

# Raoul Wallenberg and the Midwives

*[Sefaria Source Sheet](#) by Rachel Buckman*

Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) occurs a few days after the end of Pesach. This activity relates to these two events by connecting the rescue of the Jewish children by the midwives in Egypt at the time of the Exodus to the extraordinary actions of Raoul Wallenberg at the time of the Holocaust.

This lesson explores the concept of moral courage through an examination of the story of the midwives in the book of Exodus on one hand, and the lives of Holocaust rescuers on the other.

The lesson uses resources from the National Library of Israel and Centropa. The text sections can be adapted to suit the students' background.

During the Holocaust, attitudes towards Jews by German citizens and the citizens of the countries occupied by Germany ranged mostly between ambivalence and hostility. Small numbers of individuals, however, were concerned by what they were seeing around them, and some even risked their lives to help their Jewish neighbors.

In this lesson we are going to look at examples of acts of bravery displayed by the Righteous Among the Nations, as they are designated by Yad Vashem, and look at a biblical precedent for their actions.

- [Schutzpass of Tivadar Foldes, 1944](#)
- [From the Centropa collections](#)

Click [here](#) to view the document on the National Library of Israel's website.

Read the translation of the text, zoom in to explore the details, and then answer the questions below.

### Observing - What can you learn from observing the item?

The first step of analyzing a document is to observe the details closely.

- Describe the document.
- What is the name of the person who held this document?
- What information about the person is written on the document?
- Describe the picture.
- What languages is the document written in?
- What is the date of the document?
- What other images appear on the document?



[From the Centropa collections](#)

### Understanding

Next, use prior knowledge and analytical skills, reference books, and online research to understand the context and meaning of the item.

- This document was issued in September 1944 in Hungary. What was situation for Hungarian Jews at this time?
- The "W" in the bottom left-hand corner of the *schutzpass* is Raoul Wallenberg's signature. Who was Raoul Wallenberg?
- What was the purpose of the *schutzpass*? How many people were saved by the *schutzpass*?
- What was the fate of the bearer of this specific *schutzpass*? What was the fate of his family members? Read his story on the [Centropa](#) website.
- What happened to Wallenberg after the Soviets captured Hungary from the Nazis?
- What do you think motivated Wallenberg to risk his life by saving Jews during the Holocaust? Why do you think some people acted as Wallenberg did, while others participated or cooperated with the Nazis?

### Connecting

What does the item mean to you? What are your impressions of the item? How does this item connect to your own life and experiences?

- What lessons for your own life can you take from Wallenberg's story?

- In what ways does he inspire you?

### The Midwives

Throughout history there have been individuals who have been prepared to endanger themselves in order to save Jews.

#### Exodus 1:15-21

(15) The King of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, (16) saying, "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." (17) The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the King of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live. (18) So the King of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?" (19) The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth." (20) And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. (21) And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them.

שמות א':ט"ו-כ"א  
 (טו) וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִילְדוֹת הָעִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם  
 הָאֶחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה: (טז) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיַלְדוֹן  
 אֶת־הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתִן עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אִם־בֵּן הוּא וְהַמִּתְּן  
 אֹתוֹ וְאִם־בַּת הִיא וְחִיָּה: (יז) וַתִּירְאֶן הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶת־  
 הָאֱלֹקִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם  
 וַתְּחַיֶּינָן אֶת־הַיְלָדִים: (יח) וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם לְמִילְדוֹת  
 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מִדּוּעַ עֲשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַתְּחַיֶּינָן אֶת־  
 הַיְלָדִים: (יט) וַתֹּאמְרֶן הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי לֹא כִנְשִׁים  
 הַמִּצְרַיִת הָעִבְרִית כִּי־חַיּוֹת הִנֵּה בְטָרִם תָּבוֹא אֲלֵהֶן  
 הַמִּילְדוֹת וַיִּלְדוּ: (כ) וַיִּיטֹב אֱלֹקִים לְמִילְדוֹת וַיַּרְבּ הָעָם  
 וַיַּעֲצְמוּ מְאֹד: (כא) וַיְהִי כִּי־יִרְאוּ הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹקִים  
 וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים:

Read the story from the book of Shemot (Exodus) and answer the questions below.

#### Who Were the Midwives?

In verse 15, the midwives are described as מִילְדוֹת הָעִבְרִית - *miyaldot haivriot*- which can be translated either as "the Jewish midwives" or "the midwives for the Jews."

- What nationality are the midwives according to each of these translations?  
 Jewish or Egyptian?
- Click on the verses above to open the resource panel.  
 In "commentaries," read various opinions on how this phrase should be translated.
- According to Rashi, who were the midwives?  
 Compare this to Shadal's commentary.

## The Midwives' Actions

Now read verses 17-21 and answer the following questions:

- Do the midwives do as Pharaoh commanded?
- What excuse do the midwives give to Pharaoh?
- According to the text, why don't the midwives do it? (Hint: Use the words from the text to answer.)
- According to verse 21, why did God reward the midwives?  
 What does "יראת אלקים" (*yirat Elokim*) mean?  
 Double click on the word ירא (*yira*) in verse 21 to open the dictionary.  
 Look at the various definitions and choose the one that works best.

## Fear of God or Not...

For another clue as to what the phrase "יראת אלקים" (*yirat Elokim*, fear of God) means, let's look at an example where the Torah says that a group of people **don't** have this fear of God.

דברים כ"ה:י"ז-י"ט

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם: אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדַרְךָ וַיִּזְגַּב בְּךָ כָּל-הַנְּחַשְׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עָיַף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹקִים: וְהָיָה בְּהַנִּיחַ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֶל לֶךָ מִכָּל-אֹיְבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחַה אֶת-זִכְרֵ עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח: (פ)

## Deuteronomy 25:17-19

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt— how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

- Who does not have fear of God in this text?
- What did they do?

Considering the actions of people who had fear of God and the actions of those who didn't, explain what fear of God is.

According to Shadal's interpretation of verse 15, what do the midwives and Amalek have in common?

What does this say about the characteristic of fear of God?

## What is fear of God?

One way of translating fear of God is moral courage, namely, the ability to know right from wrong and to act on it even in difficult circumstances.

Fear of God requires doing the right thing, even if it is difficult or dangerous. In the context of the biblical source, it also means that doing the right thing is what is important to God and that this is done simply because it is right and not in

expectation of a reward.

- Do the midwives fulfill all of these criteria? Explain.
- Did Raoul Wallenberg fulfill all of these criteria? Explain.

### Another Example

Centropa is an organisation that interviews elderly Jews still living in 15 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Baltics, and the Balkans. They have collected examples of people who stood up, at risk of their lives, to save Jews during the Holocaust. [Click here](#) to read about these inspirational people.

### Matilde Kalef Cerge on Father Tumpej

The picture below is from Matilde Kalef Cerge, who credits Father Tumpej for saving both her and her sister's lives. Her story was recorded on the [Centropa](#) website.



[From the Centropa collections](#)

**“I couldn’t change my name back. Father Tumpej didn’t just give me a name. By saving me, he gave me a life.”**

After they had taken away almost all of our family, my mother, completely beside herself, took us to [the Belgrade suburb of] Banovo Brdo, where she begged a Catholic priest, Andrej Tumpej to take us in. Father Tumpej gave us false papers as the out-of-wedlock children of our mother, Antonija Ograjensek, [her maiden name] so that we would have some documents. My new name was Lidija Ograjensek and my sister's was Breda; her birth name was Rahela.

Next to the church there was an apartment where these nuns lived. We got two beds in a room and were there for three months. Just my sister and I. They took us in and then we couldn't go anywhere. When we were with the nuns we were the only children hiding there. They were very polite. And most importantly, they were thrilled because we knew the Old Testament because as Jewish children, we had learned the Old Testament in our Hebrew school. There was no pressure to convert.

Later Father Tumpej made it possible for us to go to a regular school, and the school director accepted us knowing we didn't have the kinds of school documents we would need from our former school. He simply accepted us on his personal responsibility, meaning, of course, he must have known.

Andrej Tumpej was an exceptional man. He hid Dr. Vajs, a pediatrician who had gone over to the Partizans, at some point. He also hid two other Jewish girls...but when he was helping them escape, someone recognized them. They were caught and taken away. I have no idea what happened to them; I'm sure it was very bad. After this the Germans locked up Father Tumpej. When he was in prison a German asked him, "How could you dare to do this, to hide Jewish girls?" and he answered, "And tomorrow if you were in that kind of situation I would do the same for you." He was a man in the true sense of the word. Exceptional.

**Matilda and Rahela Kalef grew up in a large and wealthy Sephardi family in Belgrade. The Germans invaded in 1941 and soon after, almost all of their relatives – from children to aged grandparents –were taken away and murdered.**

### Creating

Use what you have learned to create something new.

Choose from one of the following options:

- Make a presentation about the life of Raoul Wallenberg.
- Read about a rescuer from the Centropa or Yad Vashem website and present the story to your class.
- Work together with your class to create a website about people who exhibit moral courage. Include stories from the Holocaust, the Bible, or contemporary situations.
- Ask your parents or grandparents if they know an example of people exhibiting moral courage from their own experience. Write down their response and share it with the class.
- Write an essay explaining how the midwives, Raoul Wallenberg, and others inspire you.