

HISTORY HEROES LEADERSHIP ETHICS

EIGHT DEGREES OF *GEVURAH*

6th – 9th grade students

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Photo: A partisan feeding his wounded comrade in a Soviet partisan camp in a forest. Photographed by Yakov Davidson. Source: Ghetto Fighter's House.

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Who Are The Jewish Partisans?

par-ti-san *noun*

a member of an organized body of fighters who attack or harass an enemy, especially within occupied territory; a guerrilla

Who Are the Jewish Partisans?

During World War II, the majority of European Jews were deceived by a monstrous and meticulous disinformation campaign. The Nazis detained millions of Jews and forced them into camps, primarily by convincing them that they were going there to work. In reality, many of these so-called "work camps" were actually *death camps* where men, women, and children were systematically murdered. Yet approximately 20,000 to 30,000 Jews, many of whom were teenagers, escaped the Nazis to form or join organized resistance groups. These Jews are known as the Jewish partisans, and they joined hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish partisans who fought against the enemy throughout much of Europe.

What Did They Do?

Jewish partisans blew up thousands of Nazi supply trains, convoys, and bridges, making it harder for the Germans to fight the war. Partisans also destroyed Nazi power plants and factories, focusing their attention on military and strategic targets, not on civilians.

Jewish partisans forced the Nazis to spend massive amounts of resources on combating them, disrupting their focus from multiple fronts against the Allies. One Nazi commander called the Jews a "dangerous element" for their participation in partisan units in Russia.¹ In Lithuania, where Jewish partisans made up approximately 10% of all partisan fighters, they were responsible for 79% of derailed German trains and injuring nearly 50% of all enemy soldiers.² Jewish partisans saved thousands of Jewish lives, in some cases literally breaking Jews out of the ghettos, and in at least one situation, digging a tunnel to free 250 people from a ghetto.

How Did Other Jews Resist?

Resistance against the Germans took on many different forms. In addition to the physical resistance of the partisans and ghetto fighters, spiritual resistance took the form of prayer services, teaching children to read Hebrew, art and poetry. Even without taking up arms, these actions stood in defiance to the Nazis, who sought to strip Jews not only of their lives, but also of their dignity and self-respect.



A group of Jewish members of the Lenin battalion of the Lipczany forest. 1944. Location: Belorussia. Source: Museum of Jewish Heritage

Still, Jews countered the Nazis in other ways. There were smugglers who sent children to safety and couriers who carried messages between the ghettos. There were forgers who created documents for safe passage to the outside world. Jews in the work camps sabotaged guns and other products they were forced to make for the Germans.

Why Should We Learn About the Jewish Partisans?

Most students believe that Jews went "like sheep to the slaughter". They perceive the Holocaust as a piece of Jewish history only about victimization and the loss of hope. The experience of thousands of Jewish partisans who stood up to tyranny and oppression, fought successfully against the Nazis, and saved countless lives is an important part of Jewish history that few students are aware of.

This information has the power to transform people's perception of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, providing a clearer picture of Jewish heroism and character. After learning about the partisans, non-Jewish teens acquire a greater understanding about the Jewish people, leading to interfaith dialog and tolerance, while many Jewish teenagers often feel empowered, developing a stronger sense of Jewish identity and pride. The story of the Jewish partisans is empowering, and demonstrates how young people can make a positive difference in the world.

1. "Documents of the Holocaust," edited by Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot (Lincoln, The University of Nebraska Press, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem 1999), 441 – 444.

2. Dov Levin, "Fight Back," (New York, Holmes Et Meier Publishers, 1985), 196.

How To Use This Lesson

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation has produced a comprehensive and thought-provoking new curriculum called RESIST. The lessons of RESIST transmit values and enduring understandings arising from the stories of the Jewish partisans.

Every RESIST lesson is divided into six sections. These sections provide teachers and instructors with an overview of the lesson, a guide containing background information on the subjects at hand, instructions on how to prepare for the lesson, an easy-to-follow lesson procedure, materials and attachments necessary to conduct the lesson, and an evaluation component that gives teachers and instructors the ability to assess the effectiveness and impact of the lesson. The following is a list of these six sections



Recreation of how partisans laid explosives on train tracks. Location: Lithuania. Source: Ghetto Fighter's House



JPEF presentation at Camp Tawonga. 2005. Source: JPEF Archives

Overview

Contains a summary of the lesson and learning objectives.

Guide

Provides additional information for the teacher/instructor about the topics at hand.

Setup

Lists the materials and space necessary to carry out the lesson and explains how to prepare for the lesson.

Procedure

Lists step-by-step instructions for running the lesson. Action words are boldfaced.

Attachments

The worksheets, forms, and other materials needed to complete a particular lesson.

Evaluation

Provides easy-to-follow instructions for the teacher/instructor on how evaluate the effectiveness of the lesson.

Overview

Lesson Summary

Who is a hero? We often think of them as individuals who possess incredible gifts and who are confronted with extraordinary circumstances – the ballplayer that hit the game-winning homerun in the playoffs, the firefighter that helped to evacuate the Twin Towers, or even the Jewish partisan that rescued fellow Jews from a Nazi work camp. It would seem that heroes are far removed from our own lives and that heroism is a idea reserved for others, not ourselves.

In this lesson, *Eight Degrees of Gevurah*, students will explore the question "who is a hero?" and will discover various ways in which they can act heroically in their own lives. In defining heroism as possible and accessible, we bring together two frameworks, one from the Jewish tradition and another from history. The value of *tzedakah*, often thought of as 'charity', but also meaning justice or righteousness, will be explored through a study of "Maimonides' Ladder," a graded hierarchy of *tzedakah* which ranks the various ways of giving, taking into account the effects on the recipient and donor alike.

Heroic action will also be exemplified through the stories of Jewish partisans, many of whom were teenagers when they joined organized resistance groups to fight against the Nazis in World War II. This powerful juxtaposition of *tzedakah* and acts of heroism will help students to recognize their own roles in working for social justice and to discover that anyone has the potential to become a hero.

Lesson Objectives

- Define the words: **גיבור** (hero), **גבורה** (strength/might), **צדקה** (charity), and **צדק** (justice/righteousness)
- Investigate the heroic actions of selected Jewish partisans
- Apply the heroic actions of selected Jewish partisans to the degrees of *tzedakah* on Maimonides' Ladder
- Identify with the heroic actions taken by various Jewish partisans
- Express the relationship between giving and acting heroically
- Recognize various ways in which anyone has the potential to become a hero



A group of Greek partisans who are serving in the ELAS-EAM resistance movement walk along the street. Among those pictures are two Greek Jews: Louis Cohen (left) and David Broudo (far right). Location: Greece. Source: JPEF Archives

Guide

Gevurah...

Can be defined as "strength" or "might" and is the source of accomplishment, creativity, and self-preservation. *Gevurah* is primarily an act of constraint and restraint. According to Jewish mysticism, the force in the world is *chesed* (kindness). It is a manifestation of God's desire to give humanity whatever possible. The second force, *gevurah*, restrains the first basic force of Divine Providence and bids Him *not* to give. Imagine a parent watching a toddler struggle to walk. As the toddler falls again and again, the parent must muster every ounce of strength *not* to extend a hand. This is *gevurah* at its most powerful.

We are most familiar with *gevurah* from our liturgy:

"Eternal is your might, O God" - Gevurot, the Amidah

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." - Zechariah 4:6

"Who is strong? One who is able to overcome his evil inclination." - Pirke Avot, 4:1

Gevurah is not about military might, physical prowess, or winning. Rather, it is about spirit, using strength to do good, and overcoming our own impulses.

Tzedakah...

is the Hebrew word for the acts that we call "charity" in English: giving aid, assistance, and money to those in need. However, the nature of *tzedakah* is very different from the idea of charity. The word "charity" suggests benevolence and generosity, a magnanimous act by the wealthy and powerful for the benefit of the poor and needy. The word "*tzedakah*" is derived from the Hebrew root: צדק (justice or righteousness). In Judaism, giving to the poor is not viewed as a generous, magnanimous act. It is simply an act of justice and righteousness, the performance of a duty, giving the poor their due. Some sages have said that *tzedakah* is the highest of all commandments, equal to all of them combined.

MAIMONIDES...

or Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, known as the Rambam, was born in Spain, and learned mathematics, astronomy and philosophy as well as more traditional Jewish subjects from his father. He taught himself medicine and was so renowned that the sultan

Saladin appointed him court physician. His great love of detail and of exposition led him to write extensively, and he is well known for his lists: 13 Principles of Faith (a Jewish catechism), the Mishneh Torah (an annotated list of all the legal decisions of the Talmud, the basis for Jewish religious and community law), and the Eight Degrees of *Tzedakah*, a guide to charitable action, which is used in this lesson. Although some of his works were banned at the time, Maimonides has become one of the preeminent contributors to Jewish law and thought.

The Film...

is entitled *Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust*. It is 7 minutes long and can be viewed as a part of this lesson (See Procedure: Step #19). The film gives students the opportunity to meet some of the 20,000 to 30,000 Jews who committed thousands of acts of sabotage against the Nazis during World War II. They destroyed trains, bridges, convoys, and power plants. These brave men and women, many of them teenagers, saved thousands of Jews from ghettos and work camps. They fought as guerrilla fighters – partisans – all throughout Western and Eastern Europe and their story is hardly known.

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation produced this film after interviewing over 40 surviving partisans. Narrated by Ed Asner, it includes rare stock footage and photographs of partisans in action. The film can be ordered through JPEF by emailing dvd@jewishpartisans.org or calling (415) 563-2244. The film can also be viewed at www.jewishpartisans.org/films.php

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation...

develops and distributes effective educational materials about the Jewish partisans, bringing the celebration of heroic resistance against tyranny into educational and cultural organizations. JPEF is developing curricula to be taught in 6th-12th grade classes on World History, Jewish Identity, Jewish Ethics, Jewish Heroes, and the Study of Israel. JPEF educational materials are a key component to curricula in Jewish and secular schools worldwide.

For more information about the Jewish partisans, please visit: www.jewishpartisans.org where you can view additional films, photographs, maps, ask a living partisan a question, and find a list of books, films, and other websites about the Jewish partisans.

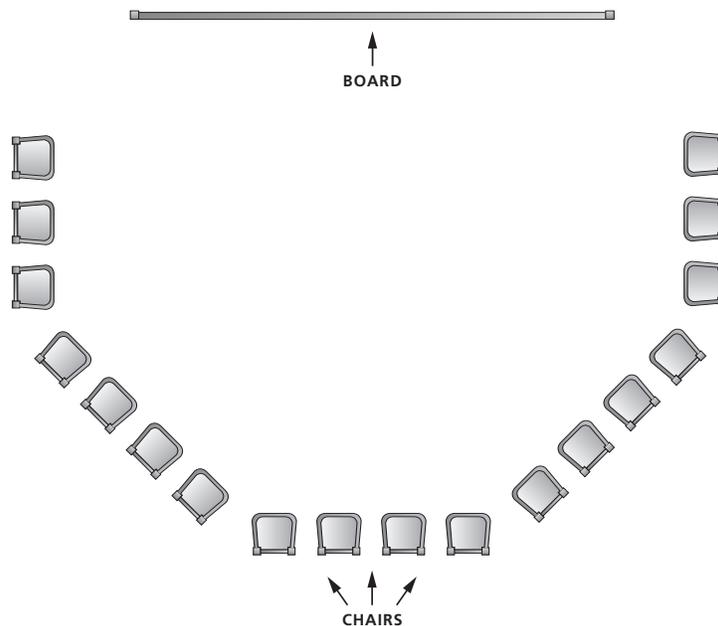
Setup

What You Will Need

- a classroom or multi-purpose space
- desks/tables and a chair for each student
- a chalkboard with chalk or a dry erase board with dry erase markers
- The film that can be utilized for this lesson, *Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust*, is 7 minutes long and can be viewed on a computer with internet access. A computer projector is helpful for presenting this film. The film can be viewed at: <http://www.jewishpartisans.org/films.php> or you can contact JPEF for a DVD of this or other films.
- WHO ARE THE JEWISH PARTISANS? printout (included here)
- 1 MAIMONIDES' LADDER printout for each student (included here)
- 1 GEVURAH STRIPS printout per team, pre-cut into 8 strips along the dotted lines (included here)
- 1 POWER SHEET printout for each student (included here)
- LESSON PROCEDURE printout (included here)

This activity should take place in a large multi-purpose or classroom. Chairs should be placed in a semi-circle in the center of the room. In addition, this activity requires a chalkboard and chalk or a dry-erase board with markers. Refer to the illustration below for a suggested room setup. The space should also be conducive to presenting a DVD presentation if possible.

Suggested Setup



Procedure

Introduction – 15 minutes

1. Seat students in a circle.
2. Write or display the Hebrew word "נבור" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "GIBOR."
3. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses.
4. Inform students that the word "נבור" is most often defined as a "hero."
5. Write or display the Hebrew word "נברה" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "GEVURAH."
6. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses. Hint that this word has the same root as the word "נבור."
7. Inform students that the word "נברה" literally means "strength" or "might."
8. Ask: "Why does the word for "hero" come from the same Hebrew root word for strength or might?" Field responses.
9. Ask: "Does one have to be strong or mighty to be considered a hero? Why or why not?" Field responses.
10. Write or display the word "צדקה" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "ZEDAKAH."
11. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses.
12. Inform students that the word "צדקה" means "charity."
13. Write or display the Hebrew word "צדק" in front of students. If you prefer to use English, you may write "TZEDEK."
14. Ask: "Does anyone know the meaning of this word?" Field responses. Hint that this word has the same root as the word "צדקה."
15. Inform students that the word "צדק" literally means "justice" or "righteousness."
16. Ask: "Why does the word for "charity" come from the same Hebrew root word for justice or righteousness?" Field responses.
17. Ask: "Do you think there is a connection between being a נבור (hero) and giving צדקה (charity)?" Field responses and take notes on them.
18. Ask: "Is there a connection between נברה (strength or might) and צדק (justice or righteousness)?" Field responses.
19. Present the short film: *Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (6:56). If the film cannot be shown, read aloud WHO ARE THE JEWISH PARTISANS? This document can be found at the beginning of this lesson.

Maimonides' Ladder – 5 minutes

1. Distribute sheet: MAIMONIDES' LADDER to each student.
2. Ask: "Has anyone ever heard of "Maimonides' Ladder" before?" Field responses.
3. Explain: "Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, was a great rabbi and philosopher who lived in the 12th century C.E. He was an expert in Jewish law and organized Judaism's many insights and directives into an ingenious hierarchy of *tzedakah*, commonly referred to as "Maimonides' Ladder." Within this "ladder," Maimonides ranked the ways of giving charity, taking into account the effects on the recipient and donor alike.
4. Choose a student to read the highest degree of *tzedakah* on Maimonides' Ladder.
5. Ask: "What types of actions could fulfill this degree of *tzedakah*?" Field responses and take notes on them.

Eight Degrees of Gevurah – 25 minutes

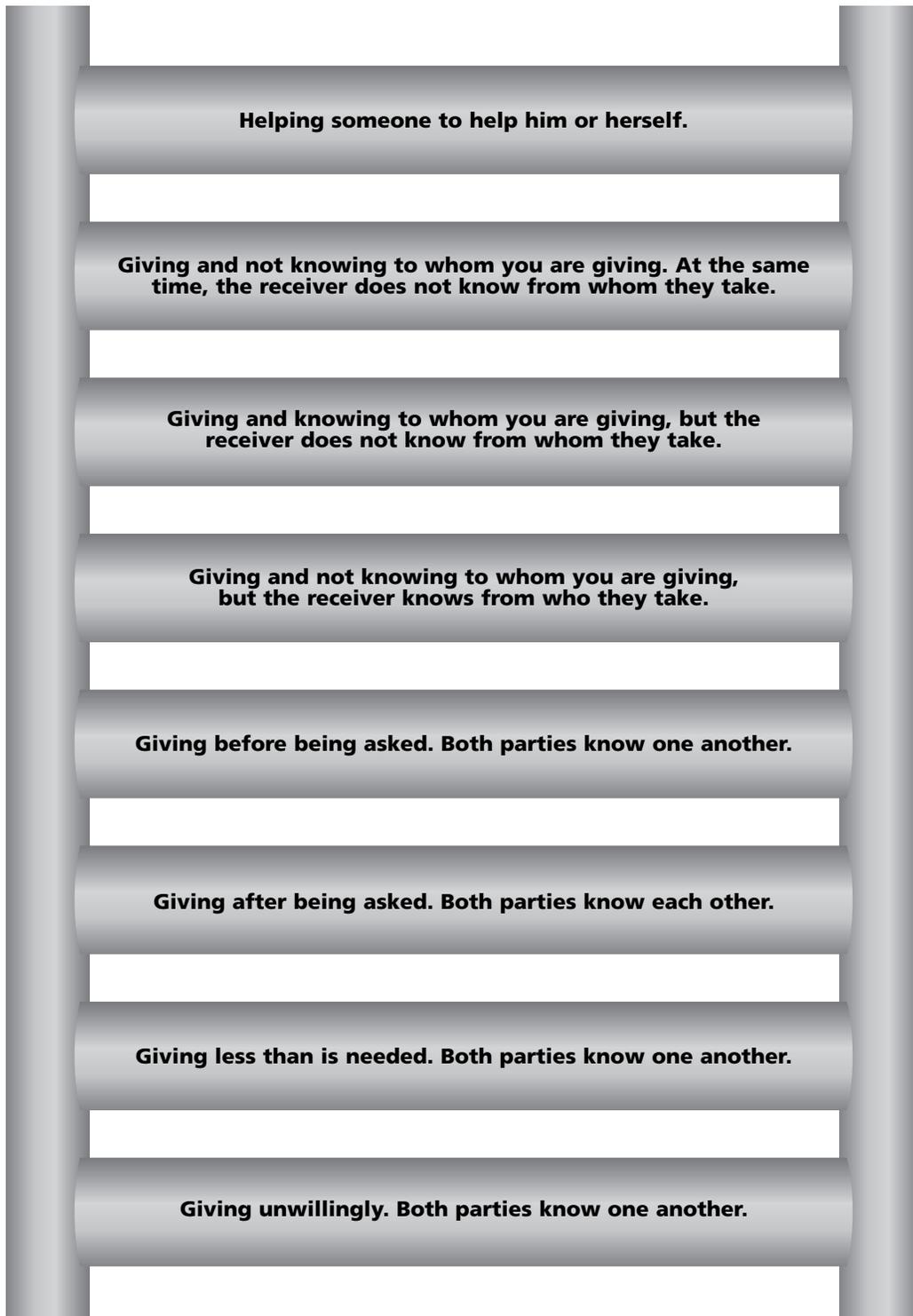
1. Divide students into teams. An ideal team would consist of three to five participants, but could work with more. Teams should go to their own section of the room, away from other teams.
2. Distribute a set of the 8 GEVURAH STRIPS to each team.
3. Explain: "Every team has received one set of *Gevurah* Strips. A *Gevurah* Strip is a strip of paper that features a specific action taken by a Jewish partisan during World War II. Your team's mission will be to put these rectangular strips in the same order that Maimonides would have, according to the 8 degrees of giving *tzedakah*."
4. Allow participants 8-10 minutes to complete this task.
5. Ask teams to present their answers in reverse order from lowest to highest, similar to the reading of a "top ten" list, saving #1 for last. Alternate with the other team(s), and call on different participants to explain each rung of their team's ladder. As you go, ask if all teams agree on the placement of each partisan action. Take notes on the answers given.

WRAP-UP – 15 minutes

1. Return students to their seats.
2. Distribute sheet: Eight DEGREES OF GEVURAH to each student. Review the instructions with the class and allow up to 10 minutes to complete the answers.
3. Review and discuss the answers to this sheet as a class.
4. Collect the Power Sheets for evaluation along with the notes taken during this lesson.

Maimonides' Ladder

Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, was a great rabbi and philosopher who lived in the 12th century C.E. He was an expert in Jewish law and organized Judaism's many insights and directives into an ingenious graded hierarchy of *zedakah*, commonly referred to as "Maimonides' Ladder." Within this "ladder, Maimonides ranked the ways of giving charity, taking into account the effects on the recipient and donor alike.



Gevurah Strips

Frank Blachman became the commander of a partisan platoon at the young age of 21. While some non-Jewish partisan units turned Jews away, Frank made a point of accepting any Jew who wanted to join. He would protect other Jews by giving them the means to defend themselves and attack the Nazis.

Simon Trakinski's partisan unit destroyed many Nazi railroad lines to disrupt German transportation. Simon understood that the people who benefited most from his actions were unknown to him: Allied soldiers that were fighting the Nazis.

When Martin Petrsek was a partisan, he pretended to be a non-Jew to protect himself. As a partisan, Martin went out of his way to help families he knew to be Jewish. He knew that he was aiding his people, while never revealing his true identity.

Tuvia Bielski established a partisan unit that consisted of 1,200 partisans. Though Tuvia did not necessarily know everyone that his group helped, everyone knew that it was Tuvia and the Bielski Brigade that saved them.

Without being asked, Lola Berliner would approach Jewish families and convince them to send their young children into hiding. She would match these children with non-Jewish families so that they would be safe during the war.

After narrowly escaping capture by the Nazis, Harry Burger was living in a barn when a partisan group discovered him. In order to survive, Harry asked if he could join them. The group took him in and he was issued a rifle on the spot.

Ben Kamm's partisan unit successfully liberated 600 Jews from a forced labor camp. However, the partisan unit was unable to provide the appropriate medical attention, food, or shelter necessary for their survival. Many of the liberated Jews died outside of the camp or were recaptured by the Nazis.

When Zus Bielski, a partisan commander, ordered several partisans to find a missing woman, his order was refused on the grounds that the mission was too dangerous. When Zus threatened to kill any partisan that did not follow his orders, the partisans complied, finding the missing woman.

Power Sheet



1) What is the Hebrew word for HERO?

2) What is the Hebrew word for STRENGTH or MIGHT?

3) What is the Hebrew word for CHARITY?

4) What is the Hebrew word for JUSTICE or RIGHTEOUSNESS?

5) Which of the actions taken by Jewish partisan resonated with you the most? Why?

6) Do you think there is a connection between giving and acting heroically? Please explain.

7) In what ways could you be a hero to your own community?

Evaluation

The following chart explains how you can evaluate student performance in this lesson. The objectives on the left were set forth in the overview section of this lesson. The assessment tools listed on the right can be used to measure whether or not students have accomplished these objectives.

Objectives	Assessment Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Define the words: גבור (hero), גבורה (strength/might), צדקה (charity), and צדק (justice/righteousness)	Power Sheet (Questions #1-4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Investigate the heroic actions of selected Jewish partisans	Teacher's notes on teamwork (Procedure: Eight Degrees of <i>Gevurah</i> : step #5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Apply the heroic actions of selected Jewish partisans to the degrees of <i>tzedakah</i> on Maimonides' Ladder	Teacher's notes on teamwork (Procedure: Eight Degrees of <i>Gevurah</i> : Step #5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify with the heroic actions taken by various Jewish partisans	Power Sheet (Question #5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Express the relationship between giving and acting heroically	Teacher's notes (Procedure: Introduction: Step #17), Power Sheet (Question #6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Recognize various ways in which anyone has the potential to become a hero	Power Sheet (Question #7)

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation is interested in obtaining the results of this lesson as we seek to continuously improve the RESIST curriculum. We would greatly appreciate any comments, ideas, and suggestions that you may have, along with quotes and selections taken from your completed assessment tools.

You can email, fax, phone, or mail any and all information to us using the contact information listed below. Thank you!

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