

The Sara &  
Samuel J. Lessans

Good  
Deeds  
Day

# Educational Supplement

Ages 14-Adult

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. They can 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 would 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.





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

### Anchor text

#### DOING GOOD IS NOT ABOUT BEING NICE:

A Challenge

Doing good is not about being nice.

You can do nice things all day long for many people, but it could all just be more service of your own self, food for your own ego.

The world was designed so people would need each other, not so that you could be nice, but to give you the opportunity to escape the confines of your own self.

When you help those who show gratitude, when you lend a hand to those who are on your side, you are still within the realm of your own ego and self.

Help someone you don't want to help, only because this is the right thing to do.

At first it may not feel so rewarding. But you have sprung free.

**Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: Meditations and Everyday Wisdom of the Rebbe Menachem Schneerson,** compiled by Tzvi Freeman

### Questions for Discussion

1. How could doing good for others really be serving your own ego?
2. What do you think about the concept that "the world was designed so people would need each other"?
3. Do you think that one's attitude affects his/her ability to do good for others?
4. What difference could it make to understand our caring for the needs of others as *tzedek/tzedakah* (justice, doing what is right) instead of *chesed* (an act of loving kindness)?

In the Passover story, there is a lesson in seeing the needs of others: God called to Moses, and he responded "hineni" (I am here), I am present and ready to serve!" (Exodus 3:4) But before Moses was able to respond so quickly, he first had to become sensitive to the needs around him. Read Exodus 2:11-15. We see stages of Moses' growing awareness of the needs of others. When he decides to get out of the palace, his comfort zone, he looks around at the slaves and feels they are his "brothers." He decides to act on the injustice he saw, even at personal risk. What can we do to grow our sensitivity to the needs of others? How can we leave our comfort zone to build empathy (and not just sympathy) for others?



## 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

"Without sustenance, there is no Torah. Without Torah, there is no sustenance." (*Pirke Avot* 3:21)

There are many studies linking proper nutrition to a person's ability to learn and function daily in school or at work. (*Torah* could be Jewish scripture or, more generically, instruction.) The Jewish organization Hazon makes the link between food and faith: "[The study of our texts and values] obligates us as Jews to challenge the injustice of hunger, champion the right to food and steward the land on which our sustenance depends." Research their version of a Jewish farm bill and discuss the features that promote more justice-driven food distribution: <http://ow.ly/rOcSk>.



## Life Context/Story

Teens have been stepping up to feed the hungry in innovative ways. See two examples:

- <http://ow.ly/rOf8a>
- <http://ow.ly/rOfjv>

After reading their story, come up with ways that you can feed the hungry in your community.

## Seasonal Tie-In

The ritual of completing *mitzvot* is a tool, not an end in itself. They are fire drills, preparing us for when a need happens in the REAL world in REAL time.

### Examples:

- Opening the door at the beginning of the Seder to ask if anyone is hungry or has need. The hope is that people who do the ritual will take on the sensibility and the habit to open doors to help others.
- Eating matzah—*lechem 'oni*, (poor person's bread)—as a prop to remind us to be modest and humble. (*Challah/chametz* is “puffed up” with “hot air” (leavening).)
- Giving alms for the poor and food portions to the community on Purim; our celebrations are not complete until we are more inclusive in our joy.

What modern rituals would you invent to help us train to say “*hineni*” (I am here) when there is a need to feed the hungry?

## Media Summary

The Torah warned, “[F]or there will always be poor people in the land. That is why I am giving you this order, ‘You must open your hand to your poor and needy brother in your land’” (Deuteronomy 15:11). The biblical prophets, on the other hand, projected a vision of a utopian society of the future. Listen to the band Mah Tovv singing “Only This” as a look to the future from Micah 6:8.

What does God demand of you? Only this, only this (2x)

Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God (repeat)

Oo-mah A-do-nai do-resh mim-cha ki im a-sot mish-pat

V'a-ha-vat che-sed v'ha-tznay-ah le-chet im e-lo-he-cha



**The Hunger Games** series by Suzanne Collins offers an imagined and pessimistic view of the future. Compare the prophet's utopian view with **The Hunger Games** dystopian view of the future. Which do you feel is most likely and why? Science fiction often uses a futuristic setting to comment on the present day. What do **The Hunger Games** books suggest about the present-day United States? What can we do to move in Micah's direction?

## Further Study

- More about the themes in **The Hunger Games**: <http://ow.ly/rOfv>
- Watch a very short student interview with the prophet Micah: <http://ow.ly/rOfAY>
- Download “Only This” by Mah Tovv: <http://ow.ly/rOfHs>

## METAVALUE #2: SECURE/SAFE SHELTER

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

### Anchor Text

Creating safe shelters for the needy is a community priority.

“One who settles in a community for thirty days becomes obligated to contribute to the charity fund together with the other members of the community.

One who settles there for three months becomes obligated to contribute to the soup kitchen.

One who settles there for six months becomes obligated to contribute clothing with which the poor of the community can cover themselves.

One who settles there for nine months becomes obligated to contribute to the burial fund for burying the community's poor and providing for all their needs of burial.” (Maimonides, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:5)

“If a community lacked a synagogue and a shelter for the poor, it was first obligated to build a shelter for the poor.” (Seder Hasidim)

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

In what ways do these texts describe a systematic approach to dealing with homelessness? Describe the how the community takes responsibility for the needy. Is this fair? What values does it reflect?

### Life Context/Story

Sometimes our own ego or being surrounded by our own comfort and possessions prevents us from truly seeing the basic needs of others. Our tradition uses this folktale to illustrate that point:

A rabbi tells the story of a member of her congregation, a self-made man who used to be a philanthropic and involved member of the community when he was just starting out and still struggling to make a good life for himself. Ironically, once he established himself, the man seemed more focused on those luxuries he could provide himself and his family.

The rabbi invited the man to her house and asked him to look out the window and tell her what he saw.

“I see my neighbors, my friends, the people I live among.”

Then the rabbi invited him to look into the mirror she had behind the door and tell her what he saw.

The man looked, and smiled at what he saw: professional haircut, nice coat, beautiful tie. “I see myself,” he said. And the rabbi replied, “The difference between plain glass and a mirror is the reflective layer of silver on the back. Sometimes when we add a little silver, all we can see is ourselves.”

In **The King of Mulberry Street** by Donna Jo Napoli, Dom, an Italian-Jewish child, arrives alone in the United States and is forced to rely on his wits and good luck to survive. Set about 100 years ago, this moving story chronicles the plight of homeless immigrants—many of them children like Dom—and reveals how his strong Jewish values give him a nobility of spirit that overcomes a desperate

situation. “Stones in Water” and “Daughter of Venice,” also by Donna Jo Napoli, are two other fine historical novels, rich in values of loving-kindness, courage and acts of *tzedakah*.

### Seasonal Tie-In

Our tradition uses the phrase “because you were slaves in Egypt...” as an eternal sensibility to the needs of others. What could have been our needs as strangers in a strange land, first during enslavement and then while wandering in the wilderness? How can we recycle those memories into action on behalf of others?

### Media Summary

Listen to “Another Day in Paradise” by Phil Collins (video: <http://ow.ly/rOfQm>). What do you think of when you hear the word “paradise”? How does the video make the ideal and real clash? What would make you think twice about what you have and what others need? The song asks, “Is there anything I can do?” How would you answer that?

### Other examples:

- HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) has been helping homeless and wandering Jews for a century. Listen to the personal story of music star Regina Spektor, who was in an immigrant family and was helped by HIAS: <http://ow.ly/rOg8x>
- 17-year-old Samantha Garvey is a high school student with a passion for science. Despite the fact that she and her family are homeless, she has defied the odds by becoming a semi-finalist in the Intel Science Talent Search. Watch her tell Ellen Degeneres her inspiring story: <http://ow.ly/rOgiR>

### Further Study

- More quotes about the Jewish views on homelessness, compiled by Sulam: <http://ow.ly/rOgoQ>



### 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

“*Vayenichayhu b’gan eden l’ovdah u’leshomrah*”

“The human was placed in the garden to till it and tend it.” (Genesis 2:15)

“The human was placed in the garden to serve it and preserve it.” (R. Jonathan Biatch translation)

What could the practical difference between these translations be when we want to act on behalf of the environments?

#### Life Context/Story

“A literal notion of *Tikkun Olam*: The perfection/fixing of the physical world is in our hands. There is a *midrash* (Rabbinic commentary on the Bible) which Jewish environmentalists are fond of quoting: “When God created the first human beings, God led them around the Garden of Eden and said: ‘Look at my works! See how beautiful they are—how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.’” (Midrash Kohelet Rabbah, 1 on Ecclesiastes 7:13, quoted on [greenfaith.org](http://greenfaith.org))

#### Seasonal Tie-In

The Seder night can be called “A Night of Questions.” The traditional four questions highlight how different the rituals around the table are from all other nights. What four questions can you ask that will bring to light ways in which we can care more for the environment? Go to <http://ow.ly/rOgEG> and plan a family or group environmental scavenger hunt, looking for things to collect, things to find, things to learn and things to snap a digital picture of.

#### Media Summary

“Garden of Eden,” by the New Riders of the Purple Sage, comments on the effects of pollution and violence:

“We live in the Garden of Eden, yeah.  
Don’t know why we want to tear  
the whole thing to the ground.”

Review the original Garden of Eden story (Genesis 2:4-14). How do you feel about what is described? Does this garden represent an ideal of humans and nature? Why or why not? Was losing Eden a real punishment or a description of the next stage of how people are to interact (and work hard with) nature? How can we appreciate seeing our current world as a Garden of Eden? How can we prevent humans from tearing it down? How does the following quote add a sacred tone to working in a garden?

“How can a person of flesh and blood follow God?... God, from the very beginning of creation, was occupied before all else with planting, as it is written: “And first of all (*mi-kedem*, usually translated as ‘in the East’), the Eternal God planted a Garden in Eden” (Genesis 2:8). “Therefore... occupy yourselves first and foremost with planting” (Leviticus Rabbah 25:3).

#### Further Study

- “Garden of Eden” lyrics: <http://ow.ly/rOgQB>
- “Garden of Eden” song: <http://ow.ly/rOgYM>

### 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

Danny Siegel is a local poet and *Tzedakah* Educator. Read the following poem, “The Good People,” and discuss the questions that follow (from ***Ei-zehu Gi-bor: Living Jewish Values from Torah Aura***).

“The Good People everywhere will teach anyone who wants to know

How to fix all things breaking and broken in this world—

Including hearts and dreams—

And along the way we will learn such things as why we are here

And what we are supposed to be doing

With our hands and minds and souls and our time.

That way, we can hope to find out why we were given a human heart

And that way we can hope to know the hearts of other human beings

And the heart of the world.”

## Questions for Discussion

1. Who are the good people?
2. Why are they here? How can you train to become one of them?
3. What is the heart of the world?
4. What is the lesson of this poem, and how may it be related to the value of being there for others?
5. How does it connect to *tzedaka* and *tikkun olam*?

## Life Context/Story

No group represents the meaning of the phrase “Your presence is your present” as much as the chaplains who work alongside the first responders. Twelve years ago, over 11,000 uniformed firefighters responded to a call that heroically helped their city as it underwent America’s gravest terrorist attack. The men and women inside the Fire Department of

New York (FDNY) are remembered for their valiant acts. The FDNY chaplains are the ones who serve the heroes.

“There’s not much you can say to people. It’s a matter of listening,” Father John Delendick said. “For the most part people come to look for answers, and I don’t have any answers. I couldn’t even direct them to the place that could tell them where their son was working or where their loved one was.”

Read this **Tablet Magazine** article, “Why First Responders Are Jewish Heroes,” that frames all first responders as Jewish Heroes because they walk in God’s way: <http://ow.ly/rOh5A>

## Excerpt:

“What does being Godly consist of, according to the rabbis? A well-known *Talmudic* text puts it this way: ‘Just as God clothes the naked, so should you; just as God visited the sick, so should you; just as God comforted the mourners, so should you; and just as God buried the dead, so should you’ (Sotah 14a). To walk in God’s ways, in other words, is to act in the ways that the Torah describes God as acting. Just as God is present when people are vulnerable and suffering, so should we be.”

Add to the list of ways we can “walk in God’s way” by being there for others.

## Seasonal Tie-In

Embrace your inner *Afikomen*: what hidden skills can you discover and share with others in service to your community? The tradition of the prophet Elijah is that he is present at our events (e.g. *brit* and Seders) and will be there with the people in exile but also signal the redemption. That is why we have a cup of Elijah on the Seder table. Turn Elijah’s cup into Elijah’s Cup of Hope; have participants share what they will do to help bring redemption to society by being there for people.



## Media Summary

Think there's nothing you can do to help the Homebound Elderly in one minute? Watch this video to help start a list of projects to bring yourself as gift to someone: <http://ow.ly/rOhdU>.

Rabbi Jonathan E. Blake made a video *d'var torah* on the portion of *Vayera* after he was in an accident and benefited from care and visits: "5772–On Being Present & Healing" <http://ow.ly/rOhka>.

## Further Study

- Read the full story about the FDNY Chaplains: <http://ow.ly/rOhpy>

## STEP 3

### How can you help?

Learning about needs is important... but only if it leads to action.

Danny Siegel is known as a *Mitzvah* Guru, educating thousands of teens and adults around the world. In his book ***Mitzvah Magic***, he makes the case for all of us making 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? Each of us has talents and skills that can be pooled to help improve the community."

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.

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?

Create a *kavanna* (a focusing thought) to be recited before and after service, reminding participants of the values involved and to maintain the dignity of the recipient. Using the traditional phrase, "*Hin'ni mukhan u'm'zuman*. I am here, ready, prepared," compose a meditation that names the sacred deed you are about to do and reflects the special intention you want to have while doing it.

## 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 bible, 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/rOhAf> (minute 5:10).
- Just the audio: <http://ow.ly/rOhG2>



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