

# Let Our People Go: The Power of Being an Upstander

## Facilitator Guide

**What makes an effective upstander?  
Does one need to be a public leader in order to be an upstander?  
How might we find inspiration from the upstanders of the Passover story to become  
upstanders to help the hostages?**

### WHO IS AN UPSTANDER?

#### Upstander (noun):

One who speaks, acts and/or intervenes in support of an individual or a group of people being intimidated, bullied or attacked or intimidated, often at great risk to oneself.

*“We must ask ourselves: Do I aspire to be human, or am I swept up in the enticing and delicious world of hatred?”*

Rachel Goldberg, Mother of Hostage Hersh Goldberg Polin, United Nations Speech, October 24, 2024

### FRAMING THE ISSUE

Advocacy efforts to return all of our hostages home safely call upon countless tireless activists and advocates, all of whom serve in the vital role of upstanders. This, of course, includes those who hold positions at the highest levels of government and who sit at the negotiation tables – but it also extends to each one of us as individuals who have a very personal stake in fighting for the hostages’ return, and who step up out of a sense of humanity, morality, and responsibility. There are hostage family members, as well as hostages who have been released, who hold a national and global stage. There are many more who are acting as upstanders in more quiet ways and behind-the-scenes spaces.

What makes an effective upstander? The idea of upstanders may bring to mind charismatic leaders who already have followers. While it is true that leaders can and should be upstanders, upstanders do not have to already be leaders. Although some individuals are well known as upstanders, some upstanders act more quietly, below the radar. Ultimately, it is the actions of the upstander that count.

### Info For Facilitator



#### Target Audience:

Middle School, Teens, Adults



#### Length Of Program:

45 minutes



#### Materials & Prep:

Copies of the Source Sheet for each participant



#### Overview for the Facilitator:

In this session, we will explore the texts from Exodus that describe Moses as an upstander, as well as all of the women who were upstanders on Moses behalf (noting that most of these details were not included in the text of the Hagaddah).

We will ask questions about and explore their roles and qualities as upstanders, and ask who are some upstanders we know – both public figures and private individuals.

Finally, we will explore how we can become (if we aren’t already) upstanders for the hostages, as well as various other causes.

## LET'S EXPLORE

### ■ **Facilitator opens the session with the following introduction:**

In the Passover story, with the Israelites enslaved, Moses first shows up as an upstander when he intervenes upon seeing an Egyptian slave master beating one of his kinfolk (Exodus 2:11-12). It is not until much later in the story that Moses is appointed to the key leadership role of redeeming the Israelites from slavery and leading them out of Egypt. Although Moses is central to the story of the Israelites' exodus, it is noteworthy that his name is omitted from the Haggadah itself.

It is also noteworthy that everyone who acts as an upstander to protect Moses and help to pave the way towards his leadership – including several women who play pivotal roles in his life - is also omitted from the text of the Haggadah. These include Miriam, the midwives Shifra and Puah, and Pharaoh's daughter.

Every Passover, as we set out our seder plates with foods that symbolize the harsh realities of the enslaved Israelites, we read aloud from the Haggadah that "In every generation, every person must see themselves as though they too left Egypt." Imagining ourselves experiencing the Exodus, through the traditional storytelling of the Haggadah, can help us recognize both the powerful roles that a range of upstanders played in our national origin story, and the powerful roles that we can each play today in facing our current challenges.

Running through the background of the Passover story are varied examples of upstander behavior, from strategic to reluctant, tentative to bold. Upstander roles take on many iterations. In addition to sharing Moses' role, the Torah tells the story of the Israelites' redemption as becoming possible through not only the highly visible role of Moses, but also through additional upstanders. The origin story of the Jewish people – which we recount not only on Passover, but also in daily prayers all year – relies on the powerful convergence of a gamut of pivotal upstanders on their way to emerging as a free nation.

### ■ **Facilitator invites learners to explore the texts on the source sheet in pairs. Invite the participants, as they study the texts, to consider:**

*Who of the upstanders are public upstanders and who act more privately?*

### ■ **Following the text study, bring the group back together and engage in a group discussion using some or all of the following questions:**

- Think of a person in your circles who makes change in the world? Who or what enabled them to become upstanders and advocate for systemic change?
- What are some ideal characteristics of upstanders?
- Are upstanders born or created?
- Can you think of a time when you acted as an upstander? What did you do and why? What made you stand up? How did you feel about taking on this responsibility?
- Looking back, what have you learned from your experience as an upstander, and what advice would you give to others?

# TAKE ACTION!

In the book of Exodus, each upstander recognized the opportunity to stand up, and devised effective ways to respond to the situation with the tools at their disposal. They set a vivid example for each of us to recognize and grab hold of our own varied opportunities – whether we seek them out, or they present themselves to us.

Below are three practical ways to act as an upstander for the issue of hostage release.

What other ways that can you think of?

## ■ Become an advocate

Reaching out to elected officials is a highly effective way to remind them of the importance of their role to “Let Our People Go.” Go to: [oneminaday.com](https://oneminaday.com) and call your elected officials.

## ■ Help others become aware by being present on social media

Post about the hostages. Take a picture of yourself wearing a yellow ribbon, hostage dog tags, or a piece of tape with the number of days in captivity written on it. Share the personal stories about the hostages and about those who are advocating for their release.

## ■ Show up:

There are numerous places to gather with community members and allies to support the hostages’ release. For example, in many communities there are weekly walks or runs where individuals and families wear unified shirts, carry the flags of the countries whose citizens are among the hostages, and share the experience on social media. You can find out more by visiting [run4lives.org](https://run4lives.org).

## CLOSING INTENTION

Each of us can recognize and seize upon opportunities to show up as upstanders on the hostages’ behalf of . Every time we stand up, we address the hostages’ plight – by advocating for their release, supporting their families, and demonstrating tangibly that “let my people go” is not just an ancient biblical adage – but a call to action for each of us today.

***What are some of the ways you are committing to show up as an upstander today?***

Yarden Gonen (far right) holds a poster of her sister Romi Gonen, who was taken hostage on October 7, 2023. Center is Jofa Executive Director Daphne Lazar Price and her spouse, David Price on the left. They each play the role of upstander by speaking out in front of communities, attending protests and vigils and by raising awareness on social media.

