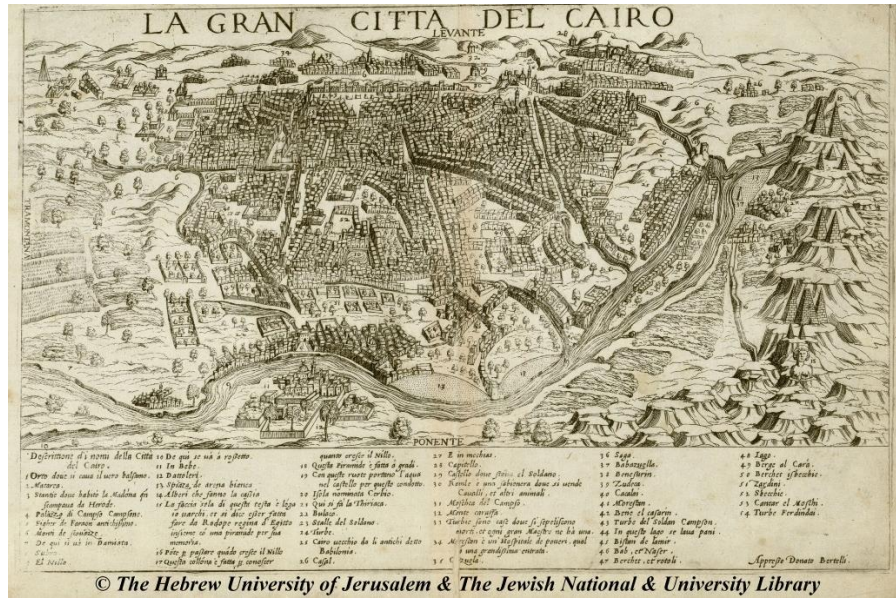


## A Letter from the Cairo Genizah



© The Hebrew University of Jerusalem & The Jewish National & University Library

### Introduction:

A Genizah is a depository for discarded religious texts. The texts contain God's name thus, according to Jewish law, they cannot be thrown out. Genizahs are most commonly found in attics or basements of synagogues. One of the most famous Genizahs in the world is the one that was unearthed in a synagogue in Cairo which remained hidden and untouched for centuries until it was rediscovered. It is extraordinary how much we can learn about a community by studying that which was once hidden.

The following video tells an astounding story that would have remained hidden had the Cairo Genizah not been uncovered.

[Watch video] <https://youtu.be/uPDzuvoZeFs>

### Activity

#### Materials needed:

1. Pens
2. Paper
3. Envelope

#### Our Hidden Objects – Relevant for a Small Group

Working in small groups, each participant looks in his/her handbag, pockets, or other places that they might have objects with them. Answer the following questions:

- What objects do you find?
- What do the objects reveal about you?
- What could an archaeologist learn about you from the items?

Ask members of the audience to place their hidden objects in an envelope. This envelope will be sent to the National Library of Israel and will serve as a time capsule- a hidden wealth of stories that will be preserved in the archives for future discovery.

### **Revealing Our Story- Relevant for a Large Group**

What can we “hide” now that will reveal something about you later? Have each member of the group write a short story or anecdote about themselves or about an object that is important to them.

The gathered stories should be placed in an envelope. This envelope will be sent to the National Library of Israel and will serve as a time capsule- a hidden wealth of stories that will be preserved in the archives for future discovery.

### Conclusion

Objects that may seem insignificant at the time, reveal much about their owners and the society in which they lived. When discovered much later, they offer fascinating information. The ephemera collection at the National Library of Israel, which contains items such as photographs, postcards, signs, and more, is a powerful tool for reconstructing Jewish culture in previous generations.

### Appendix

Who are the Karaites?

Karaite Judaism, begun as early as the eighth century CE, recognizes the Bible (*Tanakh*) as the supreme authority on Jewish law (*Halakhah*), as opposed to Rabbinic Judaism which accepts the Oral Law (Talmud, etc). Karaites will consider the insights of the rabbis as expressed in the Oral Law but they don't consider the rulings as binding. As a result, many differences in practice arise between Karaites and mainstream, Rabbinic Judaism. Some examples include eating meat and milk together as long as the meat is not the child of the animal that produced the milk, not celebrating Rabbinic holidays such as *Hanukkah*, removing their shoes in synagogue and prostrating themselves, and not requiring a *minyan* (quorum) for communal prayer. Karaite Judaism was based in Egypt, Turkey and Crimea but since the 1950's when Jews were expelled from Egypt, the largest Karaite communities are located in Israel and the United States.

---

## The Demons in the Basement

---



### Introduction

This story comes from the book called Kav HaYashar by Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kaidanover of Frankfurt in a chapter in which he explains the dangers of cavorting with demons. First published in 1705, Kav HaYashar is a popular volume of Jewish ethics. Its name literally means “The Straight Line.” The following story describes a serious problem and its bittersweet conclusion, with a bit of humor sprinkled throughout.

[**Watch video**] <https://youtu.be/XNQvePi7Hw4>

### Activity

#### **Materials needed:**

Microphone

**Two sides to Every Tale** - Assign small groups of 4-6 people a well-known fairy tale. The group should be divided in half and each half should be assigned to a specific character. The group should brainstorm for about 10 minutes on how they would best present the case of their character in defense of their actions.

For example, assign a group the story of Little Red Riding Hood. One side must defend the action of Red Riding Hood and the other must defend the actions of the wolf.

Have each side prepare a short debate and present it before the group. The group can then decide which side of the debate won their case.

**Other story options include:**

1. Hansel and Gretel- the Children v. the Witch
2. Goldilocks and the Three Bears – Goldilocks v. the Bears
3. If you have a local legend or famous story, feel free to add your own ideas!

Conclusion

There are two sides to every story. Before coming to a conclusion or making a decision, it is important to hear both sides of the story. The villain in a story may not be as bad as you once believed! When you give the other side a chance to share their perspective, you may be surprised to find that there is more to the story than you may have originally understood.



---

## The Journey of the Ethiopian Oriyt

---



### Introduction

The Jewish people have been on many long and extensive journeys throughout their history - to their homeland, into exile, from place to place and back home again. As Jews have journeyed, they have carried with them objects of significance- both sentimental and religious. The objects themselves tell the tales of those who have carried them and tell the stories of the arduous journeys they faced.

The following video takes us on a journey fraught with danger and teaches us about an important object housed in the National Library of Israel that tells the tale of the people who took that trip, of those who survived the journey, and those who unfortunately did not.

[Watch video] <https://youtu.be/eS51634UyYY>

### Activity

#### **Materials needed:**

1. Microphone
2. Stop watch

**Personal Journeys Activity- Good for Large or Small Group**

Have the group stand up and begin walking about the room on a “journey.” Have them walk for 10—15 seconds and then have them stop and speak with a fellow “traveler,” whoever is standing closest to them and ask a question for them to discuss together.

**Suggested questions to prompt conversation:**

- What is the oldest object in your home? Does it have a significant story behind it?
- Do you have an object that went on a journey? Where did it originate?
- What recipe would you take with you if you had to move to another country? Why would you choose that recipe?
- If you were moving, what one object would you be sure to take with you? Why that object? What is its significance?
- Have you been on a journey? Has anyone in your family come from afar?

After 2 or 3 minutes, the moderator signals that it is time to continue on their journey and they again begin circling the room. Ask a new question each time the group rotates.

At the end of the activity, reconvene as one group and ask people to share what they learned on their journey with the group.

**Conclusion** - Jewish history is filled with travel from place to place. Bringing objects that are important on an individual or group level have helped to make us comfortable in our new lands and have allowed each ethnic group to retain its own traditions and customs. Gathering and sharing these objects, as the National Library of Israel does, helps us to gain an appreciation of other Jewish ethnic groups and pride in our own culture.



---

## Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

---



### Introduction

Did you know, though, that various versions of the most well-known Biblical stories exist in different cultures? Many biblical stories and themes have been used, and modified, for other cultural uses. They can be found in classical literature and even in popular culture.

The well-known Biblical story of Joseph describes how the young boy was sold by his brothers as a slave to the Egyptian noble Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh. He moved into Potiphar's house and Potiphar's Wife tried to seduce Joseph who eluded her advances. As Joseph repelled her attempts, she grabbed him by his coat and it tore. Citing his garment as evidence, Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of having assaulted her, and he was sent to prison.

This video tells this famous biblical story from a different perspective and emphasizes how different cultures utilize these stories to import values that are important to them.

[Show Video]

### Activity

#### **Materials needed:**

1. Microphone

**Story Transmission Activity** - This activity is based on the idea that stories can change as they are transmitted orally.

**Break into small groups of 5 or 6 and sit in a circle.**

Each group starts with the same beginning sentence of a story. One person adds a sentence to the story. Each person, in turn, adds another sentence to the story. Together they build a full story.

Suggested story starters:

1. Once, there were twin brothers. One brother was favored by his mother, and the other by his father.
2. One day, God looked at the world that He had created and realized that the people that He had created were acting in immoral ways.
3. In a town, there was a man who was very kind and charitable but nothing ever went his way. Terrible things kept happening to him.

Reconvene into a large group and have one person from each group share the gist of the story that they have created.

Compare how the stories are similar and how they differ. Did they end up with the same moral to the story or different ones? Why do you think that the stories ended differently? Did each group have a different message that they wanted to express?

**Conclusion** - The Bible is a foundational text for much of the western world and finds its way, in various forms, into popular culture. Familiarity with Biblical stories helps to understand the new texts.