change, antisemitism, assimilation, etc). It may be useful to show them examples of empowerment posters.



**Possible Jewish quotes:**

*“There is no person that does not have his hour”  
(Pirkei Avot 3:4)*

אין לך אדם שאין לו שעה

*“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”  
(Pirkei Avot 1:14)*

אם אין אני לי, מי לי? וכשאני לעצמי, מה אני?  
ואם לא עכשיו, אימתי?

*“In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.”  
(Pirkei Avot 5:2)*

ובמקום שאין אנשים, השתדל להיות איש

*“Do not stand by at your neighbor's blood.”  
(Lev 19:16)*

לא תלך רכיל בעמך לא תעמד על דם רעך אני יהוה

*“Whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the entire world.”  
(Sanhedrin 4:9)*

לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי בעולם, ללמד שכל המאבד נפש אחת מעלין עליו כאילו איבד עולם מלא, וכל המקיים נפש אחת מעלין עליו כאילו קיים עולם מלא

*“Who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.”  
(Esther 4:13-14)*

ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED:**

All materials can be found in the following file. They can be copied and edited by the teacher or student. They can also be printed either as small cards or large posters.

**EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS:**

“The fact that someone lives in a certain time, in a specific era in a defined place and was not born in a different period and the other circumstances - we can only understand this if we accept the essential concept that every human is a messenger. Providence knows when and how the individual (with all the limitations and personal capacities incorporated in him) can fulfill his mission; in which circumstances and conditions and in what society can this person have the ability to fulfill his personal mission ?



Since if one appoints someone to carry out a mission, it would be proper to give the person the ability to function as the messenger, therefore, the individual is created in a certain era and place, in which the individual can effectively function for the purpose of fulfilling the mission.” - Rav Soloveitchik

“Wherever we are, sometimes [God] is asking us to realize why He put us here, with these gifts, at this time, with these dangers, in this place,” Rabbi Sacks wrote. “Even [when God appears hidden], if you listen hard enough, you can hear [God] calling to us as individuals, saying, ‘Was is not for this very challenge that you are here in this place at this time?’”

Elie Wiesel famously said, “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Similarly, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict.”

**[If You Remain Silent at this Time: Concern for the Jewish People - Harav Aharon Lichtenstein](#)**

## Megilat Esther resources:



"I drove my son and the other injured to the MDA station and then came back to pick up more. I was driving at 120 kilometers per hour like crazy, alone in the city. There was no one on the streets, not even birds, only terrorists everywhere. And I rushed and picked up another group of wounded under fire again." Tali made three trips, bringing a total of 12 people for medical care. Despite being unarmed, Tali bravely entered the danger zone to save lives. When asked where she found her courage, Tali explained that each of her four sons is a soldier. "The spirit in our home is the spirit of fighters."

**Tali Hadad, Ofakim**

In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man. (Pirkei Avot 5:2)

וּבְמָקוֹם שֶׁאֵין אָנָשִׁים, הִשְׁתַּדֵּל לִהְיוֹת אִישׁ:  
(פִּרְקֵי אָבוֹת 5:2)

- Do you think this text is limited to its literal meaning?
- If not, what is the more abstract concept it communicates?
- How does this text apply to Tali's situation and behavior?

Do not go with slander among your people. Do not stand by at your neighbor's blood. I am God. (Leviticus 19:16)

לֹא־תֵלֵךְ רֵכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם  
רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה (וּיְקָרָא י"ט:ט"ז)

- What might be the connection between the three different parts of this verse?
- What is the meaning of "do not stand by your neighbor's blood"?
- How did Tali fulfill this obligation?



Michaela Koretzky is a midwife at Soroka Hospital and a nurse on Kibbutz Alumim. While her children and their grandparents hid in the safe room, Michaela treated wounded residents in her kitchen and living room., with minimal equipment and no war experience. Usually, Michaela's role is to help bring life into the world, on October 7th, she helped three people be "born" again by saving their lives.

***Michaëla Koretzky, Kibboutz Aloumim***

Crisis forces us to make difficult but necessary decisions. It makes us ask, "Who am I and what really matters to me?" It plunges us from the surface to the depths, where we discover strengths we didn't know we had and a clarity of purpose we had previously lacked."

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Letters to the Next Generation**

- According to Rabbi Sacks, what is the impact of crisis on our psyche and abilities?
- How is his thesis evident in Michaela's story?

"Man was created alone to teach that whosoever destroys one soul, it is as though he had destroyed the entire world. And whosoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the entire world." - Sanhedrin 4:9

- What is the power of saving one life?
- What comparison did Michaela draw between what she does on a regular basis and what she did on October 7?

***In a place where there  
are no men, strive to  
be a man.***

(Pirkei Avot 2:5)

***Do not go with slander  
among your people.  
Do not stand by at your  
neighbor's blood.  
I am God.***

(Leviticus 19:16)

***Crisis forces us to make difficult but necessary decisions. It makes us ask, “Who am I and what really matters to me?” It plunges us from the surface to the depths, where we discover strengths we didn’t know we had and a clarity of purpose we had previously lacked.”***

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,  
Letters to the Next Generation

***“Man was created alone to teach that whosoever destroys one soul, it is as though he had destroyed the entire world. And whosoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved the entire world.”***

Sanhedrin 4:9

Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther:

***“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 in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.”***

- Esther 4:13-14

***Sum up Mordechai’s message using no more than 10 words, as a question and/or exclamation:***



***“Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!”***

So Mordechai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Esther 4:16-17

***Based on just these verses, what are four different ways that Esther demonstrates courageous leadership in a time of crisis?***

**PERHAPS THIS IS THE MOMENT**



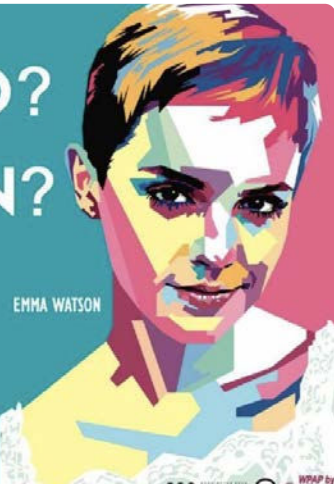
**FOR WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CREATED**  
**ESTHER 4:14**

**IF NOT ME, WHO?**  
**IF NOT NOW, WHEN?**

...

THE REALITY IS, IF WE DO NOTHING, IT WILL TAKE 75 YEARS, OR FOR ME TO BE 100, BEFORE WOMEN CAN EXPECT TO BE PAID THE SAME AS MEN FOR THE SAME WORK.


EMMA WATSON



WOMEN'S COOP by Selfish

עם ישראל חי


**WEAR IT.**



**PRIDE DISPELS IGNORANCE.**

WEAR THE NECKLACE. SHOW PRIDE IN YOUR IDENTITY. THEY CAN NEVER EXTERMINATE OUR PRIDE.

לא תעמד על-דם רעך  
"THOU SHALT NOT STAND IDLY BY.."



Ben Shalom