

Chapter Four

Guided Imagery for the Bible

“Imagination is the beginning of creation.
You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine;
and at last you create what you will.”

—George Bernard Shaw



History comes alive in the stories of the Bible. Beginning with God’s creation of the world, and continuing with the emergence and travails of the Israelite nation, the *Tanach*—comprised of the written Torah, the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and Writings (*K'tuvim*)—is Judaism’s central narrative. The drama is amazingly powerful however you view it, whether you see the Bible primarily as ancestral account, collective memory, theological document, or political and ideological treatise. Although later teachings, most importantly the Talmud, developed practice and philosophy from it, the Bible is the original source.

The story of the relationship of God and the all-too-human heroes and heroines of the Jewish people is tremendously versatile material for teaching. On the following pages, you’ll find guided imagery exercises based upon such defining events as Genesis, the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Exodus from Egypt, and the reign of King David. You can use these exercises to engage students of all ages and learning abilities, as biblical heroes talk to God, receive the commandments, and lead their people.

The Creation Story

Have the students imagine that the world has not yet been created. They are sitting in a large conference room, inhabiting the form of God’s retinue of angels, sitting around a long table, deciding how the world will be shaped and formed. They must plan out what its contents will be, what will be created first, how long it will take to create each part of the universe, and what the roles of each part will be. After everything else has been created, God decides to create human beings, Adam and Eve. Let them feel the drama of this pinnacle of creation. It is the first time that human beings appear on the stage of the planet.

Tell the students to imagine that one of them will sit in the center of the room and be Adam. Then the other students ask Adam how it feels to be the first human ever created. Is he lonely? What would he like? Is he hungry? What does he see, smell, hear? Have him describe the Garden of Eden. Interrupt his speaking and

have someone else announce, in the voice of God, that a woman, a helpmate, will be created to be his partner. God puts him to sleep, a rib is removed, and woman is created. What happens when Adam awakens?

Now place Eve in the Garden. Have Adam and Eve hold a conversation. You may or may not want to proceed with the story of the serpent, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

You may read the story together with the class before the exercise. Or, if the class knows something about the story, do the guided imagery exercise and then read the story. It will be experienced completely differently after having done the imagery exercise. Another possibility is to study the Creation story, and perhaps even some of the commentaries, and then do the exercise. The advantage is that the students will have more information to place inside the story in their minds. The disadvantage will be that the fantasy may appear too much like what they read instead of coming from their own imagination. How it is done depends on your goals as teacher and the knowledge you have of the class and its ability and readiness.

Receiving the Ten Commandments

The following represents a complete sample creative imagery script. Ask participants to get into a comfortable position, take some deep breaths, become very relaxed, close their eyes, and follow the directions as they are spoken.

Close your eyes and imagine that you are Moshe climbing up Mount Sinai. Look around at the Sinai desert. It is very warm, and you are a bit fatigued climbing the mountain. Pause for a moment and look down at the people waiting below.

You climb higher up the mountain, and can barely see the people. They are tiny specks below. What is going through your mind right now? (Pause)

You go higher and higher, finally reaching the crevice where you hear God speaking to you. Listen carefully to what the Voice says. . . .

Before you receive the Commandments themselves, God has a conversation with you. Tell God what you are thinking. . . .

If you have any fears or trepidations, ask God what to do. (Pause)

What do you think will be written on the Ten Commandments? Why does God want you to receive them and take them down to the people? Ask God that, and any other questions you have now. . . .

You are the only Prophet in the Bible to speak to God face-to-face. How does that feel? (Pause)

It is time to receive the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Describe them. How heavy are they? How big are they? What does the writing on them look like?

Think about all the generations of people who will read, study, and try to follow these laws. You have a big responsibility. What is it like? (Pause)

You may have some hesitations. Perhaps you don't want to accept them. Discuss with God any thoughts you have right now. . . .

*It is time to go down the mountain. Say good-bye to God. . . . (Pause)
Begin the slow walk down the mountain. As you get closer to the bottom, you hear some noises. Look and see; listen carefully. What is going on below? What are your reactions?*

At this point, you may bring the exercise to an end, or continue it further. If you were to terminate it, you might say:

It is now time to return to this room. Slowly and gently, begin to end the fantasy and bring yourself back to your (chair) (carpet) (place). Move your arms and legs; shake them a bit. When you are ready, open your eyes.

Now could be a good time to introduce a grounding exercise, to help participants process the exercise. Reactions are unpredictable but may include some of the following components: The students may have felt a great sense of awe in the presence of God. They may be able to appreciate the importance of law in society, and the purpose and importance of the Ten Commandments. They may sympathize with the difficulties Moshe had in asking a whole society to take upon themselves an entirely new code of behavior. They may understand the people's reluctance to accept the Ten Commandments. They may develop a new appreciation for the prophet Moshe and his difficult task in leading the people of Israel. Many other things may emerge from their experience, which may or may not be pleasing to you as the teacher. Be careful to be affirming and appreciative of whatever comes out. The idea is not for students to learn what you want, but to make Moshe's experience at Sinai a real and personal one for them, as opposed to an ancient historical experience.

King David

The next imagery script will be an example of how this process can help you work with biblical characters. Imagery works very well with biography and character study.

Any one of David's many persona would be excellent to use in a guided imagery exercise: David as warrior, as underdog against Goliath, as poet, as friend to Jonathan, as husband, as king, etc. Let's try the story of King David being told that he will not be able to build God's house. A sample exercise follows.