

The Sara &  
Samuel J. Lessans

Good  
Deeds  
Day

# Inspiration Israel

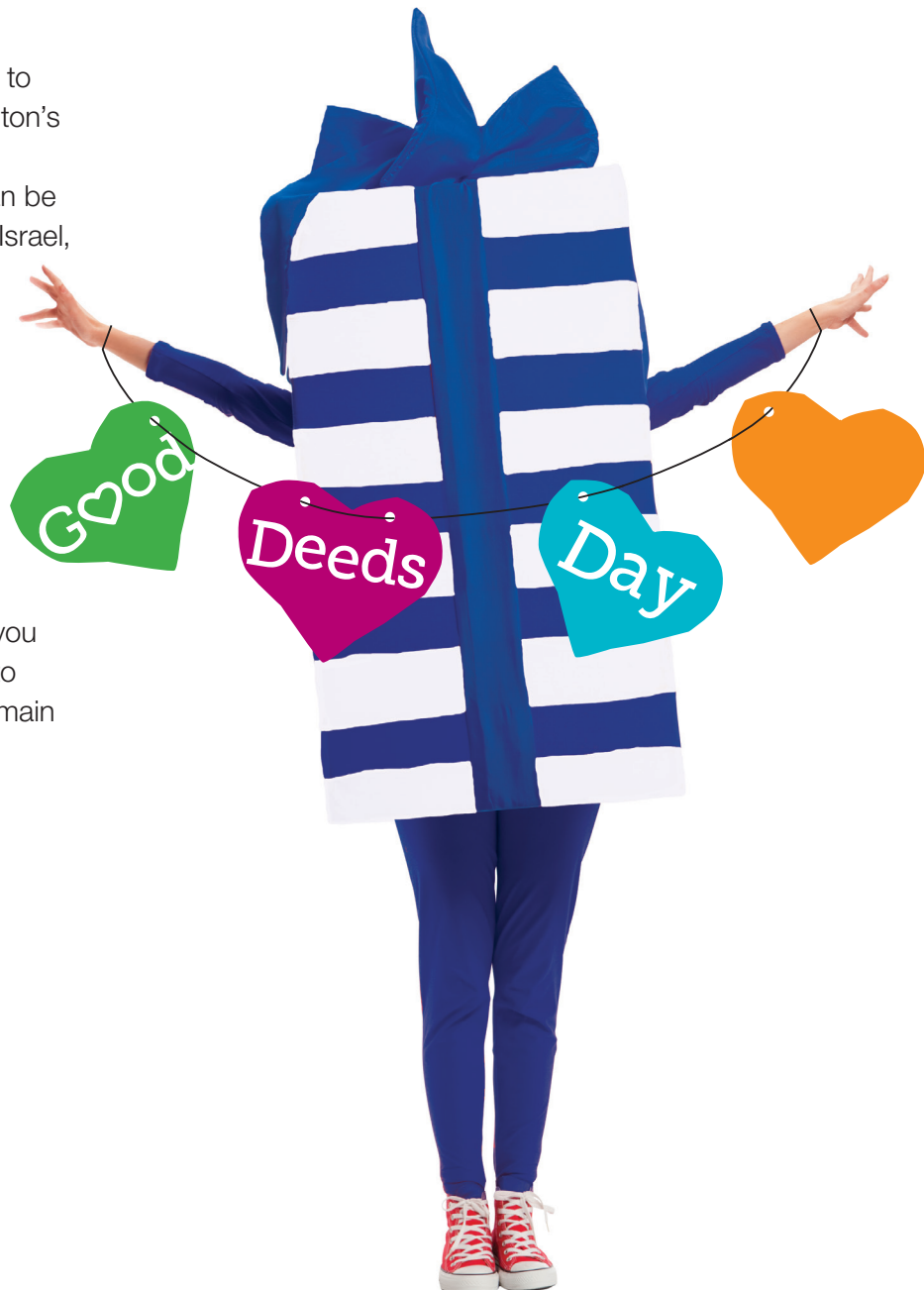
Doing a  
World of  
Good



The Jewish Federation  
OF GREATER WASHINGTON

The word Yisrael can refer to a few ideas. It can denote the Jewish people (and not just those we call Israelis); it can refer to the land of Israel; and it can also refer to the modern State of Israel. Each one of these can serve as a source of great inspiration to us. While there are surely hundreds of illustrations that show how the people, land, and state of Israel can inspire us, we will focus on one example, Good Deeds Day, which was founded in Israel and has expanded to include Jewish and non-Jewish communities all over the world.

The material below is background information to help educators and facilitators frame Washington's participation in Good Deeds Day and the connection of Good Deeds Day to Israel. It can be a stand-alone set of lessons, inserted into an Israel, bible, or history curriculum, or used as an intensive preparation for participation in Good Deeds Day. Facilitators may also select parts of the suggestions as a quick framing for Good Deeds Day activities, perhaps in response to "why is this mitzvah day different from all other mitzvah days?" Feel free to adapt the basic message of each of the four sections to the developmental level of your learners. To help you prepare to teach this material, you may want to scroll down to the last section which lists the main learning objectives.



# STEP 1

## Background Text Study

We may begin our quest to understand how “*Yisrael*” can be inspirational by analyzing the phrase “*Or LaGoyim*,” a light to nations, which first appears in Isaiah, Chapter 42:6-7.

6. I am the Lord; I called you with righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people’s covenant, for a light to nations.

ו. אֲנִי יְהוָה קְרָאתִיךָ בְּצִדִק וְאַחֲזַק בְּיָדְךָ וְאַצְרֶךָ וְאַפְגַּדְךָ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם:

7. To open blind eyes, to bring prisoners out of a dungeon, those who sit in darkness out of a prison.

ז. לְפָקֹחַ עֵינַיִם עֲרוּרוֹת לְהוֹצִיא מִמִּסְגַּר אֲסִיר מִבַּיִת כְּלָא יֹשְׁבֵי חֹשֶׁךְ:

Begin a discussion with your participants on the concept of being a “light to nations.” You may use the following questions from <http://bit.ly/1CLU2rR> as a guide:

- In an old popular song, a person sang “You light up my life; you give me hope to carry on...” What do you think the singer was trying to say to someone?
- Have your parents or teachers ever told you about someone who they believe would be a good role model for you to follow? What do you think made them so? Are there any groups, teams, communities who could be role models in their behavior to you and others?
- How do you interpret what Isaiah meant by the phrase “Light to nations?”
- Do you have any concerns about the concept of “*Or LaGoyim*”? Do you think it implies Jewish moral superiority or merely frames a goal we should strive to achieve?

- Are other groups also responsible for modeling moral behavior?
- Do you think “*Or LaGoyim*” should be read as a metaphor only, rather than as a practical dictum? If so, as a metaphor for what?
- Right after the charge to be a light to nations, the bible brings a few examples of what that can mean: “To open blind eyes, to bring prisoners out of a dungeon, those who sit in darkness out of a prison.” How can these tasks be made into practical good deed activities for us today?
- In what other ways may we act as a light to nations today?
- How do we respond when Israel/the Jewish people fall short of this ideal?

David Ben Gurion took the term “A light to the nations” from Isaiah and applied it to the State of Israel. His hope was that Israel would be a moral state that would serve as a beacon to all other nations. Given Ben Gurion’s use of the phrase, some now interpret “*Or LaGoyim*” as referring to Israel, while others see this as a directive intended for the entire Jewish people.

- What do you think about Ben Gurion’s application of the concept to the State of Israel?
- Is it a worthy goal? A realistic one?
- Is there a role for Jews outside of Israel?
- Can you think of something from Israel’s history or current events that are worth looking up to, valuing, or copying?



The designation of “light to the nations” can be understood as a behavioral imperative that inspires us to act.

The phrase “light to the nations” first appears in Isaiah, but the charge to feel a responsibility towards others appears at the beginning of Genesis 12. God reminds Abraham and Sarah to “be a blessing,” “*Ve’yhei B’racha.*” And that is our personal lifelong, and our people’s centuries-long commitment, privilege—and I would add—obligation. The whole notion of *Tikkun Olam* inspires us to bridge some of the distance between the world as it is and the world as it should be.

### Reflect

Why have a day when we get together as a community to do acts of goodness? Individuals can always do these acts of goodness imagine how much more powerful a statement it would be if a whole community, nation, or a state, would act in that manner!

- Can you recall a time when it could be said that you “were a blessing” to someone? Describe how you were a blessing.
- How could a modern state encourage its citizens to act in a certain way?
- Can doing good deeds be a law or only a suggestion?
- How could people make the suggestion “go viral” in the community?
- Do you know any non-government groups that help organize volunteers to do good in the community? What are some of the causes or challenges that these groups address?
- If you have ever volunteered in a mitzvah day or a project doing good in your community please share that experience.



## History of Good Deeds Day and its Roots in Israel

As a facilitator you may read through this section first, and create a summary appropriate for your audience. The key idea is that one person had an important idea, realized that she also had the skills and resources to make it happen, and then created a plan to spread the idea in Israel and to the world. The empowering message is that all of us have personal gifts, skills and resources that we can also share with others. The element of pride in being a part of Shari Arison’s project is that it started in Israel, made a large impact, and is now changing attitudes around the world.

Shari Arison is an American-Israeli leader of a business and philanthropic empire (world-wide advertising agencies, Carnival Cruise Line, and the Ruach Tova Philanthropic fund among other ventures) that spans the globe. In 2012 she was ranked by Forbes magazine as one of the world’s most powerful women, and she was also ranked second on Forbes’s list of the World’s Greenest Billionaires.

But despite all this success in the family business, Shari increasingly felt physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted from a lifetime of fighting to succeed and excel. She asked herself “Is that all there is? Is there something else I was meant to do?” One day she said to herself “I want to do good; I want to think good; I want to feel good!” She saw others in Israel also under pressure, wanting more out of life than simply surviving and taking from society. She heard people saying that if they only had time and some opportunity, they would give back to society. Israeli society has always faced great challenges—security, absorption of immigrants, preserving democratic ideals, fighting discrimination, and working to uphold the dignity of all its citizens. Shari Arison understood the limits that any government has on making changes in a society. It was time to step up as a citizen.



She first asked herself- “What is my role? What can I offer to the world, given my specific skills, life experiences, and through the platforms I attained?” She had seen people choose bad behavior when society was filled with scarcity, greed, and fear. Yet Shari felt optimistic about her ability to make changes and influence others. Perhaps she was inspired by the Jewish prophets of old, people like Micah, who travelled through ancient Israel with the message “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Her plan was to create a framework for people to do good together, and be influenced and reinforced by seeing other people join in. She said,

*“The beautiful thing about doing good is that it doesn’t matter where you live, where you go to school, or what you do for a living; it doesn’t matter how old you are or what cultural group you belong to. Any and every single person can make extraordinary things happen when they use the power of doing good, first for themselves and then letting it ripple out into the world.”*

The challenge was to create an organization that would help spread the word and organize opportunities to “do good.” There have always been individuals doing good all year long, but Shari Arison wanted to gather a critical mass who do good together on the same day, and eventually would create a “tipping point” that would change the attitude of society. Through the philanthropic NGO called Ruach Tova (Spirit of Good), the first Good Deeds day was called in Israel in 2007. Using word of mouth and websites, Ruach Tova helped connect people to good deeds in need of people to do them. 7,000 people joined in that first year. By 2014, 500,000 people in Israel alone took part. In 2012, MTV became a global sponsor and helped spread the word to various countries. Using TV, social media, and volunteer organizations, Good Deeds Day spread to 50 countries around the world.

Good Deeds Day has reached a critical mass in Israel, and its spread around the world may well be a modern illustration of Isaiah’s words, that Israel (the land and its people) can be a light to the nations.

- What are some specific “good deeds” that you think are needed in your community?
- How would you spread the word so more people could help out? What media would you use? Are there celebrities that could help?
- Would wearing the same shirts make an impression and add spirit to the projects—making everyone feel a part of a unified team for good?



## STEP 3

### GOOD DEEDS: Israel's Finest Export

All too often, when Israel is on the news, it has to do with war or violence. There is another side to Israel, both of her people and the government of the state. This is an opportunity to bring this profile to light, which may point to a way of fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of being a light to nations.

Since its founding, the State of Israel has been active on the world scene, sharing advances in medical, technological, agricultural, and cultural projects. Its army, always ready to defend Israel from attack, is also always ready to help after natural disasters. Israel has a long-standing tradition of extending aid to alleviate hunger, disease and poverty, as well as in the wake of natural disasters and terrorist attacks beyond its borders. (see <http://bit.ly/1AAO2Bx>)

#### **A history of Israel helping beyond borders, or as good world citizen** (from <http://bit.ly/1fAvI54>)

- The facilitator may take a world map, and as you talk about the countries where Israel helped out those in need, have students place a blue band aide on that site as a symbol of healing the world.
- You can choose a few of the examples, but it is impressive to place band aides on most continents (see underlined countries).

Through various governmental organizations like MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation and non-governmental organizations, Israel has a long-standing tradition of coordinating relief to alleviate disease, hunger, and poverty.

Starting 10 years after its founding, Israel adopted an official humanitarian aid agenda, providing vital relief to more than 140 countries. Among those countries receiving aid are nations that do not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel.

Since 1959, Israeli doctors have been offering eye camps to treat ocular diseases to people throughout the developing world.

In 1970 Israel started opening its doors to the world's refugees. It has saved non-Jewish people in distress and those seeking refuge from countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, Vietnam, Bosnia, Kosovo, Eritrea and Sudan.

Since 1995, Israeli doctors acting through Save a Child's Heart have been giving kids from around the world, including from the Palestinian Authority (PA), Iraq, Jordan and other Arab nations, free life-saving heart operations. Since the organization first started 2,300 children have been treated, and almost half are from the PA, Jordan and Iraq.

IDF aid missions help thousands around the world: Over the last 26 years, Israel has sent out 15 aid missions to countries struck by natural disasters. Immediately upon arriving in these countries, IDF doctors set up field hospitals. Overall, medical care was given to more than 2,300 people in afflicted areas, and 220 were saved from certain death.

**IsraAID** (The Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid), founded in Israel in 2001, is an umbrella organization of more than 35 Israeli and Jewish non-governmental organizations and other individuals active in development and relief work around the world and concerned about global issues. IsraAID and its members have provided relief assistance to more than 20 countries including Rwanda, India, Mexico, Congo, Chad, Sudan (Darfur) and Malawi.

**The Fast Israeli Rescue and Search Team (FIRST)** is an Israeli NGO that sends search and rescue teams to disaster zones around the world. FIRST has also provided relief assistance in Peru, Turkey, India, Mexico, El Salvador, Greece, Armenia and New Guinea, among others.

**Israeli Flying Aid (IFA)**, an Israeli NGO, provides life saving aid to people affected by natural and man made disasters worldwide.



**Save a Child's Heart** (SACH) is an organization that provides urgent pediatric heart surgery and follow-up care for children from developing countries. SACH was founded in 1995 and has since repaired the hearts of more than 2,100 children from a wide variety of countries including China, Congo, Ecuador, Angola, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Iraq, Jordan, Russia, Sri Lanka and Ukraine as well as to children in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

**LATET** (Hebrew for “to give”)—Israeli Humanitarian Aid is an NGO established in 1996 and devoted to assisting populations in need in Israel and around the world on a universal and equal basis.

**Summary thoughts to share with student:**

- Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir highlighted the importance of Israel's foreign aid program, saying: “I am prouder of Israel's international cooperation program... than I am of any other single project we have ever undertaken. It typifies the drive towards social justice that is at the very heart of...Judaism.”
- Want to see more people in Israel who are sharing their knowledge and skills to help repair the world? Visit <http://on.fb.me/1LVdNzI> to see real faces of Israel.
- Good Deeds Day is just the latest and perhaps most accessible humanitarian export from Israel. It is a day on which we can look to Israel with pride as a light to nations and participate in widening the circle of goodness in the world.





STEP  
4

## Inspirational Quotes

Choose one quote from each of the three categories that speaks to you. Explain what makes it inspirational.

Choose one quote to illustrate—make a poster to help advertise doing good deeds.

After you participate in Good Deeds Day, write a letter of thanks to Shari Arison in Israel that expresses how it felt to be a part of this International Good Deeds Day that was inspired by her foundation in Israel. You can incorporate one of the quotes from category B or C.

### A. Quotes from Shari Arison

“Doing Good is a simple and universal vision. A vision to which each and every one of us can connect and contribute to its realization. A vision based on the belief that by doing good deeds, positive thinking and affirmative choice of words, feelings and actions, we can enhance goodness in the world. Putting forward your positive energy connects you back to basic human values which we all share. Good Deeds Day shows that no matter the size of the gesture, a smile that brightens someone else’s day or volunteering in your community, we can all take active part in making a difference.”

“Good Deeds Day is based on a simple idea that every person can do a good deed for the benefit of others and the planet. Even a smile that brightens someone else’s day is a good deed. I initiated Good Deeds Day to spread the message that everyone can give of themselves, according to their heart’s desire.”

“Our everyday cares, making a living, the crazy rat race of life, often make us forget the value of a good deed. Thus, the goodness that exists within each and every one of us is covered with layer upon layer of indifference and unawareness. In fact, we almost have to be reminded of the fact that goodness is there inside us. A good deed is not just a duty, but above all, a privilege.”



### B. Quotes from Jewish sources

#### Psalm 37:3

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.

#### Psalm 34:13-14

Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

#### Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

#### Maimonides

One should see the world, and see himself as a scale with an equal balance of good and evil. When he does one good deed the scale is tipped to the good—he and the world is saved. When he does one evil deed the scale is tipped to the bad—he and the world is destroyed.

### C. Quotes from general sources

#### John Ruskin

“Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts—the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art.”

#### Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

#### Margaret Mead

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”



**Theodore Roosevelt**

“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”

**Albert Einstein**

“I wish to do something Great and Wonderful, but I must start by doing the little things like they were Great and Wonderful.”

**Dorothy Day**

“People say, “What is the sense of our small effort?” They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time.”

**Aesop**

“No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted.”



**Review and Reflect**

Ask participants to review some of the important points you have covered.

- What things have you done/could do for others that make you and your family proud?
- What has the State of Israel done around the world that has helped others [and is a source of pride and inspiration to Jews everywhere]?
- How did Good Deeds Day begin in Israel?
- What are your “gifts” that you could share with others on Good Deeds Day? What needs in the community could you help with?
- You can always continue to do mitzvot and good deeds on your own at any time. But what is special or important about having a day when thousands locally and hundreds of thousands in Israel and around the world are doing the same type of activity?



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