

# MIDBAR QUEST

## PLAYERS HANDBOOK

### מִדְבָּר קוּעֵסֵט: פְּלִיירס הַנְּדָבוּק

A/K/A, The HALAKHAH of TORAH & TA'ANIN (T&T)

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#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction. The afikoman you seek is hiding in plain sight.
2. אִיָּקָה – Where are you? Welcome to the Midbar.
3. מִי בְּצֶלֶם – Who are you? Meet your dream self.
4. Character types: humans, part-humans, and non-humans
5. Character classes and skills
6. Know yourself: backstory and motivation
7. Rules of roleplay: abiding by instruments of chance, listening, collaborating
8. Aiding your character. Skills learnt in your world, may be used in the Midbar.
9. Appendix 1: Glossary of terms  
Appendix 2: Useful References  
Appendix 3: The History & Philosophy of Midbar Quest  
Appendix 4: Character Sheet Template  
Appendix 5: Map of the Known and Unknown Wilderness

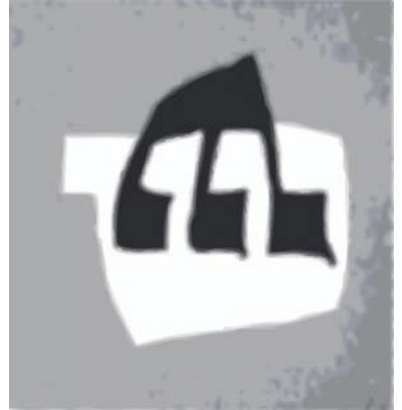
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the white space of every Hebrew word and letter is another word or letter, hidden in plain sight. Step into this world and you can discover marvels. This is the world of Jewish magic and fantasy – a wilderness of delight and danger; a sanctuary of dreams and wisdom only reached by journey through our active imaginations.

It is true you can find this world suggested in the tales of our people, recorded in the Holy Torah, in the writings of our ancient visionaries, in those remembered by our sages in the Talmud and in those told by our great storytellers (even into the present day). Perhaps you are already familiar with some of them. They are, each of them, an invitation and a gateway to corridors of dreams which lead through a maze of lands that you too can travel through and meet the magical people and creatures residing there. It is a world that is hidden but only as distant as you choose to keep it.



## 2. אֵינְךָ – WHERE ARE YOU?

If you would like to travel to and through this world, the good news is that your dream self is waiting to embody your imagination. Close your eyes and imagine seeing, hearing, smelling, and feeling through their body – learning and living in a world of miracles, magic, and danger.

You are part of a great camp of people traveling through a vast wilderness, recently liberated from a great power – powerful enough to enslave many different peoples and assimilating their unique strengths into their own. But by crying out for freedom, the power of life and death itself has intervened to save you and those in your family that have managed to survive. Some may still be lost and you grieve for them. Some you have discovered and you celebrate your freedom with them as you have made new friends and been re-introduced to the wisdom and oaths of your ancestors that are yours to embody. For certain, you've learned to navigate that world by developing skills and abilities and by discovering your own talents. What skills and talents would you want to possess and cultivate?

## 3. מִי בְּצֶלֶם – WHO ARE YOU?

As you begin to imagine who you are, begin to draw a picture of yourself in your mind. If this image doesn't come to you immediately, sit comfortably, take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds before exhaling. Do it again and close your eyes.

Continue breathing deeply. Let yourself be relaxed and let all worries and concerns fall away from you. You feel comfortable and relaxed as the earth and its fellow planets spin their way around the sun, as they orbit together

around through the galaxy wandering about the cosmos.

With your eyes closed imagine yourself sitting atop a hill underneath a shady tree on a large rock overlooking a forest and a glade, a pond and a stream. A pleasant cool breeze keeps your mind at ease. Above you can hear birds and from below the smell of delightful flowers calms you. The forest is buzzing with life and in the distance you can hear the faint sound of thunder over the mountains.

Across the ridge to where you sit there is a trail and from your vantage point you can see someone approaching. They are on a vision quest of their own. They have come to meet you, the one who will be their eyes, ears, nose, and voice in your world and together you will be able to explore the Midbar – the Wilderness – together. They are hesitant to approach. Beckon them closer to let them know you welcome them. Note how they walk, the manner of their dress, and what they carry with them. Perhaps they are carrying a gift in anticipation of meeting you?

If you only sense a vague outline of this being, do not worry yourself.

We will begin a process to begin to know them better. For this, we will use instruments of chance – dice.<sup>1</sup>

**Roll 4 six sided dice, six times.** Each time you roll, **record the sum of the three largest dice** on a sheet of paper. (The largest number you can roll is 18 and the smallest is 3.) Your dream self has six essential character attributes described below. Read through these attributes. **Place the numbers you roll alongside the attributes that seem to best describe your character to yourself.** Once you do this, you will have some strong hints as to what sort of person they are, what talents they might possess, what skills they might be working on, and even, what motivation they might have in their lives.

- **חֵכְמָה Hokhmah-Wisdom** (Intuition and Understanding: Relationships between creatures). Important for Priests, Healers, Animal Whisperers.
- **בִּינָה Binah-Intelligence** (Memory and Calculation: Languages, Spells, Songs). Important for Sages, Musicians, Baalei Shem (Masters of the Divine Name–Theurgists).
- **כֹּחַ Koah-Strength** (Lifting Heavy Things and Wielding Heavy Weapons). Important for warriors, farmers.
- **חֶסֶד Loving-kindness.** You don't have to roll dice for this. Rather, think of this as how much compassion and caring for others they share with the world. Crucial for Baalei Shem and Kohanim. (This is related to the idea of “alignment” in D&D.)
- **סֵבֶל Sevel-Constitution** (Endurance against fatigue and Resilience in health) Crucial for Everyone's Health. Important for Herbalists, Messenger-Runners.
- **זְרִיזוּת Zrizut-Dexterity** (Speed and Agility). Important for Musicians, Acrobats, Jugglers, Sheidim.
- **חֹד Hōd-Charisma** (Attraction and Persuasion). Important for Priests, Sheidim.

Biologically, you may be a man or a woman or something else. There are other magical beings in this world that

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<sup>1</sup> For more on using dice as chance instruments in roleplay, see Appendix 3: Philosophy of Midbar Quest.

travel with you. Once you determine who you are, the skills you are cultivating, and the story of your dream self, you may receive a special call from the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) Aharon with a special mission just for you and your fellow adventurers...

For example, I, speaking to you through these words am known as Dr. Shamir. Were you to see me, you might see the image of the likeness of a metallic, semi-transparent flask containing a terrarium – this is the home in which I reside, a sentient and telepathic worm who my friends call Dr. Shamir. The large creature cradling my terrarium in its arms is my companion, an artificial anthropoid known as a *Challah* Golem. On our planet, as on yours, my people became great architects and designers. No prison can easily hold me since my mucous excretion can dissolve solid stone, and it is exactly this capability that helped us to carve out the wormholes by which we have traveled from world to world and even to your space-time. We have travelled through many lands and worlds together looking for people like you to embody spirits of justice, fairness, wisdom and loving-kindness in all the worlds suffering through the illusion of separation and the oppressive characters of beings trying their best to fulfill their needs.



#### 4. CHARACTER TYPES

### Human Beings

#### Yisraelim (Israelites)

The name of the people you have found your dream self among is called the Camp of Those Who Wrestle with the Heavenly Powers, or the *Maḥaneh Yisraelim*, and the people they have recently been liberated from was the greatest and most powerful people in the world, known only as *Mitzrayim*, the Narrow Place. That empire is in disarray as your people's fantastic exit from *Mitzrayim* (and those of others also seeking their freedom) has left it in turmoil. Other nearby groups that lived at the edges of the empire have since begun asserting their own power – most, but not all, in deference to the power of your people, the *Yisraelim*. The most ambitious of these is extremely dangerous – a group of people who have taken the lesson from Nature that to survive they must test the strength of others and consume the weak. These

predatory people are known as *Amalek* and are at war with *Yisrael* in its travels through the wilderness.

Two years ago, another group of *miraglim* (scout-spies) convinced a large number of Israelites that they could never settle the land promised to their ancestors since it was inhabited by the Bnei Anak – giant descendants of the Angels that came to Earth in the generation washed away by the Great Flood. You felt the sense of gloom settle over the camp in those days and understood what motivated Korah, Datan, and Aviram in their attempted coup-de-tat against Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. People in the camp are still processing the news that your generation will live and die in the Wilderness. Some, like you, are dedicating all of their energies to realize your best selves and to raise a wiser generation prepared to develop a model society of caring and compassionate people, guardians of the Earth, who might inspire the other peoples of the world to pursue justice and fairness as well.

The people of Yisrael comprise twelve distinctive tribes, each of which is made up of clans, a few of which are dominant and which represent their tribe as elders of princes. If you were born into a tribe, talk to your Midbar Quest Maggid (and see Genesis 30) for descriptions of the tribal characteristics to determine which tribe you may be in.

There are individuals with every conceivable background and mixture of backgrounds in the camp: farmers, tool smiths, herbalists, wilderness specialists, sages competent in understanding other spoken and written languages, sages specializing in ancient and obscure languages, merchants, scribes, and artisans of all kind.

### Israelite sub-classes

#### Nazir

A good number of warriors are visibly recognizable as ascetics, individuals who have taken an oath of self-denial. These are called *nazirim* (singular, *nazir*) and restrain themselves from eating grapes, grape derived food and drink, or any fermented liquors. Those who succeed in restraining themselves from food and drink in this manner gain additional powers of strength.

#### Amei ha-Aretz, Bnei Sadeh (Earth Born Children of the Field)

In the last years of the oppression, the empire began a project of forced assimilation that involved the infanticide or killing of all male infants at birth. Some of these were babies were saved by righteous Mitzrim. Others were left in the Wilderness by mothers who fled there to give birth. The earth itself opened up and took them in to suckle them on rocks until they were nurtured into full grown men and born again from the land upon the exit of the Yisraelim, whereafter they

joined the camp of Yisrael as uneducated man-children. These orphaned men are physically very powerful and some of the greatest warriors of Yisrael. Bnei Sadeh are permitted to only use primitive weapons. They can speak to animals, hear the voice of the earth, and often work as animal whisperers.

#### Erev Rav

Other oppressed peoples took leave of Mitzrayim with Yisrael. Collectively, these are known as the *erev rav*. These include other ethnic groups enslaved by the kingdom and religious minorities in Egypt who had been worshiping their gods in secret for centuries. Word in the camp is that these “strangers” must be respected, welcomed, and honored as guests in the camp, who may if they wish, become part of the people of Yisrael.

#### Midianim (Midianites)

The Midianites are friendly allies of Israelites living in the wilderness of Sinai. Their leader is Yitro, father to Tzippora, the wife of Moshe.

## Non-Humans

### Venerated Animals of the Israelites & Israelite Tribes (Donkeys, Bears, Wolves, Lions, etc.)

Several animals are sacred to the Israelite tribes. Players wishing to roleplay animals have several to choose from. They can communicate telepathically with other players or may be limited in their communication with specific



chosen players. If you choose a non-human animal to play, talk to your Midbar Quest Maggid so they can help you with your backstory and to find human allies that you can rely upon to help you in your adventure.

## Sheidim

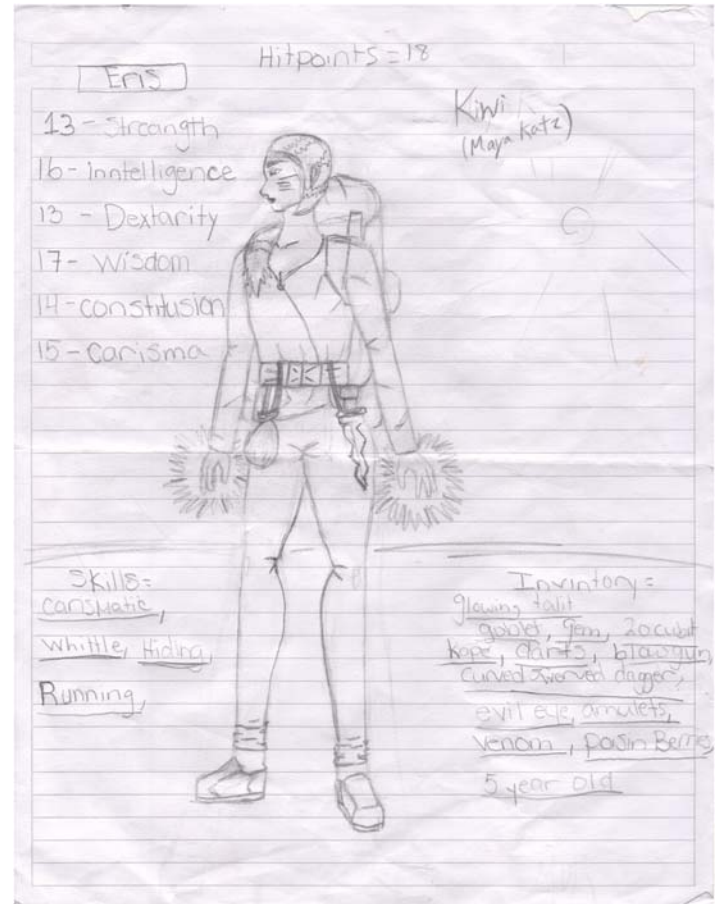


There is an entire class of beings known as *Sheidim*, masters of camouflage who often travel unseen, slightly out-of-phase with our reality. They often inhabit places ignored or neglected by human beings including ruins, but they are also known to keep the company of different species of trees and other vegetation. They are a very diverse kingdom encompassing many who are strangers to your world but wary of those who trespass or abuse their habitat. Most known as *ruh'in* are curious (if not entirely harmless) but there are others known as *mazikin* who are dangerous by nature just as certain plants and animals are. Finally, there are a group of *sheidim* known as *lillin* who are not only dangerous, they are malevolent, seeking to harm any humans that they encounter or are directed toward.

## 5. SKILLED CHARACTER CLASSES

### Warriors, Survival & Wilderness Specialists

Living outside of the camp, *hut'z lamahaneh*, isn't easy, especially in unfamiliar terrain. Israelite warriors are master observers of nature, weather watchers, and animal behaviorists. The basis of their skills is in their work as serf farmers and brute labor in Mitzrayim. Their skills with weapons is derived mainly from their familiarity with the tools of their labor there.



- Wilderness specialists.
- Farming
- Foraging
- Tool Making
- Tool Repair
- Clothes Making
- Swimming
- Endurance Running

- Sailing
- Shelter Building
- Animal Behavior
- Ropes and knots
- Weather and Animal Omens

Some have been taught violence and thievery from an early age, simply out of desperate circumstances. But most everyone in the camp is a teacher and a student and is spending their lives improving themselves and each other in anticipation of arriving in the land promised their ancestors where they might begin building a peaceful and just civilization.

SKILLS (pick two)

- Climbing walls
- Tightrope Walking
- Distraction
- Finding Traps and hidden doors
- Jumping and landing (parkour)
- Juggling (choose two objects)
- Silent Movement
- Camouflage
- Mesmerism

### Ḥakhamim – Sages

Not everyone in the world of Midbar Quest is literate. There are several character classes of literate characters: ḥakhamim (sages), kohaim/ot (priests/priestesses), and baalei shem/mages.

There are also students of Torah who seek ever greater understanding of the teachings of Moshe in how to properly preserve and cultivate *Adamah*, the Earth, without wanton destruction and mindful of the suffering of all living creatures.

Ḥakhamim are literate in one or more of the following languages. Sages can be combined with other character classes but be limited to one language and one skill from



### Jesters, Acrobats, and Thieves

In Mitzrayim, some slaves were set to work for the amusement of others and some of these even attained high status as jesters and acrobats.

Not everyone in the Camp of the Israelites is perfectly well-meaning and kind. While most needs are taken care for in the camp, there is still room for transgression while individuals seek to satisfy needs and desires for themselves, their close friends, and families.

the other character class. Those who are dedicated to learning can choose two of the following.

- Reading/writing Egyptian
- Reading/writing Hebrew
- Reading/writing Akkadian
- Reading/writing Angel script (ancient scrolls from the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever)
- Logic & Riddles
- Calculation/counting/estimation
- Meditation & Yordei Merkava
- Surveying & Mapping



### Kohanim & Kohanot(Priests)

The camp of Yisrael is guarded by a benevolent and concerned deity that identifies as the god of the ancestors of the Yisraelim, the creator of all the worlds, and the sustainer of reality as we know it. This god is known by many names but is often simply referenced as The Name, since the god's name when pronounced itself may provoke an unknown and potentially

dangerous response depending upon the alignment, intention, and preparation of the utterer. A priesthood acts as guides for the many in the camp worshipping this deity. These priests are easily recognizable as they are entirely hairless, shaving even their eyebrows. Priests are trained in healing medicine from a sacred text known as the *Sefer Refuah* and with their assistance even the dead can potentially be revived. All priests are also levites and as such also may choose a musical instrument and musical skill

Priestly skills (pick two)

- Kosher slaughter
- Healing Prayers
- Healing Potions
- Speaking with Angels
- Speaking with Sheidim
- Speaking to Animals
- Dream interpretation, omen reading
- Hypnotic Trance





## Musicians

Although there are musicians in each tribe of Israel, there is also an entire tribe dedicated to music – the Levi'im.



## MUSICIAN SKILLS

- Instrument
- Drum
- Voice
- Calm animals
- Shatter glass
- Harm hearing
- Generate confusion

## Ba'alei Shem (Masters of the Divine Name/Theurgists)

Those artisans who learn to evoke the name and manipulate the powers of the letters that form the very

fabric of reality in the world of imagination are known as *Baalei Shem*, Masters of the Name (singular, *Baal Shem*).

## THEURGICAL POWERS (pick two)

- Blessings/Curses
- Writing kameyot (amulets)
- Creating Gateways/Portkeys
- Circles of Protection
- Teleportation (kfitzat haderekh)
- Invoking Light/Darkness
- Detect Alignment and Honesty
- Protection against animal bites

## EREV RAV SORCERORS



Some of the Erev Rav are familiar with or even skilled practitioners in dark magic – powers that coerce and

manipulate animals, nature spirits, and the resting souls of the dead. Inside the camp, such magic is forbidden.

- Light/Dark
- Summon Sheid (demon)
- Fetish(es)
- Control demon
- Perceive influence
- Necromancy

### Artisans

Artist/craftsmen of every type proliferate through the camp. Their skills and abilities are drawn largely from Egypt and the wisdom preserved from their own people's culture – whatever survived the generations of serfdom in Mitzrayim.

### Animal Whisperers

There are many animals in the camp whose care is deemed of primary importance. The laws of tzaar baalei ḥayyim require that the needs of domesticated animals take prominence over human needs – they rely upon us for their welfare after all. There are those in the camp who have special talents at communicating with various creatures. If your character is an animal whisperer, choose two of the following skills:

- Communicates with donkeys/goats/cows/chickens
- Understands the language of frogs
- Understands the language of birds
- Understands the language of trees/vegetation

## 6. UNDERSTAND BEFORE WHOM YOU STAND: CHARACTER MOTIVATION & BACKSTORY

Now that you've got a pretty good idea of the being you'll be exploring the Midbar with, it's time to figure out what motivates your character. It's only been four years since you've left Mitzrayim. Where did you come from? Who are your parents and siblings? Did they all survive the years of oppression in Mitzrayim or the passage out of it and into the Midbar? If you were orphaned, who has been taking care of you all these years? Why are you pursuing the skills you are seeking to master? Who has been your teacher?

When you have a developed a backstory and illustrated your character as a drawing, you'll be ready to introduce and describe yourself to the other Midbar Quest players.

## 7. RULES OF ROLEPLAY

### DICE

In Midbar Quest as with other roleplaying systems, dice are used as “instruments of chance” in two important ways. For one, the dice keep everyone fair; everyone abides by the dice even the Maggid – the mentor of the unfolding story. For another, the dice inform us as to the physics of the Midbar world we perceive through our understanding and translation of the story in our mind.

The practice of using chance instruments for determining fate and fortune is well attested in the stories of Yonah and in the story of Purim. A *pur* is a lottery made by some form of casting or cleromancy, after all. Astragalomancy is the practice of learning the future by interpreting the casting of dice. However, in Midbar Quest we are only using dice to determine the fate of our dream selves in the Midbar, not the fate of our selves in this world. As Maimonides taught, we human beings are privileged in having a free-will, and more so as descendants of Israelites, we have our portion in haShem, El Elyon, the Highest Power. Each of us is created b'tselem elohim, in the image and likeness of the divine creator. We are partners in creation. We help to shape our destiny and the destiny of our world based on our powerful actions and decisions. When we create in Midbar Quest we are also acting as partners in creation, creating worlds and beings as the Creator creates worlds and beings. When we behave with compassion and care with our creation, then we are walking in the ways of haShem, and walking well through the Midbar of our collective imaginations.

### LISTENING & COLLABORATING

But if we were only watching the dice, we would miss most of the story. Much of what is happening is being determined by you within the constraints of your character's attributes and your own creativity, as well as by the attributes and creativity of the other players. Without listening and attending to their ideas, it's hard to tell what's going on. It can take some patience and getting used to but it's also very rewarding. Get excited, share, and listen. Your Midbar Quest maggid can help but the story can't be told without everyone respecting and collaborating with each other's ideas.

### HEALTH POINTS

We calculate health points by noting our character's Constitution attribute, rolling a 4 sided die, and then adding both numbers together.

### ARMOR CLASS

Your Armor Class begins at 10. Special clothing and helmets can reduce your armor class but also decrease your dexterity.

### MAGIC

We use Hebrew banagram tiles for *baalei shem* to spell out Hebrew verb/actions and noun/objects. After the tiles are used they are handed to the Midbar Quest Magid. In this way, the powers of the *baalei shem* are somewhat limited

during each play session.

## 8. AN IMPORTANT NOTE

Unlike other roleplaying systems, Midbar Quest explicitly allows you to share skills you've learned in this world with your character exploring the Midbar. For example: if you learn how to read and write Hebrew, or even learn a new verb and noun by which you might prepare a blessing or other spell, you may do so! In the process of creating a character, you've essentially created an umbilical chord of imagination between these two worlds.

The liturgy of Jewish spiritual practice often calls on us to remember that our identity as Jews is rooted in being rescued by G?Δ from being enslaved by an oppressive people and brought into a Wilderness where we could receive a gift, the dream of which is the liberation of all people, human and non-human, living in compassion and consideration with one another. In the Passover Seder, we are taught by Rabban Gamliel that we haven't actually fulfilled our obligation at the seder until we have imagined ourselves leaving Mitzrayim. Now that we've found ourselves in the Midbar, we can more easily realize ourselves in this ancient and potent dream. Everyday we can easily find ourselves in our own private Mitzrayim, oppressed by our own closed minds as well as those of some around us. But our tradition encourages us and prepares us to seek the Midbar, the wild places where our minds may be opened. Thankfully we are not alone on this journey. We are privileged to be traveling, each one of us, together on this journey.

## 9. APPENDIX 1

### Glossary of Terms

**Baal Shem, Baalei Shem** (plural): a Jewish wonder worker and shaman.

**B'tselem Elohim:** the likeness of the divine. According to the Torah in Breishit (Genesis), the primordial Adam (earthling) was crafted with the likeness of the divine.

**Erev Rav:** literally, “mixed many” – the non-Israelite population that joined with the camp of the Israelites in fleeing Mitzrayim

**haShem:** literally, the Name – referring to the name of G?Δ in the cosmos, and as a circumlocution for pronouncing that name in reference to G?Δ. “Hashema” is also a name of G?Δ in its own right, referring to G?Δ as a god of fate or fortune. In letters from the first Temple era Egyptian Jewish community at Elephantine, G?Δ is referred to as “YHVH Hashema.”

**Golem:** commonly, an artificial anthropoid lifeform made from clay by a Baal Shem. Non-anthropoid golems have also been known to have been made.

**Midbar:** literally, “wilderness.” Formed from the prefix “Mem” meaning “from” and “Daber” meaning “words” or “things”

**Mitsrayim:** literally, “the narrow place.” mytho-historical Egypt based on ancient Egypt as remembered in the early

first millenium (three thousand years ago)

**Sadeh:** a field or glade

**Sheid, Sheidim:** animating spirits of nature. Sometimes dangerous. Sometimes malevolent. Sometimes helpful.

**Yisrael:** the eponymous name of people of Yisrael. The forefather, Yaakov, angelified.

## APPENDIX 2: USEFUL REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical\\_and\\_Talmudic\\_units\\_of\\_measurement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_and_Talmudic_units_of_measurement)

Rabbi Geoffrey Dennis's *Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism*

[https://www.academia.edu/3635363/Developmental\\_Issues\\_in\\_Guided\\_Fantasy\\_Roleplaying\\_for\\_Children\\_and\\_Young\\_Adolescents\\_for\\_Jewish\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/3635363/Developmental_Issues_in_Guided_Fantasy_Roleplaying_for_Children_and_Young_Adolescents_for_Jewish_Education)

*Golem* by Moshe Idel

*Hamlet's Mill* by Giorgio de Santillana and Herta von Deschend

### A HEBREW-ENGLISH/ENGLISH-HEBREW DICTIONARY

Ernest Klein's *Etylmological Dictionary of the Hebrew Languages*

*Maps of the Mind* by Charles Hampden-Turner

*The Cheese and the Worm* by Carlo Ginzburg

*Castle of Crossed Destinies* by Italo Calvino

Aharon Varady's Hebrew Letter Chart  
(aharon@opensiddur.org)

*Miriam's Tambourine*, Howard Schwartz

*The Book of Seals and Amulets* by Jacobus G. Swart

Bialik and Ravnitsky's *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*

## APPENDIX 3: THE HISTORY & PHILOSOPHY OF MIDBAR QUEST

The overarching philosophy of Midbar Quest is that Judaism invites us to take our imaginations seriously. Our god, after all, is invisible and its self-conception is engaged through exercises of the imagination. And imagination must be cultivated. Those who demean the imaginary as “fake” or “false” or set-up myth as a straw-man for Truth, usually have some other proposition or advertising to sell. The last territory to colonize is the imagination and what better way to populate fresh minds with junk imaginations is to convince them that products of the imagination are commodities like any other, and that it's better to buy up and passively consume someone else's vision than to seek out and share one's own in play. Myths, while vehicles for all sorts of ideas, have by the power of metaphor always been powerful containers for sharing complicated ideas, esoteric wisdom, and even scientific knowledge. They survive in an ephemeral world we create as partners with culture. This world is perhaps the most integral space in which Jewish culture lives. Jewish culture does not live in the Land of Israel. Jewish culture does not live in Hebrew dictionaries. Jewish culture does not live in the Siddur or the Torah or the Sefer ha-Aggadah. Jewish culture lives in the imagination beyond all such artifacts and concepts that give witness to the existence of this imagination. I call it, the land beyond the River Sambatyon – a river that cannot be traversed by ordinary means. A kfitzat haderekh is required since this land cannot be plotted on any map (although possibly allusions to it can be found in certain

maps). It is a sanctuary of the imagination, and just as potent and ephemeral as a child's soul.

J.R.R. Tolkien explains that fantasy in the modern tradition of William Morris, is misunderstood as escapist literature. Rather, the fantasy presents a world that is comparative to our own and which through that comparison has the potential to inspire change. This is the radical potential of the imaginary. The fact that the landscape, characters, and ideas shared through Jewish folklore are so unfamiliar to many Jewish children is thus a serious concern for without it, the rest of Judaism has little foundation. Some, despondent with the superstitions of yor, have argue for a Judaism built upon Maimonidean rationalism – a philosopher's Judaism. They are deluding themselves. We are dreamers, children of prophets and our stories are containers and vehicles for values that might eagerly (or absently, or casually, or callously) be overwritten in favor of some other muscular Judaism. As a project in recovery and restoration, we thus seek to develop in the minds of youth and adults fluency in the living imagination of Jewish culture through modalities of immersive and transformative experiential education. We hope that our realization of this project through tabletop adventure roleplaying inspires other educators to incorporate its techniques in their own curriculum and with the groups they seek to engage deeply with loving-kindness for the autonomy of their student's *tselem elohim* – their world creating capabilities.

– Aharon Varady, 2015

## About the author

Adventure roleplaying through the landscape of Jewish folktales, rabbinic Jewish lore, and biblical and apocryphal mythology has been the largely private and very nerdy desire of Aharon Varady since he was 11 years old. He was first introduced to Jewish demons while learning the Talmud *Bava Metziab* in fifth grade and to Jewish fantasy literature soon afterward through an anthology of strange Yiddish stories translated by Joachim Neugroshel, z”l, entitled: *Yene Velt* (the Other Side). Frustrated by the misappropriation of Jewish fantasy motifs and mystical ideas in western hermetic, occult, and genre literature, on the one hand, and the lack of attention, interest, and expertise among Jewish educators, on the other, he set out to learn as much as he could from books, eventually discovering a growing body of scholarly literature in English in academic libraries. Through a clever ploy, he tricked a community of Jewish environmental educators into an evening of adventure roleplaying and character creation in a medieval world populated by oppressive fiefs, scroll thievery, magic, demons, and forest Jews. While pursuing a masters degree in Jewish experiential education at the William Davidson School at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, he wrote a paper in 2013 titled: “[Developmental Issues in Guided Fantasy Roleplaying for Children and Young Adolescents for Jewish Education.](#)” In 2014, while working as a Yahadut (Judaism) specialist at Eden Village Summer Camp, he began offering “Midbar Quest” as an activity during schmooze for a select group of “Keter” boy campers. This Players Handbook was written during the summer of 2015, when Midbar Quest was accepted as an official *hug* (elective) option for both pre-teen and adolescent campers, boys and girls. The popular *hug* engaged over 80 campers that year.

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YOUR NAME:  
YOUR MIDBAR QUEST NAME:

HEALTH POINTS

PEOPLE & TRIBE:

AGE:                      GENDER:                      ARMOR CLASS:  
HEIGHT:                      WEIGHT:                      HAIR (?) COLOR:

SPECIALIZATION:

SKILLS:                      Brick Making, Shlepping

LANGUAGE(S):              Hebrew

### ATTRIBUTES

	<p><b>חֵכְמָה Hokmah–Wisdom</b> (Intuition and Understanding: Relationships between creatures). Important for Priests, Healers, Animal Whisperers</p>
	<p><b>בִּינָה Binah–Intelligence</b> (Memory and Calculation: Languages, Spells, Songs). Important for Sages, Musicians, Baalei Shem (Masters of the Divine Name, Theurgists).</p>
	<p><b>כֹּחַ Koah–Strength</b> (Lifting Heavy Things and Wielding Heavy Weapons). Important for warriors, farmers.</p>
	<p><b>סֵבֶל Sevel–Constitution</b> (Endurance against fatigue and Resilience in health) Crucial for Everyone’s Health. Important for Herbalists, Messenger–Runners.</p>
	<p><b>זְרִיזוּת Zrizut–Dexterity</b> (Speed and Agility). Important for Musicians, Acrobats, Jugglers, Sheidim.</p>
	<p><b>חַיָּוִת Hōd–Charisma</b> (Attraction and Persuasion). Important for Priests, Sheidim.</p>

INVENTORY:                      1 Shofar, 1 Backpack, 1 canteen (6 *log*), 1 family heirloom,  
1 Amulet (protection against the evil eye), sandals.

YOUR NAME:

HEALTH POINTS

YOUR MIDBAR QUEST NAME:

Draw a picture of yourself :

Describe your **background** and your **family**, your history in **Mitzrayim** and **why you left**. Explain all of your disabilities and needs and what you've been trying to improve about yourself since you've joined the **Camp of the Israelites**. What is moving you in your life – **what are your motivations** for developing the skills and specializations? (Use as much extra paper as needed.)