INTRODUCTION

An excellent question to ask of ourselves and of our students is why God chose Abraham\(^1\) to be the father of our nation. Surely, as adults, we wonder about some of the troubling decisions he made, including lying about his relationship to his wife in a way that put her in a compromising position, and his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, at God’s instruction. On the other hand, Abraham also demonstrates exemplary qualities. It is this complexity that makes him a real model of humanness and leadership for the strengths we can aspire to emulate.

A number of midrashim (Rabbinic legends) about Abraham are cogent for young learners. Among these is the story of a young Abraham breaking his father’s idols and recognizing that neither the sun nor the moon is powerful enough to be a true god. In this lesson, however, the goal is to help our students understand two Torah stories about Abraham and the messages they convey about courage and caring. The former is demonstrated in the story about Abraham leaving home at God’s command, and the latter is represented in the story about Abraham rushing to provide assistance to travelers in need. Sarah is a partner in both of these events and will be treated as such in the context of this lesson.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- Torah is an ongoing dialogue between the text and its students.
- Torah is real in our daily lives; it goes with us wherever we are.
- Developing the skills to study Torah is essential to integrating Torah into our lives.
- I am part of the ongoing story of Torah and the Jewish people.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What does the Torah have to say to me and my world?
2. How can Torah study help me in my everyday life?

\(^{1}\)In the actual Torah narrative, both Abraham and Sarah undergo name changes. For the purpose of student comprehensibility, the names Abraham and Sarah (not their earlier names Abram and Sarai) are used throughout this lesson.
3. Why is the Torah different from other books?

4. What is the story of Torah?

5. What does it mean to be part of the story of Torah and the Jewish people?

6. How can I play an active role in the story of Torah?

**QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED**

1. What are the qualities that Abraham and Sarah possess that would make God think they are worthy to be the Patriarch and Matriarch of Judaism (to be the first Jews)?

2. How can I incorporate Abraham and Sarah’s positive qualities into my own life?

**EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING**

Students will decorate an image of a tent with a picture or sentence about the qualities that Abraham and Sarah demonstrated. They will affix an image of a tent to their Genesis Traveler.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

- Set Induction (15 minutes)
- Teaching the Story (10 minutes)
- Exploring the Qualities of Abraham and Sarah (25 minutes)
  - Abraham and Sarah’s Tent Game
  - or
  - Abraham and Sarah Kid’s Writing Activity
- Conclusion (10 minutes)

**MATERIALS NEEDED**

- *CHAI* Level 1 CD, track 6, “Hospitality.”

- Copies of the Quality Posters (pages 45–48). (They should be copied prior to the lesson. You can also choose to color them in.)

- Copy of the Abraham and Sarah’s Tent Game maker for each student (pages 49–50). (Copy for each student prior to the class.) If you have never made a “fortune teller” before (also called a “cootie catcher”), take some time to make one before your class and become familiar with the process so that you can easily direct your students. You may choose to pre-fold the game for your students.)
• Glue/glue sticks.
• Image of a tent, one per student (in student workbook).
• Letter to parents (page 54).

READING RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS


LESSON VOCABULARY

midrash

“Midrash” can have several different meanings. In general, the term refers to a particular type of Rabbinic literature that derives moral or legal lessons from even the smallest word in the Bible. Midrashim have also been used by the Rabbis to explain something that is not obviously understood within the text (one of the most famous examples would be the story of Abraham smashing the idols). There are several collections of this literature, dating from the second century B.C.E. through the Middle Ages, and this collectively is often called “the midrash.” A verse from this literature is called “a midrash.” For more information, see Barry W. Holtz, Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), or other general Jewish reference books.

LESSON PLAN

SET INDUCTION (15 MINUTES)

Please keep in mind that in the questioning below, there are no right or wrong answers. The suggested “answers” are included as prompts if students do not know how to respond.

1. Sing or play the class welcome song.

2. Say together the blessing over Torah study.

3. Ask the students to share a time when they did something that helped someone or a time that they were very nice to someone—perhaps a friend or a member of their family. (Possible answers: I help my mother set the table because she works hard and I want to make it easier for her, I help my baby brother walk because he can’t do it by himself, I shared my toys with a friend.)

4. Explain to the students that today they are going to learn about two very special people, Abraham and Sarah, and why God picked them to be the very first Jews.
5. Point to the Genesis Journey Map and review the stories that the students have learned. Point to the Abraham and Sarah poster and explain that this will be the next story that they will learn about.

6. Explain that we are going to hear a story about four good things that Abraham and Sarah did. Post the Quality Posters (pages 45–48) on the board. Explain to the students that there are four things that we remember Abraham and Sarah doing. They followed God, they welcomed others into their home, they shared what they had, and they included others.

7. Point to the Following God poster and ask students, “What does it mean to follow God?” (Possible answers: believe in God, do what God says, go where you think God wants you to go, pray.)

8. Point to the Welcoming Others poster and ask students, “What does it mean to welcome others?” (Possible answers: inviting others to your house, making other people feel comfortable in your home.)

9. Point to the Sharing with Others poster and ask students, “What does it mean to share?” (Possible answers: letting other people borrow your toys and things, giving other people part of something you have.)

10. Point to the Including others poster and ask students, “What does it mean to include others?” (Possible answers: hang out with people who want to hang out with you, play with people who want to play with you.)

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

**Teaching the Story (10 minutes)**

Explain to the students that you are now going to read them the story of Abraham and Sarah. Ask students to open their workbook to pages 10–11, where they can follow along with the story. Remind students to listen to see if they can hear Abraham and Sarah doing any of the four things that were discussed earlier (following God, sharing, welcoming others, and including others). After reading each segment, ask the questions that follow. The underlined phrases indicate key points in the story.

**Story segment 1**

One day God spoke to Abraham and told him to take his wife, Sarah, and go to a new place to live, but that God could not tell him exactly where it was. God told Abraham that if Abraham obeyed God’s command to do this, God would reward him later on.

Teacher questions to students:

- Which quality from the posters on the wall did Abraham and Sarah show in this part of the story? *(Following God)*

- How do you think Abraham might have felt about this?

- Would you have listened to God if you didn’t know exactly where you were supposed to go? Why or why not?
Story segment 2
Abraham and Sarah believed in God, and they left their home and moved to Canaan, the land that God showed them. They brought with them their nephew Lot, and all the people who wanted to go they let join them. Sarah and Abraham made a new home there, and they welcomed all those who wanted to be their friends and to learn about God.

Teacher questions to students:
- Which quality from the posters on the wall did Abraham and Sarah show in this part of the story? (Welcoming others, including everyone)
- Do you welcome people who want to be friends with you?
- Do you ever talk with your friends about God or about Jewish things you do, like celebrating Jewish holidays?

Story segment 3
When the house and the land where Abraham and Sarah and Lot were living had become too full, Lot started to argue with Abraham that he needed more room. “We are friends and family,” said Abraham, “I do not want to argue with you. We can share this land that God has given to us.” Abraham shared with Lot by giving Lot his own land so he and his family would have their own place to live.

Teacher questions to students:
- Which quality from the posters on the wall did Abraham and Sarah show in this part of the story? (Sharing with others)
- Is it hard or easy to share?
- When is it important to share?

Story segment 4
Abraham and Sarah loved to make people feel comfortable and happy. Once, right after Abraham had an operation, he noticed some travelers who were on a journey in the desert near where he lived with Sarah. He thought they must be tired and thirsty so he ran to greet them, even though he wasn’t feeling so well himself. He invited them in for food and drink, which Sarah happily prepared for them.

Teacher questions to students:
- Which quality from the posters on the wall did Abraham and Sarah show in this part of the story? (Welcoming others)
- Did you ever take care of someone else, even when you weren’t feeling so well yourself?
- Did it ever make you feel happy to help someone else? (Request an explanation.)
Exploring the Qualities of Abraham and Sarah (25 minutes)

Choose the activity most appropriate for your class: Abraham and Sarah's Tent Game or Kid's Writing Activity (or do both activities if time allows).

Abraham and Sarah's Tent Game

In this activity, students will create a tent game, using the templates that you have prepared before class. Some children may need assistance in doing the necessary folding, so be sure that you or another adult or assistant will be available to help them.

1. Tell the students that there is a story told that Abraham and Sarah lived in a tent in the desert that had four sides. (In those days, many people lived in tents, not houses or apartments like us.) Their tent had four open sides so people could come in and be welcomed. Explain to the students that if there is a door on every side of the tent, no one could walk by without being noticed and welcomed.

2. Explain to students that today they are going to create a special Abraham and Sarah's Tent finger game.

3. Hand out to students the Abraham and Sarah's Tent finger game square and direction strip (that you have already cut off). Step by step, lead your students in creating their finger game. For example, “I am folding a diagonal fold so my page looks like this (hold up page). Now everyone try.”

4. If time allows, students can color in their tent game.

5. Break students into pairs and explain to students the following directions for playing the game:
   - Each person takes a turn holding his or her tent and leading the game.
   - The person leading holds his or her tent closed (fingers together) and says, “Abraham and Sarah had four openings to their tent. Which number do you want?”
   - The person playing chooses a number between one and four.
   - The person leading moves his or her fingers open and closed that number of times. A picture of Abraham and a picture of Sarah will be revealed inside the tent. The leader asks the player if he or she wants Abraham or Sarah.
   - The player answers, and the leader puts down his or her tent and opens up the correct flap. The leader, using the picture or the words, identifies which quality the person has chosen. Then, the leader asks, “How can you _________ (have courage, share, be welcoming, include everyone)?”
   - Students continue to take turns and play their game until time is up.

Abraham and Sarah Kid's Writing Activity

1. Remind the students that the story of Abraham and Sarah begins with God asking Abraham to leave his home and be the first Jew. We do not know anything about Abraham and Sarah's life before that moment. The great Rabbis of the Talmud created midrashim to try to explain what Abraham did...
before God chose him that proved that he would be a good leader for the Jewish people. Since the Torah did not tell them, they used their imagination.

2. Share the following midrash, “Abraham, the Sun, and the Moon,”3 with the students. It is also found in the student workbook on pages 12–14.

Abraham, the Sun, and the Moon

When Abraham was just a little boy, he lived with his family. Abraham and everyone he knew believed in many gods—a god of the sun, and a god of the moon; a god of the trees, and a god of each animal.

One day, young Abraham was playing in the dark caves near his home. When he came out of the cave's inky blackness and walked into the sunlight, he was amazed at all of the beauty around him. He saw the crisp green blades of grass and the dazzling flowers of red and orange. He saw the wispy white clouds on the sky blue background.

Abraham wondered, “Who created all of this beauty? Who created the heavens, the earth, and me?” He thought of all of the gods that he knew about. The sun was bright in the sky and made it so that Abraham could see the world around him. Abraham decided that the sun must be the greatest god of all. Abraham decided that the sun must have created all of the beauty around him, since it was so bright in the sky. Abraham spent the day praying to the sun and thanking the sun for creating the heavens, the earth, and him.

Soon it grew cold and started to get dark. The sun faded away, and the moon and stars rose in the sky. Abraham looked into the sky and said, “I was wrong. The sun has disappeared, and the moon has taken over. The moon must be the greatest god of all. The moon was able to push the sun out of the sky. The moon is surrounded by stars like a mighty king surrounded by princes and princesses.” Abraham decided that it must have been the moon that created all of the beauty around him. Abraham spent the whole night praying to the moon and thanking the moon for creating the heavens, the earth, and him.

Soon, however, the moon started to fade, and the sun began to rise again. Abraham was confused. The moon was not so powerful after all. The sun chased it from the sky each morning. The sun was not so powerful either, for the moon chased it from the sky each night. Abraham thought and thought. “I know!” said Abraham. “There must be one true God, One who is not the sun and not the moon. There must be one true God more powerful than both of them. I can't see this God, like I can see the sun and moon, but this God must be there nonetheless. This God created the sun and moon in the sky. The one true God created all of the beauty around me! Abraham prayed to God both day and night.

God heard Abraham and smiled. God knew that Abraham would teach others about the one true God—the God who created the heavens, who created the earth, and who created all people everywhere. And God knew that the story was finally beginning.

3. Explain to students that this is a midrash that was written about Abraham as a young boy. Even though the story is not in the Torah, it was written about Abraham to show what type of person he was.

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3*Bet HaMidrash (2:118–196) by Adolf Jellinek. Adapted by Michelle Shapiro Abraham.*
4. Explain to the students that they are going to write or draw their own story about when Abraham or Sarah was little. Their story should show one of the four qualities that they learned that Abraham and Sarah showed.

5. For story writing, use the technique of Kid’s Writing that is used in many schools to teach writing. In Kid’s Writing the students should not focus on correct spelling—the focus is instead on telling the story of their picture. Students may spell words phonetically or ask a teacher for correct spelling if needed. To help students feel comfortable, you may want to ask students for key words they would like spelled on the board (shared, welcomed, helped, knew God).

6. Provide students with markers, crayons, and colored pencils. Ask students to turn to page 15 in their workbook, “My Midrash about Abraham or Sarah.” Ask students to first think of their story in their head. Explain that they should think about the four qualities that we know Sarah and Abraham have (remind students of the quality posters) and think about ways Abraham and Sarah could have demonstrated those qualities as children. You can brainstorm ideas together as a class. Then, students should draw a picture for their story (in the box at the top of the page). If students are able to, they can write (alone or with help) two or three sentences for their story. If time allows, ask the students to share their stories. They can either share what they actually wrote or just tell their story based on their picture.

**CONCLUSION (10 MINUTES)**

1. Bring students back together. Ask students to turn to page 16 in their workbook. Remind the students that at the end of each story that they learn in class they will decorate a large version of an item for their Genesis Traveler. When they have completed decorating the item, they will receive a small image of the item to glue on their Genesis Traveler on the back of their book.

2. Ask students, “Why do you think that we would add a tent to our Genesis Traveler to help us remember the story of Abraham and Sarah?” (Abraham and Sarah welcomed people into their tent.)

3. Ask students to draw in the tent a picture of themselves showing one of Abraham and Sarah’s qualities. If they want, they can write a sentence instead of drawing a picture. Remind students of the quality posters on the wall if they need ideas. When students have completed decorating their tent, have them cut out the tent image from page 31 of their workbooks. The students should color in the image of the tent. If you have posted the My Genesis Travelers on a bulletin board, take them down and hand them to the students. If not, have them open their workbooks to the My Genesis Traveler page. Give the students glue or glue sticks and have them paste the image of the tent over the dotted outline of the tent on the My Genesis Traveler page.

4. Remind the students that, like Abraham and Sarah, sometimes we do good things and sometimes we are tired or in a bad mood and may not do good things. Nonetheless, we continue to be good people because we try our best to make good decisions with our parents and friends. We have learned from Abraham and Sarah about some of these good qualities. We should try to follow their example.

5. Sing or play the class good-bye song.

6. Hand out the parent letter (page 54).
Quality Poster 1

Following God
Quality Poster 2

Welcoming Others
Quality Poster 3

Sharing with Others
CHAI: Learning for Jewish Life

Quality Poster 4

Including Others
Instructions
1. Cut along the line to make your puzzle a square
2. Turn over your square to the "back"
3. Fold each corner to the center dot
4. Turn over so you see the "center star" on the front. Fold each of your new corners to the center "star" on the front.
5. Fold your square in half - taking the top and putting it on the bottom
6. Insert thumbs and index fingers under outside corners (in to pockets) and pinch together to open.
Background: Torah Text about Abraham and Sarah


The story of Abraham and Sarah is found in Genesis 12:1–23:2 and spans from God asking Abram to leave his native land through the death of Sarah. Below are the Torah texts that we have focused on from their lives.

Genesis 12:1–9

12:1] The Eternal One said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father’s house, to the land that I will show you. 2] I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing. 3] I will bless those who bless you, and I will pronounce doom on those who curse you; through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” 4] So Abram went forth as the Eternal had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. 5] Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother’s son Lot, all the possessions they had amassed, and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set forth for the land of Canaan, and they arrived in the land of Canaan. 6] Abram then traversed the land as far as the sacred site of Shechem, as far as the Oak of Moreh. (At that time the Canaanites were present in the land.) 7] The Eternal now appeared to Abram and said, “I am giving this land to your descendants.” Abram then built an altar there to the Eternal who had appeared to him. 8] From there he moved on to the hill country east of Beth El. He pitched his tent between Beth El on the west and Ai on the east. There he built another altar to the Eternal and called upon the Name of the Eternal. 9] And then Abram continued his journey—toward the Negev.

Genesis 13:5–12

13:5] Now Lot, who had gone with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, 6] so that the land could not support them both; they had so much property that they could not remain together. 7] A quarrel [now] broke out between Abram’s cattle herders and Lot’s cattle herders. (At that time the Canaanites were inhabiting the land.) 8] Then Abram said to Lot, “There should be no quarrel between you and me, and your herdsmen and mine, for we are close
The whole land lies before you! Pray part from me: if [you] go north, I will turn south; and if [you] go south, I will turn north.”

Lot looked around and saw the whole Jordan plain; all of it was well-watered, [this being] before the Eternal’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; [it was] like a divine Garden, like the land of Egypt as you get to Zoar.

So Lot chose the whole Jordan plain for himself and moved away toward the east. They parted, then, each from the other.

Abram stayed in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the plain, pitching his tents as far as Sodom.

Genesis 17:15–22

God then said to Abraham, “Sarai your wife—call her Sarai no more, for her name is [now] Sarah. I will bless her and, too, I will give you a son through her; I will bless her and she shall become nations; rulers of peoples shall come from her.”

Abraham fell flat on his face and laughed, thinking: “Can a child be born to a man of 100? Can 90-year-old Sarah bear a child?”

Abraham then said to God: If only You would let Ishmael live [happily] before You! But God said, “Nonetheless, your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, whom you shall call Isaac, and I will establish My covenant with him and his descendants after him as an everlasting covenant.

As for Ishmael, I have heard you. See, I have blessed him and made him fruitful and made him exceedingly numerous—he will father twelve princes; I will make him into a great nation.

But it is with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear for you at this time next year, that I will establish My covenant.”

Done speaking with him, God ascended, away from Abraham.

Genesis 18:1–15

The Eternal appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as he was sitting at the entrance of the tent at about the hottest time of the day.

Looking up, he saw: lo—three men standing opposite him! Seeing [them], he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, and, bowing down to the ground, he said, “My lords, if I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by.

Let a little water be brought; then wash your feet and recline under a tree, and let me bring a bit of bread and you can restore yourselves. Then you can go on—now that you have come across your servant.” And they responded: “Very well, do as you propose.”

Abraham then hurried toward the tent, to Sarah, and said, “Hurry, knead three measures of wheat flour and bake some [bread-]cakes!”

Abraham then ran to the herd and took a young calf, tender and sound, and gave it to the servant lad, who quickly prepared it.

He took sour milk and [sweet] milk and the calf he had prepared and set [it all] before them; and as he stood over them under the tree, they ate.
They then said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” “There, in the tent,” he replied. One of them then said, “Rest assured that I will return to you at this time next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.”

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, behind him. Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in years; the way of women had ceased for Sarah—so Sarah laughed inwardly, thinking: “Now that I am withered, will I have pleasure, with my lord so old!” But the Eternal One said to Abraham, “Why is Sarah laughing so, thinking: ‘Am I really going to bear a child, when I have grown so old?’ Is any wonder too difficult for the Eternal? At this fixed time, next year, I will return to you, and Sarah shall have a son.” Sarah, then denied it, for she was afraid, and said, “I did not laugh”; but [God] said, “Ah, but you did laugh!”

Genesis 21:1–8

The Eternal now remembered Sarah; the Eternal did for Sarah as promised, so that she became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the exact time God had told him. Abraham named his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne to him, Isaac. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him. Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born.

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter; all who hear will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have dared say to Abraham, ‘Sarah shall nurse children’? Yet I have borne a son in his old age!” The child grew and was weaned, and on Isaac’s weaning day, Abraham held a great feast.
Dear Parents,

In Genesis 12:1 we read: “The Eternal One said to Abram [Abraham], “Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.”

With these powerful words, God creates what will become the Jewish people. Interestingly, we hear nothing in the Torah about the life of Abraham and Sarah before this moment. As Torah often does, we enter at the middle of the story—just when it is starting to “get good.” With the lack of childhood stories, the Rabbis of the Talmud asked, “What would have made Abraham worthy of being the father of our nation?” They answered their own question (as they usually do) by creating myriad stories depicting a young Abraham breaking his father’s idols, recognizing that neither the sun nor the moon is powerful enough to be a true god, and proving his honesty and integrity. In class today we explored these questions and imagined what could have made Abraham and Sarah such wonderful leaders for the early Jewish people.

The students learned four qualities of Abraham and Sarah that could have made them effective leaders. These qualities come directly from the text, from experiences that Abraham and Sarah have during their journey. We discussed not only how Abraham and Sarah showed these qualities, but how we can show these qualities in our own lives. The qualities were:

• Following God—trying to be a good person and doing mitzvot.

• Welcoming others—being a good host, inviting people to join you, sharing your things when friends are over, sharing water/snacks if others are hungry.

• Sharing with others—sharing their toys, supplies.

• Including others, inviting others to play with them.

With your child please review these four qualities and explore together how to apply them to daily life. When your child demonstrates one of these qualities, be sure to praise him or her and say, “You are acting like Abraham and Sarah!”

For further family learning:

• Read and discuss the Family Shabbat Table Talk for Lech L’cha 5759 at www.urj.org/shabbat/genesis.

• Read the following sections from the Torah with your child. They teach about the qualities of Abraham and Sarah. In class, our students read a summary of these sections appropriate for young readers. Genesis 12:1–9; Genesis 13:5–12; Genesis 17:15–22; Genesis 18:1–15; Genesis 21:1–8.

Sincerely,