



Webinar Discussion Guide

Let There Be Play: Bringing the Torah to Life with Grandchildren

By Jonathan Shmidt Chapman
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Purpose

This guide provides prompts for discussion of the JGN webinar “Let There Be Play: Bringing the Torah to Life with Grandchildren,” led by Jonathan Shmidt Chapman on October 15, 2024. Grandparent Groups, other grandparent social meet-ups, and program facilitators can view parts of the webinar recording <https://jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org/video-library/> together, then use the prompts for participants to share their own experiences and thoughts.

Key Takeaways

- Torah can be an accessible, joyful, and meaningful platform for grandparents and grandchildren to share stories from Jewish tradition. It is an opportunity for grandparents and grandchildren to feel connected to a larger Jewish story, and to each other.
- Play is a hands-on, approachable way for grandparents and grandchildren ages 3–8 to explore Torah together.
- The weekly Torah portion can provide grandparents — even those with very little Torah knowledge or experience — a structure to use when connecting their grandchildren with Jewish tradition.
- Exploring ancient Jewish stories can provide grandparents and grandchildren with “windows and mirrors” — an opportunity to feel empathy for the experience of another (“look through a window”), and to recognize one’s own life in the story of our ancestors (“see in a mirror”).

Tips for Using Torah as a Playground with Your Grandkids

- Create a regular practice for exploring Jewish stories and traditions with each other, at a particular hour each week or month. Decide when and where you will meet and stick with the schedule as best you can (for example, designate a particular spot in the house to play, or find a consistent time for a video call).
- Prepare the Torah story you want to share in advance. Find an age-appropriate version of the story that highlights the themes and values you want to explore with your grandchild. Check out [Let There Be Play: Bringing the Bible to Life with Young Children](#) by Jonathan Shmidt Chapman. You can find other examples [here](#).
- Tell or read the story aloud to your grandchild and ask them to draw a picture of a moment from the story that they remember right after you tell it. Ask open-ended questions about their drawing to begin conversation. Or, together, act out a scene from the story using your own bodies or with toy figures. Consider bringing along props (for example, Duplo figures and blue paper to demonstrate the Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds. You can also use household objects to create landscapes, like using a bed sheet and pillows to create a mountain for Sinai).

Discussion Questions

1. Which character or story from the Torah or Jewish tradition do you feel most connected to personally? Why?
2. Why do you think children should be introduced to Torah? What do you think are the opportunities and the challenges of exploring Torah with them?
3. In what ways is play a useful method for exploring Jewish tradition with your grandchild?
4. How can you be a co-learner with your grandchild rather than a teacher?
5. How can sharing Jewish tradition together through play become a tool to strengthen your connection with your grandchild, whether you are in person or at a distance?



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