

Taking Responsibility for Others in Times of Crisis

Facilitator Guide

**How do I balance my self-interest with my responsibility to care for others?
How can Queen Esther from the Purim story inspire us to take responsibility for our people?
How do I approach government officials to intervene on behalf of people who are suffering?**

FRAMING THE ISSUE

We are not alone in this world. Each of us belongs to a specific cultural or religious community and, at the same time, we are part of the human race. What is my responsibility towards others? How do I balance my self-interests with my obligation to care for others?

Standing up for others requires staying power, courage, determination and faith in our leaders' abilities to support us in our mission.

The hostage crisis in Gaza affects not only the Jewish people, but all people throughout the world. How should we advocate on behalf of the hostages? What is the message we should convey to our political leaders? How do we remain hopeful and vigilant even with the passage of time?



Info For Facilitator



Target Audience:

Middle School, High School, Young Adults



Length Of Program:

45-60 minutes



Materials & Prep:

- Text of Megillat Esther (The Book of Esther)
- A PDF of the entire text in Hebrew, with English translation, from Chabad, can be found [here](#) or live text in Hebrew and English can be found on [Sefaria](#).
- [Music video](#) to share (on digital device).
- Blank sheets of paper and writing utensils for writing messages (or digital devices).
- Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story by Ken Mochizuki (1997)
- Printed copies of the "Responsibility for Others" Quote Sheet



Esther Before the King

Bloom Murray, 1980

LET'S EXPLORE

Stage 1: Esther's Choice

- Facilitator invites participants to take turns reading the following texts:

- **Participant One (Introduction):**

In the 5th century BCE, the Jews of the Persian Empire were marked for death by a king whose minister had initiated the call for genocide. Unbeknownst to King Ahashverosh who issued this decree, his chosen queen, Esther, was a Jew. Esther had been hiding her Jewish identity from the king, but now her cousin Mordechai urges her to reveal herself and to take action to save her people. He sends her the following message, as recorded in *The Book of Esther* in the Bible:

- **Participant Two:**

"If you are silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place (while you and your father's house will perish). And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis." (Esther 4: 13-14)

- **Participant Three:**

Queen Esther is faced with a terrible dilemma: Should she carry on with her safe life in the palace, or risk everything for her people?

- Facilitator invites participants a full group discussion:

If you were Esther, what would you have done in this situation? What are the two sides she must consider? What makes this a difficult choice?

Extending the Conversation

- How do I balance my own self-interest/ care for my own well-being with my obligation to care for others?
- If Esther were alive today, how do you think she might respond to the hostage crisis?
- Divide the large group into smaller groups of two or three people. Distribute copies of *Megillat Esther*, Chapters 4-7 (Omit chapter 6). Participants should take turns reading together and then discuss in their small group, using the following prompt questions:
 1. How does Esther successfully convince Ahashverosh to cancel his evil decree?
 2. What strategies does she use?
- Facilitator brings group back together and asks one representative from each group to share the insights their group came up with regarding these questions.

Stage 2: Reflecting on the Theme of Responsibility

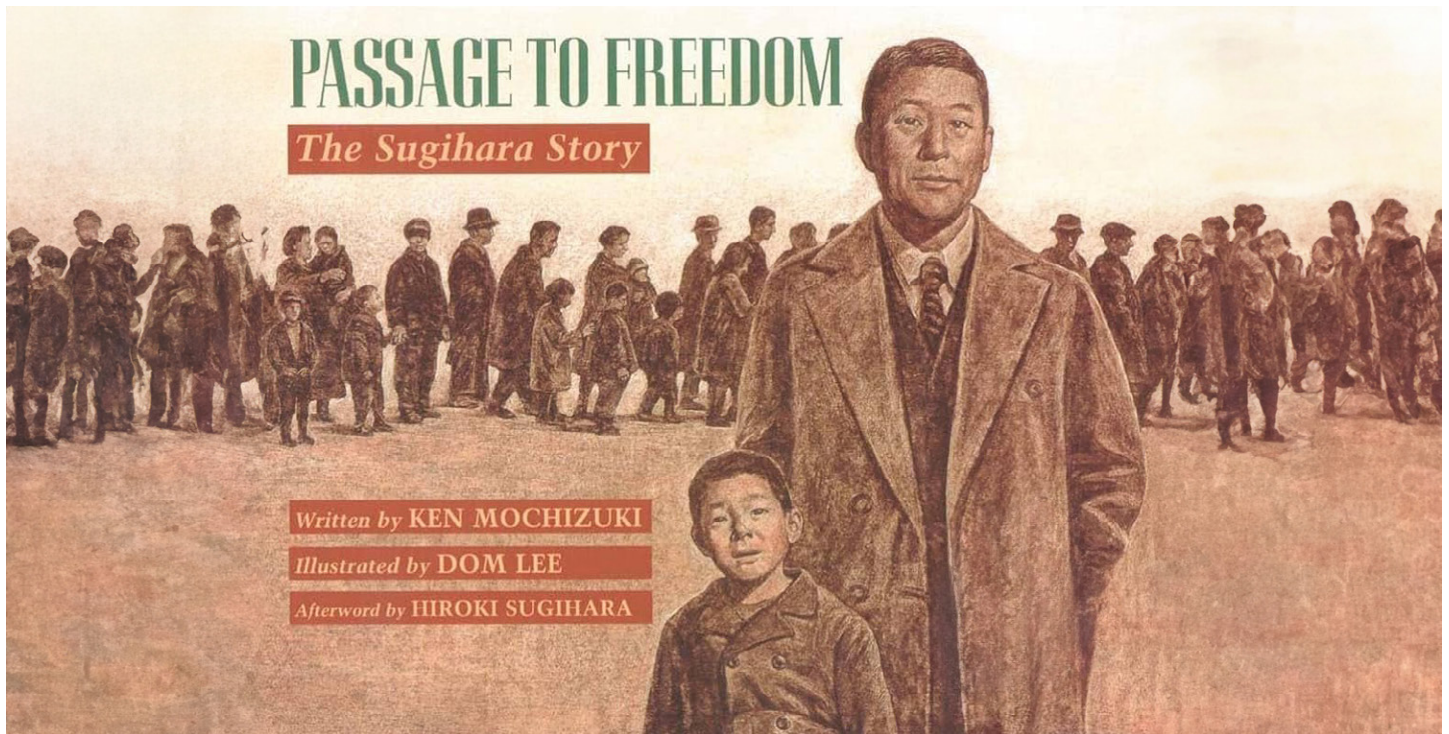
- Take turns reading from the Quote Sheet
- Ask participants to relate these quotes to the hostage crisis.
- In December 2023, a group of 1,000 Israelis gathered in Caesarea, Israel, to sing and to pray on behalf of the hostages. Listen to the stirring "[Bring them Home](#)" – [Homeland Concert](#), for inspiration towards action.

For Additional Reference

Read about a twentieth-century hero, Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat stationed in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 1940, who was entreated by the city's Jews to help them escape the approaching Nazis.

The book is called: *Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story* (Ken Mochizuki, 1997), and is narrated by Sugihara's son.

**Even though this book is a picture book, it is appropriate for any age. But you could also choose a more advanced reading on the topic.*



■ *Read the story to yourselves, or read together as a group.*

■ *After reading the story, discuss with the group:*

1. What was Sugihara's challenge? What did he risk?
2. What was the price he paid for his actions?
3. Why do you think he risked his own comfort and safety to rescue Jews in Kaunas in 1940?

TAKE ACTION!

Inspired by Esther's actions, how can we take action on behalf of the hostages? Ask group members to share their ideas. Here are a few options to work on with the group:

■ Contacting your elected officials

1. Compose sample messages you'd like to say to your elected officials. How would you frame your message in the most powerful way? Participants can work on writing their messages individually or work on them together.
2. Identify and then contact your elected officials [here](#).

■ Develop other "Plans of Action"

1. Attend rallies
2. Share plight of hostages on social media.
3. Discuss additional plans with participants.

CLOSING INTENTION

For the sake of the hostages, we must not become complacent, especially as more time elapses. Each one of us must strive to keep this issue alive with our elected officials and continue to demand the release of the hostages. Do not think that others can do this work on your behalf. Each person should demonstrate responsibility and do their part.



Esther touches Ahasuerus' Scepter

Bible Historiale, 1400 (Artist unknown).
Located in: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris