

# Finding Your Path

## Core Concept

Each of us enters the world with our own unique set of gifts; discovering and sharing those gifts is a lifelong journey.

## Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how living a Jewish life is like traveling along a path, and how Judaism may serve as a travel guide.
- Articulate that life cycle events create opportunities for reflection, for giving thanks, and for connecting us to our families and communities.
- Identify gifts that they each possess, and explain how these gifts might help them to enrich the world around them.

## Chapter Overview

This introductory chapter presents the Jewish life cycle as a journey, along which we encounter important transitions—our Jewish life cycle events. Though we each possess a unique set of gifts and the potential for unique contributions to the world, Judaism may serve as a travel guide for all of us.

Judaism emphasizes the everyday, but also provides opportunities to celebrate and observe major life transitions: birth, coming-of-age, marriage, and death and

mourning. This chapter personalizes the information for the students, encouraging them to think about their own gifts and the paths that they might pursue in their own lifetimes.

## Getting Started

Bring a wrapped gift box with a slit cut in the top (like a ballot box) to class. Explain to the class that they are going to fill the box with their gifts to the world.

Have a volunteer read page 5 and the top of page 6 aloud. Distribute index cards and instruct the students to write one of their gifts on their card. Explain to your students that gifts may include musical, artistic, or athletic talents, personality traits, or academic skills. Pass the gift box around the class, inviting the students to share what they wrote and to place their cards into the box.

You may wish to take this opportunity to allow your students to get to know you a little better: Start the exercise by sharing your own index card with the class.

## For Me? (page 6)

Have a volunteer read the quote aloud, then divide the class into pairs to discuss and complete the two follow-up questions. Bring the class back together and ask volunteers to share their answers with the class.



## Q & A

- **What do you think is meant by “For me, the world was created”?** (*Answers may include: each person has infinite potential; every life is like a world unto itself; God recreates the world with each new person.*)
- **“What talent or special ability do you have that is like a gift—something that helps you enjoy life? How can you use that gift to help others?”** (*Answers may include: musical talent can bring joy to other people’s lives; athletic skill can bring pride to a student’s school; a sense of humor helps people to laugh.*)



## Expand the Conversation

Expand the conversation by asking:

- What characteristics are “molded” into every human being? (*Answers may include: physical attributes such as heart, eyes, and DNA; emotional attributes such as the ability to be compassionate or angry.*)
- What characteristics make each person’s “mold” unique? (*Answers may include: physical appearance; individual personality traits; unique talents or abilities. Allow students to be creative with their answers!*)
- How does the belief that each of us is unique affect our attitudes toward other people? (*If we see each person as a*

*unique individual created by God, then our respect and sense of responsibility toward him or her increases.*)

## The Greatest Journey (pages 6–8)

Have a volunteer read “The Greatest Journey” aloud. Invite the class to ask questions.



## Expand the Conversation

After reading “The Everyday,” ask:

- What “treasures” have your parents, grandparents and other older relatives passed to you to help guide you? (*Answers may include: good, practical advice; personal stories with a moral; a favorite saying.*)
- Do you hope to pursue a path that no one in your family has taken before? What challenges might you need to overcome? (*Challenges may include: hard work; stiff competition; having the self-confidence to succeed.*)

After reading “Beyond the Everyday,” ask:

- What are some transitions that you or a family member has celebrated? How was this transition marked? Was Judaism part of the transition?
- Without a special way to mark this transition, how would the transition

have felt different? (*Answers may include: The transition may have felt less important, lonelier, or less fun.*)

## My Everyday (page 9)

Introduce this exercise by writing the following abridged version of the Ten Commandments on the board:

I am Adonai your God who brought you out of Egypt.

Do not have any other gods besides Me or pray to idols.

Do not use My name except for holy purposes.

Remember Shabbat and keep it holy.

Honor your father and mother.

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not talk or swear falsely.

Do not desire what belongs to your neighbor.

Point out that nine of the ten Commandments speak of how we conduct ourselves in our everyday lives, and only one speaks of a special time (Shabbat). Ask your students: What does this tell us about Judaism? (*Judaism emphasizes finding significance in the everyday.*)

Have your students complete this exercise individually or in small groups, then review the open-ended section as a class.



## Bring It to Life

One way to mark milestones both large and small is with the words of the Sheheḥyanu:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁהַחַיְנוּ  
וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Praised are You, Adonai our God,  
Ruler of the world, who has given us  
life, sustained us, and brought us to  
this special time.*

Encourage your students to say the Sheheḥyanu at least once in the coming month. Some ideal opportunities for reciting Sheheḥyanu include: a graduation or birthday in your family, buying new clothes, seeing an old friend, even hearing good news. At the next class session, students can report back on how taking the time to recite this blessing felt.

For the next class session, have students bring in baby photos of themselves. You may wish to send a letter or email to parents, inviting them to send the photo—a great way to introduce yourself!