

The Sara &
Samuel J. Lessans

Good
Deeds
Day

Educational Supplement

Ages 2-6

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 classroom learning. 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 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*, while 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.



Doing a good deed is a laudable goal. It goes a long way towards refining one's character. But doing a *mitzvah* (commandment) or an act of *tzedakah* (justice, righteousness) or *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) is different. The words we use to describe these acts are important. For example, Julie Hilton Danan writes in **The Jewish Parents' Almanac**:

"These 'Jewish words' are much more than ethnic expressions. These are not simple translations of English words, but carry distinctively Jewish connotations....The use of specific Hebrew value-words teaches our children that there is a specific framework of Jewish values, sometimes overlapping with, or inspiring or learning from, but always maintaining an essential distinctiveness from other religious or humanistic value systems. Being a Jew is much more than "being a nice person" who happens to observe different holidays a couple of times a year. Being a Jew encompasses a distinctive ethos, a particular life orientation."

When PJ Library® organized its reading and music lists, it arranged them around core Jewish values.

"Most parents aspire to raise a *mensch*, a kind, caring, and responsible person. Helping out at home, respecting others, showing gratitude, taking care of the earth, and performing acts of kindness—each of these is a universal value with deep roots in Jewish tradition. Many PJ Library® books teach Jewish values through the stories they tell." (PJLibrary.org)

STEP
1

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

To understand the Jewish idea of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) is to understand the great empowerment we humans have been given. Young children are able to link the idea that

when something breaks, there is a need to repair it. And even if **we** did not break it, **we** could step up to fix something for others. The concept of *tikkun olam* means that we see ourselves as positive instruments for change in the world, and children need to be inducted into that sacred mission.

Set an Introduction

Young children will learn best in the context of their everyday life experiences. Seek teachable moments! Learning opportunities present themselves every day. When the children notice that something in their learning or play environment has broken, think of ways that you can expand the conversation to include a responsibility to repair it. Are we only responsible for fixing what we break or also what we find broken? Are we responsible for our private property or also for the property of the community?

Children's natural inclination is to help. Our role is to give meaning and Jewish context as we support their actions. Too often an adult will sweep away the broken pieces without presenting the children with an opportunity to help. Seize the moment and bring the conversation to the child or to the group framing their natural behaviors to help into a Jewish conversation.

Application

Now think of some things that are broken in real life. Since young children take things literally, explain that "broken" means "not in good order; not working the way it should." Trash on the ground and not in the receptacle needs fixing. People not having access to a food supply needs to be fixed. Ask them if they have seen anything that is broken or anyone that needs help. What are their ideas of how to help people? How can we help take care of our environment? Take a walk around the neighborhood and ask them to help you find things that need repair and then create a plan with them on how to help fix things. Introduce the term *tikkun olam* as the way Jews talk about fixing what is broken in the world.





Connection

The PJ Library® book, **Tikkun Olam Ted**, can further illustrate to how everyone can take part in *tikkun olam*. For each action Ted takes, have the children explain

what the need is or what is broken that needs fixing. Get suggestions of how Ted could have his friends help, and link this to why we want to do good deeds as a community.

Tikkun Olam Ted by Vivian Newman and Steve Mack. Synopsis: How can very young children participate in activities that make the world a better place? Little Ted shows us specific ways of participating in *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).



Read the PJ Library book, **Gathering Sparks** by Howard Schwartz and Kristina Swarner. Synopsis: “Where did all the stars come from?” A grandfather offers an age-old Jewish explanation to

his granddaughter and, in the process, teaches her about *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

Review

Take a walk in the park with a trash bag to pick up trash, or find something that needs fixing in the building and work along with the custodian to fix it. You could also find something broken in the neighborhood and write a letter to the city or county to request the repair be made.

door to door each week before Shabbat and take from everyone what they are expected to give. And they distribute the money before each Shabbat and give to each poor person enough food for seven days. This is called the *kupah*.” (*Mishnah Torah, Laws of Contributions to the Poor, ch. 9:1-3*)

Discussion:

Why do you think the collection was to take place every week before Shabbat and the money immediately distributed before Shabbat? What basic foods would be given to the families? Why were “well known and trustworthy” people supposed to do the door-to-door collection?

Life Context/Story

Our hands are the hands of God when we give help and food to the need.



Read the PJ Library book, **Bagels from Benny** by Aubrey Davis and Dusan Petricic. Synopsis: while working in his grandfather’s bakery, Benny learns the joys of giving and receiving, caring and gratitude.

Seasonal Tie-In

In the Passover Haggadah, we read, “*HaLachma Anya, di achalu avahatana b’ar’a d’mitzrayim*. This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come share our Passover.”

This may be an opportunity to differentiate between nutritious food and junk food. Give examples of each and create a virtual shopping cart filled with food high in nutrition that could be donated to feed the hungry.

This ritual is a tool, not an end in itself. It is like a fire drill, preparing us for when a **real** world in **real** time need happens. What modern rituals would you invent to help us train to take action when there is a need to feed the hungry?

Media Summary

On “Shalom Sesame,” Adina learns about incorporating charity (*tzedakah*) into her weekly routine by collecting food for Shabbat for those in need: <http://ow.ly/ssSBq>



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

“Every city with even a few Jewish people must appoint *tzedakah* collectors, people who are well-known and trustworthy, who will go



Further Study

- From the PJ Library Blog: “Nurturing Gratitude,” <http://ow.ly/ssSLp>
- Meet PJ Library author Aubrey Davis: <http://ow.ly/ssT7n>

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.

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

How do we help people who need help? How can we help people who are hungry? Need warm clothing? Need a place to sleep? People who are sick? How can we help the friends in our class who are sick? How can we make them feel better?

Life Context/Story

From Wendy Mogul’s **Blessings of a Skinned Knee**, we see how teaching hospitality helps children learn about relating to and caring for others.

“Torah puts great emphasis on the importance of welcoming people into your home, making sure they feel comfortable, and giving them your full attention—it’s a *mitzvah* called *hachnasat orchim* (hospitality to guests). According to the teachings of the Talmud, we are required to:

- Greet guests at the door and escort them inside
- Make an effort to remain cheerful during the visit
- Offer food and drink
- Ask our guests questions about their interests and activities
- Escort them to the door when they leave

If children are to follow these rules, it means that when the play date arrives, your four-year-old does not have the luxury of staying in her room playing with Duplo but must come to the door to greet her friend. If your child is very absorbed when the friend is due to arrive, give advance warning.

For the full article, see <http://ow.ly/ssT7n>.

Seasonal Tie-In

Near the beginning of the Seder we hear the words: “Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are needy come and join in Passover’s observance.” No one is turned away from the Seder. Even the youngest children can begin to understand that we are responsible for each other in this world. A beautiful Hebrew adage states that “*Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh Lazeh*” (All Jews are responsible for each other). This can certainly be extended to the basic care and respect all people deserve. There is no better time to extend graciousness and hospitality than during the Passover season, as we remember the bitterness of slavery and strive to keep others from knowing the loneliness and misery that are the result of all types of servitude.” (PJ Library Reading Guide for “Only Nine Chairs”)

Pesach is a time when guests are invited around the Seder table. Think about being a guest. What would make you feel at home? If you are traveling and need to sleep over, what would you need to be comfortable? Now think about being a host. How would you make guests feel at home in your house? What would you say and do? Read “Only Nine Chairs” to learn more about hospitality around Passover.



Only Nine Chairs by Deborah Uchill Miller and Karen Ostrove. Synopsis: How in the world do you handle nineteen guests at a Seder when you only have nine chairs?



Media Summary

The biblical story of Abraham and the Three Visitors shows how our ancestor models hospitality. Find the “Shalom Sesame” version at <http://ow.ly/ssTjL>.

For a version that ties the tradition of hospitality to the shelter of the *Sukkah* on “Shalom Sesame,” watch <http://ow.ly/ssTqV>.

Further Study

- PJ Library Reading Guide for **Only Nine Chairs**
<http://ow.ly/ssTIC>

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

“*Shemirat Ha’adamah*” (from the Hebrew word meaning “protecting the earth”) is a universal value rooted in Judaism. From the very beginning of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), we are taught to respect all things that grow, as Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden to “keep it and watch over it” (Genesis 2:15). The value of *bal tashchit*, which translates from the Hebrew as “do not destroy,” an injunction against wastefulness, has become the Jewish ecology mantra. Put into action, this concept means we are all partners in preserving the beauty and sustainability of our world.” (PJLibrary.org)

Life Context/Story

“The Lorax” by Dr. Seuss has many themes appropriate for talking about the environment. In the animated movie version, the song “Let It Grow” encourages the people of Thneedville to let the trees grow. The people of Thneedville come to terms with the fact that what they need to do is to change. Watch it here: <http://ow.ly/ssTBg>.

Seasonal Tie-In

Passover is also called *Chag HaAviv*, the Spring Festival. It often falls around the same time as Earth Day is celebrated in the United States. What could a spring holiday and Earth Day

have in common? For a child friendly introduction to Earth Day, see the video story at <http://ow.ly/ssTYv>.

The traditional ritual symbol that reminds us of spring is the *karpas*, often a green vegetable, on the Seder plate. What other rituals could you create to remind Seder participants about protecting the environment?

Media Summary

Share “We’ve Got The Whole World In Our Hands,” from DARIA’s “Earth Day” CD. Video: <http://ow.ly/ssUqk>. Teach the song chorus. Ask if it seems possible to “have the whole world in your hands”? If not taken literally, what could it mean to have the world in our hands? In the video, what suggestions are made so we could take the responsibility of protecting our environment and all living things? Make your own illustrations to the words of the song.

Further Study

- More on *Shemirat Ha’adamah* from PJ Library: <http://ow.ly/ssUA7>
- Daria, World Music for Children: dariamusic.com

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

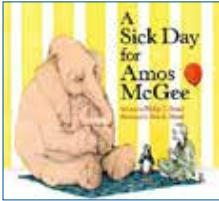
“It is written in the *Talmud*: “One who visits a person who is ill takes away a sixtieth of that person’s pain.” The *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick), a Jewish tradition to support those who are sick, can be traced back to the Torah when God visits Abraham after his circumcision. The *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick) can be performed with children starting at an early age. Young children remember being sick, so they can easily empathize with another person.” (PJLibrary.org)

Check out these selected PJ books for stories to stimulate family conversation about taking care of friends and family who are sick: <http://ow.ly/ssUA7>.



Life Context/Story

When someone is not feeling well, it is a *mitzvah* to call or visit them.



Read the PJ Library book, **A Sick Day for Amos McGee** by Philip C. Stead and Erin Stead. Synopsis: Every day, zookeeper Amos McGee rides the bus to the zoo, where he plays chess with

the elephant, races the tortoise and reads stories to the owl. But one day he feels too sick to go to work, so his animal friends hop on the bus to visit him—performing the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick. Before long, Amos will feel healthy as a horse.

Visiting people who must stay at a home or in a hospital facility is a big *mitzvah*. Making cards for your friends who are sick, calling someone who is sick are all ways to help children participate in this *mitzvah*.



Read the PJ Library book, **Say Hello, Lily** by Deborah Lakritz and Martha Aviles. Synopsis: Lily wants to accompany her mother on her visits as she volunteers at Shalom House, an assisted living facility. The kindness and patience shown by the elderly residents help Lily

overcome her shyness.

Seasonal Tie-In

On Passover we tell the story of when God brought us out from slavery to freedom, from anguish to joy, from darkness to light. If we are told to imitate God, then we also have to bring people from anguish to joy, and from sorrow and feeling sad to festivity and being able to celebrate. How may a visit to someone who is lonely help bring that person joy or light? Can you tell a few jokes or draw a happy picture to take with you? Can you bring over some juice and drink with them, wishing them “*Lechayim*, to life!”?

Media Summary

Enjoy this “Two-Minute *Mitzvah*” video and learn everything you ever want to know about *Bikur Cholim* (Visiting the Sick): <http://ow.ly/ssUQ7>. Take turns making and sending get well cards or emails to children who are too ill to come to school or for neighbors who are not feeling well.

Further Study

- Download the reading guide for **A Sick Day for Amos McGee** at <http://ow.ly/ssUQ7>



How can you help?

In the book **God’s Paintbrush** by Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, after a mom helps a boy who was lost in a store, she hugs him. The author remembers that her mom rocked her in the cradle when she was a baby, and then wonders “I wonder if God’s hands rock the world?” She then asks, “How can your hands help God’s hands?” In small groups, list a few ways that our hands can help God’s hands. Later in the book, the author (as a child telling the story) talks about her friends that are good in math or baseball. She would like to be like them... but then remembers that she is great at gymnastics. She concludes, “Perhaps God gave each of us a special gift that makes us different from anyone else, and when we share that gift, God is happy.” She concludes by asking “What is your gift? How do you share your gift?”

Young children are developing new skills each at their own pace. Ask children: what are you good at now that you can help your friends with? What do you like to do that could be helpful to others? Some children can tie shoes, others are taller and can reach an item on a shelf. How can you help at home? At school? They can even make a game of charades to have their friends guess.



Follow up your learning by asking the following questions from *Mitzvah* Guru 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?"



Read the PJ Library book, **26 Big Things Small Hands Can Do** by Coleen Paratore and Mike Reed. Synopsis: As you go through the alphabet, don't forget the

ABCs of *mitzvot*. Performing good deeds is something even the littlest among us can do.

STEP 4

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

We want to help children participating in Good Deeds Day projects think about how their work will help the people they visit, or the area in nature they clean or the institution they volunteer to help others. Gather the volunteers and teach them "*Heivaynu Shalom aleichem*," where the word *shalom* refers to both peace and wholeness. Talk briefly how the work you will do today could bring peace of mind to someone or wholeness to an organization.

Ask parent participants to introduce themselves before they get to work on doing their good deed. Rabbi Hillel said, "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? *Im ayn ani li mi li?*" (Avot 1:14). Have participants respond to Hillel's question by asking them, "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. Tell children that in Israel, children just like them are also helping other people. How does this commitment to service define our community?

STEP 5

Reflecting 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 parents, 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?

Pledge to always try to act like a *mensch*, and read the following story.



Estie the Mensch by Jane Kohuth and Rosanne Litzinger. Synopsis: Estie does not always know how to be around other people and sometimes when her grandmother reminds her to be a *mensch*, she'd rather not. She'd prefer to be a turtle or a seagull. Eventually, something

happens that shows her grandmother and Estie herself what a *mensch* the girl can really be.



Reflecting on why we gain strength from responding as a community

The words of Psalm 133 are “*Hinei mah tov uma’na’im shevet achim gam yachad*” (How good and pleasant it is to sit together with your brothers and sisters).

Learn the song (any of the many versions). Start with one person singing and keep adding voices. How was it different when many voices were singing together?

In what ways is it better for the community when groups of people get together to do *mitzvot* and help each other out? Now learn the circle dance to “*Hinei Mah Tov*” (or sit in a circle with arms around each other and rock as you sing). How does it feel holding hands together and following each other? In what ways is a circle like a family? How is it like a community?



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For more information please contact:

Good Deeds Day—School Involvement:

Sarah Rabin Spira
301-230-7243
sarah.rabinspira@shalomdc.org

Good Deeds Day—Educational Questions:

Avi West
240-283-6218
avi.west@shalomdc.org



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