



Courage / Ometz Lev

Ometz Lev (from the Hebrew words *ometz* – strength, and *lev* – heart) refers to acts of **courage**. In *Pirkei Avot 4:1*, the question is posed, “Who is strong or mighty?” The answer is, “One who overpowers his inclinations.”

Throughout history in children’s literature and fairy tales, there are references to *Ometz Lev*, heroic actions. In Judaism, many of the Biblical and traditional stories we read to our young children focus on heroism and courage. These include holiday stories about *Hanukkah*, *Purim*, and *Passover*. We recount how the few Maccabees won their fight against the armies of their enemies. We describe Queen Esther standing up to King Ahasuerus who had agreed to a plot to kill the Jews. We learn in the Torah of Pharaoh’s cruel edict that first born Hebrew children be thrown into the river and of the bravery of Moses’ mother, Yocheved, who defied Pharaoh, saving baby Moses by putting him in a basket in the river. As Moses grows up, we read about his bravery in confronting cruel taskmasters about their treatment of the Israelite slaves. We also read how Moses, following God’s direction, stood up to Pharaoh demanding that the Israelites be allowed to go free.



These stories teach our children about acting courageously and overcoming fear. We often wonder about the value of sharing stories about violence with children. Do these stories provoke fear in children who already live in a world filled with danger? Or, will these stories help them become courageous? Children need courage to overcome situations that are fearful to them. Their fears may include everyday situations like sleeping in their own bed, separating from parents, or participating in activities for the first time.

In recent years, the suitability of violence in children's stories has been questioned by parents and teachers. Experts do not agree on the value or consequence of reading stories containing violence to young children. It is essential to communicate to children that suffering is caused by violence and that there are solutions to conflict other than violence. There are age appropriate books that discuss conflict and courageous solutions.



Many experts argue that children’s literature that includes violence can be especially valuable in teaching children to cope with conflict. Experts also believe that violence has value in children’s literature, only if it truthfully reflects characteristics of the world that children should be aware of,¹ no matter how much adults may wish to protect them from those dangers.

[Click here](#) for more information on [Jewish Values for Everyday Living: Mussar for Children](#)

¹ Although fairy tales often involve violent and dangerous situations, it is clear that stories such as these can have immeasurable value in a child’s life." Christina Moustakis. "A Plea for Heads: Illustrating Violence in Fairy Tales." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 7.2 (1982): 26-30. Project MUSE. Web. 28 Feb. 2014. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>