

The Sara &  
Samuel J. Lessans

Good  
Deeds  
Day

# Educational Supplement

Ages 11-13

Doing a  
World of  
Good



The Jewish Federation  
OF GREATER WASHINGTON

Participating in Good Deeds Day is one way to share Jewish values with your students—from an educational and from a practical standpoint. These supplements are designed to offer introductions to four Jewish metavalues and provide ways to bring them into your classrooms, youth groups and camp/retreat environments, to be followed up by participating in a Good Deeds Day project of your choosing.

This educational supplement for participating in and enriching your Good Deeds Day experience will frame activities using Jewish values, and give you options for bringing deeper meaning, mindfulness and lasting significance to that sacred act.

Almost every service project that may be chosen to do for Good Deeds Day will be an example of one of the four following Jewish metavalues:

- food security/*hazan et hakol*/providing food for all
- secure shelter/safe space/*sukkat shalom*/providing shelter
- caring for the environment/*shomrei adama*/partners with God in creation
- being present/*hineni*/personal growth/human comfort & contact

Notice that each value has a Hebrew phrase and an English tag line. Doing a good deed and being a *mensch* (a person of integrity or honor) is indeed a universal value; however, Jewish tradition provides a value-added challenge—to be mindful of the sacredness of the act of doing a *mitzvah*, simultaneously preserving dignity, acting upon justice and seeing each human as an image of God.

### How to use this booklet:

We found that these steps before, during and after a Good Deeds Day project will help turn the service into service learning. For many participants, this learning, in the form of framing, discussing and reflecting, make the service more meaningful and memorable. You may use any or all of the following five steps to frame, enrich and debrief from the projects you have chosen to do leading up to or during Good Deeds Day. The activities are structured to enable a facilitator to use them in a formal or informal setting.





## STEP 1

### Recognize that there are needs in the community/world that need to be addressed

One of the most popular ideas in Judaism today is that humans and God are partners in continuing the works of creation and repairing those aspects of life and society that have been broken. According to Kabbalistic teachings, the world we live in today is filled with sparks of God's Divine light, and it is the responsibility of every person to collect them, thereby repairing and fixing the world. This is *Tikkun Olam*, literally the act of repairing the world. Jews are supposed to become fixers, partners in completing God's creation.

"At one point [in the film "Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist"], Norah says, "There's this part of Judaism that I like. *Tikkun Olam*. It's said that the world is broken into pieces and everyone has to find them and put them back together." Nick thinks for a moment and replies, "Maybe we don't have to find it. Maybe we are the pieces."

We are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in God's image, and there is much that is said about partnering with God to complete creation and perfect the world. We are the divine sparks in the world, and by taking an active part in repairing the broken pieces, it goes beyond simply volunteering and feeling good about it; we are partners in a divine act." (Elisha Frumkin, Jewish Family Living)

Learn the blessing/*berakha* in gratitude of being empowered to repair the world: "*Barukh Ata Adonai Elohaynu Melekh Haolam, shenatan lanu hizdamnut l'takein et haolam. We praise the Eternal who gives us the opportunity to repair our world.*"

Blessings are expressions of gratitude; for what does this blessing voice gratitude? Does acting to repair the world merit the recitation of a blessing (i.e. invoking God's name)? How can being able to be a partner in world/community repair be a meritorious act and deserve a pause (the time taken for a blessing) to note the sacredness of the act and moment? (You may want to begin the project on Good Deeds Day by singing/reciting this blessing/meditation.)

### Further Study

- Listen to Dan Nichols and the E18hteen song "L'takein" (also known as the Na Na Na song): <http://ow.ly/rGbHj>
- For the kabbalistic story of creation and the origin of the concept of *tikkun olam* (world repair), see **Tikkun Olam: Collecting Divine Sparks** on the Jewish Family Living blog: <http://ow.ly/Ebd04>
- **Light** by Jane Breskin Zalben, a beautifully-illustrated PJ Library® book on this topic: <http://ow.ly/rGbW7>



## STEP 2

### Learn about four Jewish metavalues related to Good Deeds Day

#### METAVALUE #1: FOOD SECURITY

*Hazan et Hakol*, providing food for all, is the value underlying the work to combat hunger and provide food security to all.

#### Anchor text

"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings (*leket*) of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God." (Leviticus 23:22)

Leket Israel, Israel's National Food Bank, has a 21st century take on the biblical value while protecting the dignity of the needy. It provides nutritional food like fresh produce (not canned and packaged foods) and helps other businesses fulfill the mitzvah of avoiding food waste by redistributing the food to nonprofit partners caring for the needy. Locally, the Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network (MAGNET) also provides fresh produce to food banks by harvesting the last of the crops at local farms.

"The well-off are but divine instruments for alleviating human suffering." (Rabbi Ismar Schorsch)



## 3

## Life Context/Story

Sharing food with others is both a feature of Jewish LAW and Jewish LORE. The biblical story of Ruth has a central motif of famine and individuals looking for escape vs. communal gleaning and acts of loving kindness leading to Boaz and Ruth's regal heritage as ancestors to King David. Another folktale adopted by Jewish tradition tells of King Solomon wanting to find a place to build the Temple. A heavenly voice directed him from Mount Zion to a field that was once owned by two brothers. One of the brothers was a bachelor, and the other was blessed with a wife and children. After the harvest, each brother was concerned about the other. Under the cover of night, the brother with the family kept adding to his brother's pile because he reasoned the bachelor had no children to support him in his old age. The bachelor added to the father's pile because he thought that, with so many children, his brother needed more grain. One night when secretly bringing food to the other's land, the brothers met in the middle of the field and embraced. This field, a manifestation of brotherly love, King Solomon reasoned was the best site for the Temple.

## Seasonal Tie-In

Purim and Passover both have a great emphasis on families eating together...but what if a family cannot afford to celebrate through food? They may feel excluded from the community. Our tradition has a few ritual ways to respond. Giving alms for the poor and food portions to the community on Purim (*mishloach manot, matanot la'evyonim*—"sending of portions to friends and gifts to the needy") reminds us that our celebrations are not complete until we are more inclusive in our joy. The month between Purim and Passover offers us the opportunity to gather resources for those who will have difficulty celebrating Passover with dignity and honor (*ma'ot chittim*).

## Musical Summary

The Israelites were once slaves in Egypt, and ever since, we have attempted to fight against all forms of enslavement. Poverty and hunger are forces that enslave humans. So when we do have freedom and resources, how may we continue to fight the way hunger enslaves people? Think about a few solutions while listening to the "Avadim Hayinu, We Were Slaves" Passover Seder song.

### "AVADIM HAYINU" (WE WERE SLAVES)

*Avadim hayinu, hayinu  
Ata b'nei horin,  
b'nei horin  
Ata, ata, b'nei horin, b'nei horin*

## Questions for Discussion

How can you (or your class or your family) be a divine instrument to help the hungry while preserving their dignity? How is responding to the mitzvah of *leket*, such as gleaning in the fields or buying extra food for others while shopping in the supermarket, an illustration of *tikkun olam* and being a partner with God?

## Further Study

- Leket Israel's website <http://leket.org.il/english/>
- "The Love of Two Brothers," adapted by Dr. Mike Lockett, a good retelling of the story of the two brothers: <http://ow.ly/rGc4X>
- Listen to "Avadim Hayinu" (We Were Slaves) sung by Peri Smilow and The Freedom Music Project: <http://ow.ly/rGcnu>



## METAValue #2: SECURE/SAFE SHELTER

We act in the divine image when we provide shelter and protection from violence, *Sukkat Shalom*.

### Anchor Text

“Share your bread with the hungry, and take the poor into your home; when you see the naked, clothe him and do not ignore your own kin.” (Isaiah 58:7 (the *Haftarah* on Yom Kippur))

“This prophetic cry [from Isaiah] defines the relief of homelessness as a religious duty, preferable to fasts, sacrifices, and other ritual observances. In the first chapters of the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden. Abraham begins his relationship with God by leaving his native land, and Jacob and his sons leave their own home to go down to Egypt. After the Exodus, the Israelites journey through the wilderness, homeless, for 40 years. The destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem is followed by 70 years of exile, and the destruction of the second Temple in 70 C.E. is followed by two millennia of national homelessness, which ended only with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It is no wonder, then, that Jewish law (*halakhah*) attempts to guarantee housing stability. Though powerless to grant the Jewish people a permanent home, *halakhah* can at least help to assure individual members a stable place to live. Jewish law offers a number of criteria for evaluating the condition of housing and a number of suggestions about the responsibility to ensure that the poor have adequate housing. Central to all of these laws is a concern that housing be safe, secure, and permanent, and that every home allow its inhabitants to live a full and dignified life.” (Rabbi Jill Jacobs, *My Jewish Learning*)

### Life Context/Story

The Torah sets a high bar for helping the poor and homeless. “According to what a poor person is lacking, you are commanded to give him” (Deuteronomy 15:18). What needs would you put on the list? What would be short term needs and long term needs? Homeless shelters serve for immediate safety, but can they give back to the needy person their dignity? Can they rehabilitate their future? What other solutions would you suggest to a community? Collect suggestions and then learn the story of Housing Unlimited.

Housing Unlimited is a non-profit organization in Montgomery County, MD that provides affordable, permanent housing for low-income individuals with psychiatric disabilities. They focus on promoting independence and recovery by providing a stable and comfortable home. With the security of knowing that their housing is secure, their tenants can focus on becoming valued and integrated members of the community. Rent is computed on a sliding scale based on income and is capped to encourage employment and maintain a sense of security. Tenants are responsible for their own health, finances, interpersonal relationships and maintaining a clean home. They encourage tenants to succeed in their independence by providing concrete incentives such as rent credits for getting involved in the community. They also provide paid intern opportunities so that tenants can achieve work experience.

Many of the people served come to Housing Unlimited from homeless shelters, supervised residential programs or the homes of their aging parents.

### Seasonal Tie-In & Questions for Discussion

What could get in the way of our seeing the needs of others? Do we tend to surround ourselves with possessions, or “puff” ourselves up with pride or denial? On Passover, eating *matzah*, *lechem ‘oni* (poor person’s bread) could serve as a prop to remind us to be modest and humble (conversely, *challah/chametz* is “puffed up” with “hot air” (leavening)). What other Seder table props could keep us mindful of the needs and feelings of others?



## Musical Summary

A ritual can be most meaningful when it leads to a new consciousness and a mindfulness of life's situations. Listen to "Candles of the Menorah," a story song by Safam of what happens on a family trip to Philadelphia during Chanukah: <http://ow.ly/sCsBx>. What was the contrast felt by the children between the glowing lights of the menorah and the freezing homeless person on the street? How did they react, and what may have contributed to their "hineni" (I am here) moment?

## Further Study

- See a video that puts faces and personal experiences to the Housing Unlimited story: <http://ow.ly/rGcvd>
- **Judaism and the Homeless**, by Rabbi Jill Jacobs on [myjewishlearning.com](http://myjewishlearning.com): <http://ow.ly/rGcKQ>
- Lyrics to "Candles of the Menorah": <http://ow.ly/rGcQN>
- HIAS Refugee programs and local JSSA services: <https://www.jssa.org/service/refugees/>. Watch the video and see how your family can volunteer.

## METAVALUE #3: CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

We are partners with God in creation, *shomrei adama*, which includes a need to care for the environment.

### Anchor text

Study the two following texts and compare the two analogies about responsibility and the greater group. Summarize what you think it implies for our individual and group responsibility to the environment.

- A. "If one Jew sins, all of Israel feels it....This can be compared to the case of men on a ship, one of whom took a drill and began drilling beneath his own place. His fellow travelers said to him: 'What are you doing?' He replied: 'What does that matter to you? I am drilling only under my own place!' They continued: 'We care because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all.'" (Midrash: Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 4:6)

- B. "We travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work and the love we give our fragile craft." (Adlai Stevenson)

## Life Context/Story

A *Teva* (nature) story, from an unknown Hasidic tale:

The child of a certain rabbi used to wander in the woods. At first his father let him wander, but over time he became concerned. The woods were dangerous. The father did not know what lurked there. He decided to discuss the matter with his child. One day he took him aside and said, "You know, I have noticed that each day you walk into the woods. I wonder why you go there?" The boy said to his father, "I go t here to find God." "That is a very good thing," the father replied gently. "I am glad you are searching for God. But, my child, don't you know that God is the same everywhere?" "Yes," the boy answered, "but I'm not."

Do you feel the same everywhere? Describe how you feel when you are in school, home or in the woods. How does being in nature affect your mood? If the woods help you feel good, how may you show the woods/nature your appreciation?

## Seasonal Tie-In

The seven week period between Passover and Shavuot is the Counting of the *Omer*. This refers to the time when the grain crop slowly ripened and a certain measure of the new crop (an *omer*) would be brought as a thanksgiving offering to Jerusalem. Some commentaries talk about these seven weeks as a way to link the freedom we celebrate on Passover with the responsibility we assume by accepting the Torah on Shavuot. Brainstorm a list of responsibilities that your family or group can take to care for the environment. Have participants create a seven week calendar for using some of the collected suggestions during the *omer* weeks.



## Video Summary

Show the GodCast video about the ancient sage, Honi the Circle Maker: (<http://ow.ly/rGcWIFocus>). In the second part of the story after Honi urges God to bring rain during a famine, what lesson did Honi learn? (One answer: one generation must plant for the future, in the same way we are born into a world with trees...) How may we act upon that lesson today? Have the participants meet outdoors and generate a list of ways to appreciate nature and preserve its beauty.

## Further Study

- Compare your list of environmental responsibilities with **Ten Ways Your Family Can Help Protect the Environment on Earth Day:** <http://ow.ly/rGd2y>

## METAVALUE #4: BEING PRESENT

We can be a gift or blessing to others by being “present,” saying “*Hineni*” (I am here). This value also encompasses personal growth, human comfort and contact.

## Anchor Text

Read Genesis 12:1-3. What does God ask Abram and Sarai to do? What is promised to Abram if he does what God asks? Explain the word *brit* (covenant), and outline both sides of this agreement between God and Abram. How do you understand the relationship between “I will bless you,” and “You will be a blessing?” How can people be blessings to others?

Listen to Debbie Friedman’s song “*Lechi Lach*.” What was Abram’s journey, and what could have been his needs along the way? In what way may all people be on journeys that have challenges and require the help of others? How could you be a blessing to others on their life’s journey?

## Life Context/Story

Individual volunteers and family caregivers do an amazing job being there for people who are homebound or hospitalized for illness. But how can a community encourage continuing visits by people trained to assess and work with their

spiritual needs? What do you think a person’s spiritual needs could be, and how could they affect someone’s physical needs? The Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA) has a department called Jewish Chaplaincy Services. A Jewish quote that inspires their work is “One who visits a sick friend lessens their pain” (the *Talmud*). What could be done during a visit that “lessens their pain”? Are there hints in the following description on their web site?

“Jewish Chaplaincy Services (JCS) provides skilled pastoral care, along with spiritual and religious services to elders, hospital patients and those most vulnerable in the Jewish community.

“JCS serves Jewish residents in facilities not under Jewish auspices, such as nursing homes, assisted living facilities and hospitals throughout the Washington metropolitan area. Our chaplains serve as Jewish resources, offering meaningful programming, as well as prayer leading on Shabbat and Holidays. They employ music and storytelling to engage Jews across a wide spectrum of ages, religious backgrounds and cognitive capacities.”

Divide participants into small research groups and have them read the description of chaplaincy services listed by links at the bottom of <http://ow.ly/rGd84>. Have each group share what they researched by explaining to all groups how that particular service was an example of “being there” for a person in need.

## Seasonal Tie-In

The *dayenu* song sung during Seders is really a song of thanks—reminding us of the many items we should be thankful for and that at each one we refrain “*DAYENU*,” or “just that would have been enough to make us grateful!” Try your hand at composing a personal or group *dayenu* of thanks and appreciation, and wonder how it could lead to action. Think about your blessing and how you could pay it forward for others.

## Musical Summary

Musician Sam Glaser thinks about the many times in Jewish history when leaders stepped up by saying “*hineni*” (I am here) and wonders if when the opportunity arises we will step up and be the first to



say “I am here.” He ends the song with the reminder that each one of us must feel and consider OURSELVES as if WE got out of Egypt. How may this idea increase our empathy for the needs of others?

Listen at <http://ow.ly/rGdcg>

### Further Study

- Learn more about JSSA at [jssa.org](http://jssa.org)
- Read the lyrics for Sam Glaser’s “hineni” (*I am here*): <http://ow.ly/rGdpr>

## STEP 3

### How can you help?

Learning about needs is important, but only if it leads to action. Our tradition states “*Lo hamidrash ha-ikar, ella hama’aseh*; doing is the essential thing, not just learning” (Avot 1:17). An important interpretation on *Talmud torah keneged kulam* (the study of Torah is equal to all of the other *mitzvot* put together) is that the study of Torah, usually regarded as some platonic or theoretical form of justice, will invariably be challenged by practice in real time situations. Our job is to respond appropriately and use the system—even if it is in need of repair—so that it works. We are trained by the balance of *midrash* & *ma’aseh* to recognize the cognitive dissonance between the ideal and the real and step up. Follow up your learning by asking the following questions from Danny Siegel’s book **Mitzvah Magic**:

“Each of us has talents and skills that can be pooled to help improve the community. All of us should make an appointment with ourselves to honestly ask: What bothers me about the world so much I really need to change it? What do I really like to do? What am I really good at doing? Who do I know? Why not?”

As a group, discuss the values that resonate most with each person and then brainstorm ways to apply those values to a communal need. For a list of project ideas, please visit [GoodDeedsDayGW.org](http://GoodDeedsDayGW.org).

## STEP 4

### Engage in a project; do the good deed. Things to think about during the project

Rabbi Hillel said, “If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? *Im ayn ani li mi li?*” (Avot 1:14). Ask participants to introduce themselves before they get to work on doing their good deed. Have them respond to the question, “What am I expecting to get out of this experience today? What is the gift I will receive?” Then continue with Hillel’s saying, “But if I am for myself only, then what am I? *U’kesheani l’atzmi, mah ani?*” Now ask participants, “What impact am I expecting to achieve today? What is the gift that I am giving?” Continue with Hillel’s punch line, “And if not now, when? *V’im lo akhshav, aymatai?*” Remind participants that Good Deeds Day is an international movement, and that Jews around the world are doing projects like theirs, and in our community alone over 6,500 participants will be working to repair the world. How does this commitment to service define our community?

## STEP 5

### Reflect on your good deed and what comes next

After engaging in a project, the process of reflecting deepens the impact and engagement. Try to cover at least the first two questions in a discussion or through a reflective email to the participants, giving them more time to reflect and respond.

1. How am I changed by having done this good deed?
2. How was someone else changed by my having done it?
3. How is my community/the world changed?
4. How could I make a continuing commitment to a life of service?



**5. Reflect on why we gain strength from responding as a community:**

“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For should they fall, one can lift the other; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and there is no one to lift him.” (*Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes) 4:9-10)

**6. Read the following meditation on the above text:**

“The strength and continuing vitality of a community rests on the ability of its individual members to care for one another, especially in times of need. *Kohelet* suggests the positive benefit of helping one’s fellow, and cautions that the individual alone, living in isolation, cannot thrive and flourish. Thus, out of practical necessity, we must be alert to and mindful of the needs of our fellow and in turn, have the confidence that they will be similarly responsive to our needs. Such “compassionate reciprocity” assures all community members the ongoing support and attention necessary to live secure and meaningful lives, and to receive “a good reward for their labor.” (*from the Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council, a program of the New York Jewish Board of Family & Children’s Services*)

Judaism encourages individual responsibility. And yet, we also ask people to come together as a community to do good deeds. Musician Dan Nichols expands upon the phrase we wish each other whenever we complete the reading of a book of the *Torah*, or complete any task as a group: “*Chazak, chazak, venitchazek*. Be strong and strengthen one another!” We do believe in the power of one, but we also understand the multiplier effect of doing things as a group. Since our mission is to repair the world, Malcolm Gladwell might agree that doing things as a community helps us reach the tipping point of repair much sooner.

**Further Study**

**CHAZAK**

Words by Dan Nichols, Lee Freedman;  
music by Dan Nichols

We have come from near and far  
To raise our voice in song,  
And the more we join in the refrain,  
the more we feel strong.  
(*Chazak, chazak, v’nitchazeik.*)

There is a power in this place and time  
A truth we can’t deny.  
Be strong, let us strengthen  
One another.  
Be strong, let us celebrate our lives.  
Be strong, let us strengthen  
One another.  
(*Chazak, chazak, v’nitchazeik.*)

As we sing we link ourselves,  
To those who came before,  
And we’re one with all  
Those yet to come,  
Our strength it will endure.  
Be strong...  
*Chazak*

Video of Dan Nichols and Carrie Newcomer singing “*Chazak*,” a good song to review Hillel’s saying: <http://ow.ly/sCtBG> (minute 5:10).

Just the audio: <http://ow.ly/sCtV2>

First, as individuals, think of ways to do good in the community. Then join in groups of three and brainstorm again. Debrief that process: did you learn any new ways to do good by brainstorming with others? In what other ways can we be strong individually but as a community strengthen one another? How may we find strength when we “link ourselves to those who came before and those yet to come”? Talk about the [Jconnect.org](http://Jconnect.org) web site and community listings as a way to plug in to communal events.



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