“The Heart of the Rescue”

After an earthquake devastated Turkey in 1999, Israel dispatched its renowned Home Front Search and Rescue team to assist the Turkish government in rescue efforts. The unit has responded to countless similar horrors, helping to locate and save survivors of both human-made and natural disasters. This lesson explores the concept of ḥatzalah from the perspective of those rescued. Students will study Ḡirḳat Ḥagomel and discover how Jewish ritual provides a means of recognizing every aspect of human experience. In addition, students will create responses appropriate for the rescuers to mark their work.

OBJECTIVES
▲ Students will learn the text for Ḡirḳat Ḥagomel.
▲ Students will establish an empathetic rapport with Magen and his team by creating a reflection for Magen and his team.
▲ Students will examine the words of the mishnah in Sanhedrin and reflect on their significance to this article.

VOCABULARY
শIELD 倒塌
 Apocalypse  one who gives good things
רedeemer  to save

QUOTES & QUESTIONS

Thought Question: Lt. Col. Magen’s last name means “shield” in Hebrew. How does he act as a “shield” in his job?

“Through clever detective work, Magen discovered where Shiran was buried. ‘I realized how the rooms were built, and which room Shiran would have been in,’ says Magen. ‘I walked over and drew an X and said: “Make a hole here.”’

What special skills and talents did Lt. Col. Magen need in order to discover where Shiran was buried?

Teamwork is essential in any work, but especially in a rescue attempt. Who else’s help was needed for Lt. Col. Magen to figure out where to make the hole to save Shiran?

“Τhe Israeli unit is considered one of the world’s best rescue teams because of its ability to improvise, and improvisation saved Alif’s life.”

What is meant here by “improvisation?” Why does a rescue team leader need this ability?

Have you ever improvised in a difficult situation? How?

“Shiran’s mother, Irit, recently gave birth to a baby boy, and Magen and his men attended the bris, joyous to see that one of the lives they saved had brought forth new life. ‘This is a tie we will have for the rest of our lives,’ says Irit of the unit she calls ‘my angels.’”

Magen and his team and Irit and Shiran will be connected forever by their shared experience.

Look at the text from Mishnah Sanhedrin. Why do the rabbis make this statement?

ACTIVITY: BLESSING THE RESCUE

1. Begin by having students read the article on pages 10–12 of BABAGANEWZ aloud as a class.

2. Instruct students to work in pairs to answer the questions from the Quotes & Questions section above.

3. Post the Mishnah Sanhedrin text in the room on a large sheet of paper or on the blackboard. Ask students to write a few words, or a sentence in response to the mishnah. Then give students the opportunity to share what they have written.

4. Instruct students to open to the Torah service in their siddurim or use the text for Birkat Hagomel included in this Teacher’s Guide.

5. Lead students in “guided discovery” of this berakhah and its response.

Why do you think this berakhah was instituted?

Most berakhot just have “amen” as a response. Look carefully at the response. Why does this berakhah require the congregation to respond as it does?

What impact does having the congregation respond make on the reciter of the berakhah?

What impact does it make on the congregation?

Why is this berakhah said in the presence of the Sefer Torah?

Why do you think that this berakhah has to be said with a minyan? What is the difference between saying this berakhah by one’s self and with a congregation?

Can you imagine what your feelings might be like if you were a friend of Shiran’s and you were present when she made this berakhah? Think about the
words you as a member of the congregation would say in response to her berakhah. What would your feelings be as you responded? Do these words capture your feelings? Why or why not?

3. Ask students to reflect on the following question:

It is obvious that Irit and Shiran would have good reason to say Birkat Hagomel, but what about Lt. Col. Magen and his unit?

Is there a special berakhah that they should say?

How should they express their feelings to God about what they have done that day?

Sometimes Magen and his team are successful in their rescues and sometimes they are not. Should there be a different response depending upon the outcome of their mission?

Invite students to respond to these questions by writing a response for Magen’s team that is either joyous at being successful or sad at being unsuccessful. Alternatively, create a response that embodies both feelings. Students may work alone, in pairs, or small groups to create one of the following:

- A “ye’hi ratzon” prayer (“May it be Your Will God”)
- A response in song

Students should consider whether their response should be recited in public (in front of the Torah, with a minyan) or in private (by one’s self, with one’s family and friends), and why they have made the choice that they did.

JEISH TEXTS

MISHNAH SANHEDRIN 4:5

Adam was first created as a single being to teach you

that whoever destroys a single soul, it is as if he or she destroyed an entire world; and whoever saves a single soul, it is as if he or she saved an entire world.

TORAH SERVICE, BIRKAT HAGOMEL

Blessed are You...Who is the One Who bestows good things on those who are guilty, Who has bestowed every goodness on me.

[Congregation responds.] Amen. May the One Who has bestowed goodness on you continue to bestow every goodness on you forever.

Birkat Hagomel is based on Psalms 107:2.

This berakhah is recited in front of the Torah when a person is saved from a life-threatening event such as serious illness or surgery, giving birth, imprisonment, or crossing an ocean.

This must be recited with a minyan since the congregation must respond.