INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce the students to the matriarch Rebekah and to acquaint them with her qualities of kindness, strength, and courage. The students will be asked to reflect upon how these same qualities can be expressed in their own lives, thereby making a connection to this biblical role model and enabling the students to see themselves in the story of Torah.

A range of opinions have been expressed about Rebekah, especially with regard to her behavior as a wife and mother when later in the biblical story she conspires with her son Jacob to deceive his father so he can steal the blessing and the birthright due the older twin brother, Esau (Genesis 27:1–40). A deeper reading of this family's entire saga, however, together with an understanding of Isaac’s own likely psychological trauma—as a result of his own father’s willingness to sacrifice him at God’s command1—can help us see Rebekah in a more positive light. She was, after all, a woman of vision who was able to make painful choices in the short term to ensure the success of God’s plan for the Jewish people in the long term. Rabbi Beth Singer notes: "In contrast to her husband Isaac’s blindness, Rebekah is blessed with total clarity about her life’s purpose and its implications for future generations. Realizing herself as God’s partner, she makes decisions and carries out plans without hesitation."2

In this lesson, the students will engage in study, guided meditation, and dramatic interpretation as they explore the kind behaviors displayed by Rebekah. They will consider how they themselves can become more mindful of kind behaviors toward others.

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.

1This is told in the story of the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac, which can be found in Genesis 22:1–19.
ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
1. What does Torah have to say to me and my world?
2. How can Torah study help me in my everyday life?
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. Why did Abraham’s servant pick Rebekah to be a wife for Isaac?
2. What is special about Rebekah?
3. What did Rebekah do that makes us think she is special?

EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING
• Students will identify a quality of Rebekah’s that they could emulate in the world today.
• Students will decorate an image of a pitcher with a picture or sentence about how they can help others. They will affix an image of a pitcher to their Genesis Traveler.

LESSON OVERVIEW
• Set Induction (10 minutes)
• Where Are We? Where Are We Going? (5 minutes)
• Guided Meditation: What’s Special about Rebekah? (10 minutes)
• Paper Bag Drama (10–15 minutes)
• Rebekah Travels to a New Home (optional, 10 minutes)
• Conclusion (10–15 minutes)

MATERIALS NEEDED
• CHAI Level 1 CD, track 7, “A Woman Strong and True.”
• Large paper bag with several items inside (e.g., bread, water bottle, blanket, book or scroll, scarf, candle).
• Glue/glue stick.
• Image of a pitcher, one per student (in student workbook).
• Letter to parents (page 62).
READING RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Genesis 24:1–25 (pp. 60–61)


LESSON VOCABULARY

matriarch  
A woman who holds a leadership role in a family. In Judaism, there are four Matriarchs in the Bible: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel.

well  
A deep hole in the ground used to get to the source of water. In some countries, wells are the only means of obtaining water, even to this day.

LESSON PLAN

SET INDUCTION (10 MINUTES)

1. Sing or play the class welcome song.

2. Say together the blessing for Torah study.

3. Ask the students to answer this discussion question: How can you tell when a person is a kind person? (Possible answers: You can see that they help other people, you have seen them look after their pets, they take care of people in their family.)

4. Tell the students that today they will be learning about one of the important Jewish women from a long time ago who was very kind to animals and to people.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Where Are We? Where Are We Going? (5 minutes)

1. Point to the Genesis Journey Map and review the stories that the students have learned. Point to the Rebekah poster and explain that this will be the next story that they will learn about.

2. Ask them to listen closely to the words of the song you will be playing for them.
3. Play or sing “A Woman Strong and True.” Tell the students that this song is about Rebekah. Tell the students that in the class today, they will be learning about Rebekah, who was a very important Jewish woman who became a matriarch, a leader of our people.

4. Together with the students, find the location of Rebekah on the Genesis Journey Map.

Guided Meditation: What’s Special about Rebekah? (10 minutes)

In this learning activity, the students will learn about the first part of the Rebekah story in the Torah, focusing on her qualities of kindness, strength, and courage.

1. Ask the students to turn to page 17 in the workbooks, and read the story to them as they follow along. The facilitator’s copy of the story appears below. You do not have to limit yourself to the story as it has been written for the students; on the contrary, feel free to explain things you know about this Bible story from your own study or from the supplementary material provided with this lesson (pages 60–61).

   Abraham’s son Isaac was sad because his mother, Sarah, had died. Abraham sent their servant to try to find a kind wife for Isaac. The servant came to a town and he saw women getting water from a well. The servant prayed, “God, I hope there will be one kind young woman here who will give me water, and water for my camels, too.” When the servant had finished his prayer, he noticed Rebekah, a kind young woman. When he asked her for a drink from her pitcher of water, she quickly gave him enough to drink, and she offered to get water for his camels, too! The servant realized that Rebekah would be a good wife for Isaac because she was so kind and so strong, so he went to meet her family. Rebekah agreed to go with the servant to meet Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah got married.

2. Ask the students to relax, to close their eyes, and to try to imagine the scene that you will describe to them. Ask them to think about a time when they were in a very hot place, perhaps a beach, where there was sand, but no water to drink. Tell them to remember a time when they were very thirsty and really needed a drink because it was so hot and the sun was beating down on them. Ask them to imagine how they would have felt if someone they didn’t even know was nice enough to offer them a drink from a pitcher of water, even though it was big and heavy and hard to lift.

3. End the meditation by asking the students to open their eyes. Ask them to tell about the situation/place they had been thinking about during the meditation. Point out that the servant in the story really appreciated how kind Rebekah was when she helped him and his animals by giving them water, even though it was very hard for her to get the water from the well with her heavy pitcher.

4. Engage the class in a discussion by asking these questions:

   • Can you think of a time when you helped someone who needed something, just like Rebekah helped the servant and the camels by giving them water?

   • Do you think that Rebekah was brave to go to a faraway place with the servant so she could marry Isaac? (If the students have difficulty answering this question, you might want to affirm that Rebekah was brave and courageous and she wasn’t afraid to take matters into her own hands and do what she thought was right.)
Paper Bag Drama (10–15 minutes)

In this learning activity, students will make the connection between the assistance Rebekah gave the servant and the assistance they might give to someone in need.

1. Arrange the students in a circle.

2. Have the students take turns (individually or in pairs) in coming to your large paper bag, taking out an object (e.g., bread, water bottle, blanket, book or scroll, scarf, candle) and either telling or showing how Rebekah might have used it to help someone, and how they could use it in our time to help someone.

3. After each student (or pair) presents an object, place the object next to the bag. If there are not enough objects for each student or pair of students, they can be used more than once.

Rebekah Travels to a New Home (optional, 10 minutes)

1. Reiterate to the students that when Rebekah agreed to marry Isaac, she showed great courage because she had to leave her home to go to where Isaac lived, which was far away.

2. Ask the students to think of a time when they had to go somewhere new and different. Invite them to discuss these questions: Were you afraid? Were you excited or nervous?

3. Ask the students to turn to page 18 in their workbooks and to draw a picture of going on the journey to the new place.

CONCLUSION (10–15 MINUTES)

1. Ask students to turn to page 19 in their workbook. Remind 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 actually put on their Genesis Traveler on the back of their book.

2. Ask students, “Why do you think that we would add a water pitcher to our Genesis Traveler to help us remember the story of Rebekah? (Rebekah brings water to those who are thirsty. The image of a pitcher reminds us to be kind.)

3. Ask students to draw or write in the water pitcher a way that they can help someone in the world today. When students have completed decorating their water pitcher, have them cut out the water pitcher image from page 31 of their workbooks. The students should color in the image of the water pitcher. 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 water pitcher over the dotted outline of the water pitcher on the My Genesis Traveler page.

4. Invite the students to share something they learned about Rebekah in the lesson today.

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

Background:
Torah Text about Rebekah
Genesis 24:1–25

24:1] Abraham was old, well advanced in years, and the Eternal had blessed Abraham in every way. 2] Abraham now said to his slave, the elder of his household, who had oversight of all that was his, “Put your hand under my thigh, 3] so that I may have you swear by the Eternal, God of heaven and God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose midst I dwell. 4] Rather, you shall go to my land, my birthplace, and get a wife for my son Isaac.” 5] The slave replied, “Suppose the woman does not care to follow me to this land—should I then bring your son back to the land you came from?” 6] Abraham then answered him, “Take great care not to bring my son back there! 7] The Eternal God of heaven—who took me from my father’s house, from the land of my birth, who spoke to me and promised me, saying, ‘To your descendants will I give this land’—will send a [divine] emissary before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8] But if the woman does not care to follow you, you are released from this oath of mine—only do not bring my son back there!” 9] The slave placed his hand under his master Abraham’s thigh and swore to him concerning this matter.

10] The slave then took ten of his master’s camels and, laden with an abundant store of his master’s goods, got up and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. 11] He made the camels kneel down outside the city at the water-well, at eventide, at the time when the girls who draw water go forth, 12] and he prayed: “Eternal One, God of my master Abraham, please bring me luck today, and do a kindness for my master Abraham. 13] Here I am standing at the water-fount, and the daughters of the townspeople are going forth to draw water; 14] the girl to whom I say, ‘Tip your pitcher and let me drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink; and let me water your camels, too’—let her be the one You have designated for Your servant Isaac; that is how I shall know that You have done a kindness for my master.”

15] Before he was done praying, Rebekah, who had been born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor, was going forth with her pitcher on her shoulder. 16] She was an exceedingly beautiful girl, of marriageable age, whom no man had yet known. She went down to the spring, filled her pitcher, and went up.
The slave ran toward her and said, “Let me sip a little water from your pitcher.”
And she replied, “Drink, sir!” Quickly she lowered her pitcher on her hand and let him drink.
The drinking done, she said, “I will draw some for your camels, too, till they are done drinking.”
Quickly she emptied her pitcher in the trough and she again ran to the well to draw water, drawing water for all his camels.

The man stood staring at her, silent, in order to learn whether or not the Eternal had cleared the way for him.
When the camels were done drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring, a half-shekel in weight, and two bracelets for her wrists, ten gold shekels in weight, and said, “Please tell me: whose daughter are you? Is there a place in your father’s house for us to lodge?”
She said to him, “I am Bethuel’s daughter; [he is] the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.”
And she added, “We have straw and fodder in abundance, as well as room for lodging.”
Dear Parents,

Today our class learned about the matriarch Rebekah, and about her qualities of kindness and courage. According to the biblical story, Abraham sent his servant to his former town to find a wife for his son Isaac to console him after his mother Sarah’s death. The servant came upon women drawing water from the well, and he was treated with great kindness by Rebekah; not only did she volunteer to draw water for him, but for his camels as well. After meeting her family, the servant asked if Rebekah could accompany him back so that she could marry Isaac. Rebekah boldly accepted the offer and grew to become one of the Matriarchs of our people.

Torah stories provide important models for us on many levels, and I hope you and your child can continue our study by identifying the actions we can take in our world today that demonstrate kindness and courage.

Sincerely,