

# Stories of the Hebrew Bible

## Lesson 8: Moses Part 3 – Wandering in the Desert

3.28.2021

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**Objectives:** Explore trust/covenant as core dimension of our faith.

**Materials:** Moses DVD, Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

**Time allotment:** Suggested for 60 minute online class.

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### 1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

### 2. Zoom Icebreaker: Imaginary Ball (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

Pass the imaginary ball by calling out someone’s name! Invite youth to unmute and stand up as able. Have a teacher or eager youth start by describing their ball creatively, then using their hands to “throw” the ball at the screen. “Pass” the ball by calling out someone else’s name who is then asked to “catch” the ball, creatively describe a new kind of ball, and “throw” it to the next person. Go around until everyone’s name is called.

### 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (from German scholar and activist, Jan Philipp Reemtsma)

*“Not in violence, but in trust, rests the foundation of true power.”*

### 4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

## 5. Manna from heaven (10 minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** We left Moses and the Israelites at the parting of the Red Sea. Moses then begins to lead the people through the desert wilderness toward the promised land. God has not yet told Moses where or when the people shall reach it. For weeks they travel and begin to get restless. Zyrac, an outspoken man who doesn't believe in Moses or in his leadership, stirs the people up. Everyone is hungry, tired, and fearful that God has forgotten them, or worse, that God has deceived them.

Moses tries to speak to the people, but to no avail. He then raises his staff in hopes that God will send them another sign; unfortunately, the sign happens to be the instant burning of their tents. Moses, too, wonders if God has turned on the people, and wants to give up his leadership. His brother, Aaron, convinces Moses to keep faith that God has a plan. Moses then prays to God, and tells Aaron to instruct the people, "Go into your tents and do not come out until morning." The Israelites are still angry, but not knowing what else to do, they go into the remaining tents and wait until morning. This next section of the video continues the story from there...

**Screen share (with audio), "Moses" DVD (approx 5 minutes)**

- **Play chapter 18** and stop at 1:50:00, after the people find meat/quails to eat.

**Questions for Discussion:**

- The Israelites are asked to follow God without a map or clear explanations. They are instructed to eat manna they had gathered for each day and NOT store it up, as it would rot. A gift for a single day, as "each day the Lord will see to your needs." What is the aim or purpose behind all this?

*(Hint: All of these challenges are about the Hebrews becoming a covenanted people. They are learning what it means to trust in God when they are confused, afraid, and desperate – not just in theory but under pressure of actual conditions that threaten their survival.)*

- Do you think the Israelites have a stronger faith in God because God provided manna?  
*(Hint: The people then ask for meat, and then for water, and then, and then...)*

## 6. Giving of the law (20 minutes)

**Teacher Summarizes:** As the Israelites wandered through the desert wilderness, not even manna would finally satisfy the people's grumbling and complaining. There was constant lack of food and water, enemy attacks, impatience for the journey to end, and ongoing complaint about the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The people's trust in God wavered between the relative security of life back in Egypt and the great uncertainty of life in the wilderness.

God finally instructs Moses to lead the Israelites to Mount Sinai (also called Mount Horeb). Here, the kind of community they would become would be established in the

giving of the law. At Mount Sinai, the Decalogue (literally “Ten Sayings,” more commonly known as the Ten Commandments) would bind the Israelites in a sacred covenant with God.

Moses goes up the mountain with Joshua, and instructs the people to have faith and wait for his return. Moses remains on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. But in his absence, the Israelites decide that something had happened to him, and they demand that Aaron fashion an idol that can provide the reassurance and protection of a god’s presence. They create a golden calf and the people celebrate. (Scholars debate what the calf represented, but images of bulls and calves were common in Near Eastern religions.)

**Screen share (with audio), “Moses” DVD (approx 13 minutes)**

- **Play chapter 21** until 2:19:10, *be sure to stop just before scenes of violent conflict.*

**\*\*Important scene to watch for:** The Israelites will break up between those who choose to follow Moses and those who choose to follow Zyrac:

**Zyrac:** *You’re a fool, Moses. We’ll go our own way. There’s nothing you can do about it.*

**Moses:** *Lay them waste!*

**[STOP video here, as next scenes are bit gory and violent.]**

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

- Moses gives the command – “Lay them waste!” – to kill those who choose to follow Zyrac and the golden calf. How does a journey to become a community of trust come to such violence?
- Reconsider the quote read during chalice lighting: “*Not in violence, but in trust, rests the foundation of true power.*” Is trust a form of power?
- Without trust, what forms of power do people use to pursue their interests? (Consider: *legal-political power, money power, status power, military power, etc.*)
- What kind of power is religious faith? (Consider: *the word “faith” comes from Latin “fidere” and much older roots meaning “to trust.”*)

#### **7. The Promised Land (25 minutes)**

**Teacher Summarizes:** Moses later heads back up the mountain to ask for God’s forgiveness for breaking the tablets in anger, and he returns with another set of stone tablets. These are wrapped in holy cloth and placed in a golden ark made from the melting down of the calf. This is the Ark of the Covenant (as in “*Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*”) and is housed in the holy tent called the Tabernacle.

Eventually, the Israelites reach the lush land of Canaan, the land that God has promised them. However, the land is already occupied. Moses sends twelve men to scout out the land and the people living there, and to report what they find. The men return after 40 days. This next section of the video continues the story...

**Screen share (with audio), “Moses” DVD (approx 10 minutes)**

- **Play chapter 26** to its end, 2:40:30, when scenes of Israelites walking through the desert wilderness fades out, with voice of Moses narrating.

**Screen share** lesson attachment 8a (Moses Story Summary)

- Invite youth to read each bullet point aloud.
- Take a moment to look at the pictures.

**Questions for Discussion**

- Rather than a rosy, glowing portrayal of the Israelites, why does the Hebrew Bible bring attention again and again to all the complaining, grumbling, arguing, and betraying going on in this journey to become a covenanted people? What does it reveal about trust?
- The rabbinic tradition understood the desert wandering as a mutual test: (1) God testing the Israelites to see if they would trust in God, and (2) the people putting God to the test to see if God was trustworthy and reliable. Where did you see God and the Israelites testing their trust in each other?
- We say that UU congregations are “bound not by creed, but by covenant.” What holds UUs together is not doctrine but trust! How is the story of Moses and the journey to become a covenant people of God relevant to UUs today?

- 8. Announcement:** We don’t have RE for the next two weeks – have a wonderful Passover and/or Easter holiday and Spring Break!
- 9. Extinguish the chalice,** saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*
- 10. Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”