

*Lo Alecha Hamlacha Ligmor:*  
Alleviating Suffering Through  
Mitzvot

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# Educational Rationale

Think about the hardest, most difficult time in your life. What did it look like? What did it feel like? Who was there to help pick you up?

Rabbi Rachel Adler writes, “We are made for suffering just as we are made for joy: in our lives we experience joy and pain, happiness and sadness, love and loss.<sup>1</sup>” But Judaism compels us to be active agents against that suffering, pain, sadness and loss. Regardless of where that suffering originated, and regardless of whether it is fixable or not, we are commanded to reach out our hands and do what we can to lift up those in need around us. We are compelled to try to heal the brokenness in others, and inside of ourselves. We choose overcome our own vulnerability and our own fear of the other.

This curriculum guide is called *Lo Alecha Hamlacha Ligmor*, after Rabbi Tarfon’s famous saying that it is not upon you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.

In this guide, high school learners in a synagogue setting confront the brokenness of the world around them, and they engage with the Jewish tool of *mitzvah* to help alleviate it. Along the way, they will act out these mitzvot to confront suffering in the real world, and to create personal meaning for themselves.

The units are organized from communal to individual: suffering at the largest level in the community, to the most personal suffering, internal suffering and recovery. This allows students to move from easier to more difficult material, from the most comfortable to the most uncomfortable.

Therefore, this guide opens with charging the students: *alecha hamlacha ligmor*, it is upon you to change the suffering in the world. Students will grapple with mitzvot as commanded and chosen, will examine voicing our suffering through Job, and get on their soapbox and complain about a particular kind of injustice. Then, they will begin taking these basic understandings into exploring alleviating suffering in the community through the mitzvah of caring for the widow and the orphan. Learners will pinpoint who are the vulnerable and the needy in our midst, visiting a homeless shelter and overcoming fear of the other. With a new understanding of communal vulnerability, learners will move toward suffering on an interpersonal level, where they will engage with visiting the sick, comforting mourners, and being devoted in prayer. Learners will plan and then visit a sick person in their community, to better understand the reward and effort of alleviating another person’s suffering face to face.

Finally, students will turn inwards, as they engage with healing as alleviating suffering. Through the lens of teshuva and recovery, students will engage in Jewish healing texts, hear recovery stories, and in small groups, will observe and then debrief an AA meeting in their community.

In the final unit, students are reminded, *lo alecha hamlacha ligmor*, it is *not* upon them to completely erase suffering from the world. They are reminded that suffering is

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<sup>1</sup> Adler, Rabbi Rachel. “Bad Things Happen: On Suffering.” *Jewish Approaches to Coping with Challenge*. p169.

part of life, and every mitzvah, no matter how small, still helps to mend themselves and others. As part of a year long project, learners will choose a form of suffering or injustice they want to help solve, research and engage in it, and create a presentation of the cause for their class as well as another outside group. In the final lesson, students will create an online mitzvah contract over social media to continue to motivate each other after the course to continue doing mitzvot and to alleviate suffering.

By high school, most teens are aware of suffering, both in their own lives in the world. Yet most mitzvot curricula I have encountered focus solely on the mitzvot themselves, and not the suffering, nor the *suffer-er*, behind it. **This guide is not just about mitzvot; rather, this guide is about mitzvot as a means to alleviate suffering.**

Instead of a Confirmation or high school curriculum that too often lacks vision and clear goals, this guide meets high schoolers as burgeoning young adults, who are getting their first taste of autonomy and understanding of the world, and allows them to engage with Judaism in a deep, meaningful way before they leave for college and begin their journeys as independent young adults.

With this guide, learners will confront and deeply engage in two of the most basic questions of humanity: why do we suffer? and, when I see or experience suffering, how do I respond?

## Enduring Understandings:

1. One who saves a life, saves an entire world. (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a)
2. It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. (Rabbi Tarfon, Pirke Avot 2:21)
3. Only through action and study together are ethical mitzvot effective.

## Goals:

- To teach about mitzvot as active, compassionate responses towards alleviating suffering.
- To teach learners how to care for the vulnerable, visit the sick, comfort the mourner, pray with intention, engage in teshuva, and support one going through recovery.
- To re-teach concepts of mitzvah, tikkun olam, and tzedakah.
- To empower learners to change their communities by engaging them in intentional and meaningful mitzvot experiences.
- To ignite learners' own passions about sufferings in the world, and provide for them the tools and resources to begin alleviating them.

## Essential Questions:

- How do we respond to and grow from alleviating the suffering of others?
- To what extent is a mitzvah commanded and/or chosen?
- How do we overcome fear of the other?
- How do we inspire others?

# Scope and Sequence

## Unit 1: *Alecha Hamlacha Ligmor*: It's up to you to change the world

In this unit, learners will be able to...

- Create a safe space and begin to create a community
- Identify three different approaches to suffering through the book of Job.
- Select and modify one approach for a modern situation involving suffering, and will defend their choice.
- Design a proposal for how they can help alleviate a chosen type of suffering.

## Unit 2: Caring for the Widow and Orphan

In this unit, learners will be able to...

- Identify three groups of people who are vulnerable and considered strangers today.
- Assess Abraham as a model for doing justice and upholding mitzvot while still being deeply flawed as a human being.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to alleviating suffering for those vulnerable in our community.
- Students will then have the opportunity to reflect on encountering the vulnerable through a PSA (public service announcement) to share with the synagogue community

## Unit 3: Love Your Neighbor As Yourself

In this unit, learners will be able to...

- Identify three mitzvot that alleviate suffering in another person.
- Identify the rewards, tensions and stigmas associated with these mitzvot.
- Contrast Emanuel Levinas' philosophy with their own experiences of being compelled to help someone.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to visiting the sick (bikkur cholim).
- Students will then have the opportunity to reflect on visiting the sick through guided questions, creating a "get well" card, and creating their own bikkur cholim ladder.

## Unit 4: Answer, Return, Repent

In this unit, learners will be able to...

- Construct their own definitions of teshuva, addiction and recovery.
- Critique Rambam's definition of and steps for teshuva.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to observing an AA meeting.
- Students will then have the opportunity to reflect on the experience of observing an AA meeting through guided questions and a thank-you letter to the AA group they observed.
- Create an artifact that creatively explains how to support a friend or loved one in recovery.

## Unit 5: *Lo Alecha Hamlacha Ligmor*

In this unit, learners will be able to...

- Contrast their current views of the mitzvot with their views from the beginning of the curriculum
- Assess the importance of action and study in performing ethical mitzvot.
- Create and defend mock presentations for their chosen cause.
- Create a communal mitzvah contract to last beyond the course.

# Authentic Assessment: Chosen Causes

Throughout the course, your learners will be confronting the brokenness of the world, and engaging in mitzvot as a means to alleviate suffering. While the lessons are designed to appeal to high schoolers, the Authentic Assessment allows students to take ownership of what they are learning, personalize it, and impact their classmates and others in a powerful way.

Students will determine what I call a “chosen cause” - some sort of suffering or injustice that they personally feel passionate about alleviating. It might be a global issue, such as hunger or poverty, a particular social issue, such as domestic violence or abuse, or a particular disease, such as Alzheimer’s or cancer. During the course, students will research their cause and also find a way to engage in it one time within their community. This will likely involve some form of volunteering or community service. At the end of the course, students will create a presentation with artifacts (more on those below), to present to an outside group that is neither the class community nor their family. Rather, students will deliver a mock presentation for their peers, receive guidance and feedback, and then present their cause to an outside community. This could consist of another high school or religious school class, another group within the synagogue, one of their high school classes, or a club they participate in.

For their presentations, students are asked to bring in artifacts, or tangible evidence of their research as well as their experience. These might include photographs, interviews, documents, videos, or physical items collected from their experience. Students should expect to integrate 7 artifacts in their presentation.

At the beginning of each unit, you will find an “Authentic Assessment” section that details what progress you should be making in regards to the Authentic Assessment. Depending on your number of sessions, as well as the length of the year, you are welcome to adapt the assessment to best fit the needs for your students. Of course, high schoolers will be busy with many different commitments. However, this Assessment is vital to the course, as it creates a personal connection between learner and material, allows them to engage in their own chosen cause, apart from the classroom, and to inspire and educate others about alleviating suffering.

I hope both you and your learners find this assessment to be fulfilling and that it will add even more meaning to this course.



Dear Educator,

Thank you for your interest in this curriculum guide! This guide was created in order to provide Reform Jewish congregations with a deep, engaging and relevant curriculum for high school students about alleviating suffering. I have met many young Jewish teens who are hungry for the next step in their Jewish learning and to integrate that learning into their own identities and actions. I have also seen and experienced Confirmation curricula that do not seem to have direction, observable and measurable goals and outcomes, nor a respect for where high schoolers are at in their lives. Instead, this guide, and you as their educator, will acknowledge that your learners are already aware of, and in some cases, have experienced or seen suffering in the world. They will be exposed to a crucial part of Judaism that doesn't shy away from the truths of the world, but rather embraces the difficult elements of life and responds in a constructive and loving way. This material will meet high schoolers at their level without becoming a curriculum about *their* suffering. Moreover, they will be empowered to choose a cause that is important to them, engage in it, and pass on their knowledge and experiences to others.

Understandably, some educators might shy away from addressing suffering with teens; this can be an uncomfortable and personal topic for any age. However, this is also an incredible opportunity for learners to create strong, lasting bonds with each other, share “real” experiences, emotions and insights with each other, and to discover that engaging in the long process of alleviating suffering in others and in the world is not only possible, but it can also be joyful.

This guide places a strong importance on experiential education, and having rich, meaningful experiences and encounters outside your classroom. Mitzvot were not meant to only stay inside the classroom or just learned through text; rather, learners will experience the cycle of studying and acting out mitzvot, while engaging in deep reflection both internally and with each other.

The units are organized from communal to individual: suffering at the largest level community to internal suffering. This allows students to move from easier to more difficult material, from the most comfortable to the most uncomfortable. That being said, building a strong community, safe space, and feelings of trust within your classroom are essential to this course's success. Sometimes, exploring a tangent or moving through difficult reflection can be more important than chugging through all of the lesson's material.

This curriculum can be used for any high school classroom (confirmation, seniors, mixed grades, and so on). If you are an educator for adult learners, this can also be easily adapted to an adult learning atmosphere. If you would like to adapt this curriculum for younger learners, it can be done, but I suggest you remain very sensitive about some of the material in this course, particularly in Unit 4, and determine carefully which materials are appropriate for your learners' ages and development. Additionally, these lessons were designed to meet once a week for 45 minutes, and imagined as if you are meeting in a synagogue setting; but of course you are welcome to adapt the lesson material depending on your class' meeting times and individual needs.

*B'hatzlecha!* I wish you success and a meaningful year with your students.

Sincerely,  
Lenette Herzog

# Unit 1 - Alecha Hamlacha Ligmor

*Welcome to the course: it's up to you to change the world!*

## **Enduring Understandings:**

- It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. (Rabbi Tarfon, Pirke Avot 2:21)
- One who saves a life, saves an entire world. (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a)
- Only through action and study together are ethical mitzvot effective.

## **Essential Questions:**

- Are mitzvot commanded or chosen?
- What kinds of suffering exist in the world?
- What is my responsibility to alleviate suffering?

## **Unit Goals:**

- To introduce the material and assessment for the course
- To re-teach key concepts that that students might have also learned differently growing up (such as mitzvah and tikkun olam), and whose “new” meanings will be integral throughout the course.
- To inspire students to create a safe space, an open community, and to bring their whole personal selves to the rest of the course.

## **Unit Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Create a safe space and a community
- Identify 3 different approaches to suffering through Job
- Select and modify one approach for a modern situation involving suffering, and will defend their choice.
- Identify 5 groups of people who are vulnerable or in need today
- Design a proposal for how they can help alleviate a chosen type of suffering.
- Describe how tikkun olam is a long process, and not a quick fix.

## **Key Terms**

- Mitzvah
- Command
- Choose
- Job
- Tikkun Olam

# Authentic Assessment: Introducing the Assessment

Learners will be introduced to the Authentic Assessment by way of the “suffering soapbox” in the final lesson - see more in the lesson plan. Their soapbox can serve as a jumping-off point for their presentations, or they can choose a different topic — regardless, it will begin the thought process of what the students are personally passionate about within this subject, and what they might like to focus on for the assessment. By the end of the unit, learners should choose a) a topic for their presentations, and b) a general idea of the site/organization where they are going to have their experience.

# Lesson 1: Welcome & creating a safe space

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Create a community and safe space with each other
- Define several of the course's key terms (mitzvah, tikkun olam, suffering, responsibility, and Judaism) in their own words

## Suggested Activities:

*Set induction activity - Welcome to the course - 5 minutes*

Show 3 images (or short videos) of people suffering – for example, someone lying in a hospital bed, people somewhere in the world who are hungry and poor, a child who looks lonely without friends or toys, and so on. Ask, what do all of these pictures have in common? (*they make us feel terrible, the people in them are all suffering in some way, and they are all of people who need ME/US*).

In a nutshell, this course asks the question, “How do we alleviate suffering and help make the world a better place?” and strives to empower students to do so through both acting and studying mitzvot on communal, interpersonal, and internal levels.

*Activity 1 - Mixers - 20 minutes*

There is a chance that students already know each other from earlier years in either Jewish or secular education; regardless it's important to begin the course with mixers to create community building as well as a safe space. You may choose any mixer that you are comfortable with, but here is one suggestion:

*musical chairs, interview style:* disperse strips of paper with questions around the room. Questions should be a mix of basic get to know you or questions, such as favorite food, childhood memory, spirit animal, and so on; Jewish questions, such as favorite holiday, favorite Jewish memory, etc; as well as questions that hint to the material, such as a mitzvah you did that was particularly meaningful. Students randomly walk or dance around the room while music plays. When the music stops, students pair up with another student near them, pick up the nearest paper, and ask their partner the question.

*Activity 2 - word association - 20 minutes*

Individually, students fill out on a sheet of paper their own definitions for words: mitzvah, tikkun olam, suffering, responsibility, and Judaism. Afterwards, volunteers read out definitions. Verbally take note of any similarities or differences between definitions.

Ask students why there were differences or nuances in each definition - answers might be that students learned these words from different places, they don't have an exact translation from Hebrew, they understand these words differently based on experiences.

Be sure to collect and keep these sheets- you can use them as baseline, but also keep them for a later closing activity in Unit 5.

# Lesson 2: What is a mitzvah?

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- categorize different mitzvot according to a category they are given.
- debate whether mitzvah comes from external commandment or intrinsic need
- recommend their own definitions of a mitzvah beyond simply “commandment” or “good deed”
- compose questions for a clergy member about mitzvot.

## Suggested Activities:

*Set induction activity - 5 minutes*

In a quick whip around, ask students to say the first word or phrase (but not a full sentence) that comes to mind when they hear the word “mitzvah.” You will probably hear the phrase “good deed” and “commandment” most often. Ask students to raise their hands if they’ve heard of a mitzvah defined this way.

*Activity 1 - categorize mitzvot - 15 minutes*

Divide students into groups. Each group receives each of the below mitzvot, cut into strips (see below), and chooses one of these categorizations (also below). Students then categorize on their own. After each group is finish, students walk around and observe the different categories that other groups created.

Ask:

- Why do you think there are so many categories to mitzvot? Are there other, additional categories we didn’t use?
- If you’ve learned that a mitzvah is a good deed, does that fit each of the mitzvot you categorized? Why or why not? (*Not all of them are good or bad, they’re just laws*)
- Does mitzvah as a commandment fit each of the mitzvot you categorized? Why or why not? (*Some of them we do without being told, some are about just being a good person, some we might do not because we feel someone/something else told us to*)

We tend to only define “mitzvah” as a commandment, because mitzvah comes from the Hebrew *tziva*, or to command; but in this course we’re going to broaden and complicate our definition of a mitzvah.

*Activity 2 - Reform Judaism - 30 minutes*

From the list of mitzvot the students put into categories, each student chooses one mitzvah they do and one they don’t do; students can choose the same mitzvah. In their small groups, explain why to each other.

After a few minutes, ask each group to find and share three mitzvot they think more traditional (Conservative and Orthodox) Jews do, but not Reform. Explain that most of the “613” commandments found in both the Torah and later commentaries are what we call *halachah*, Jewish law. They are still largely practiced<sup>2</sup> by Conservative and Orthodox Jews who see the mitzvot as *halachah* that is binding - that is, God literally commanded them to do these mitzvot. In Reform Judaism, we engage in a different struggle. Reform Jews *choose* which mitzvot they do or don’t want to do; but at the same time, we also choose to give the tradition the right to command us in that way, and to trump personal whims at certain times, for the benefit of others and the community.

Ask: why do Reform Jews find mitzvot problematic? What does it *matter*, whether mitzvot are chosen or commanded?

Divide your board in half (or use a large poster board) and write “commanded” on one side and “chosen” on the other. Brainstorm with the students what would be gained or lost if we only believed in one ideology. Here are some examples:

### ***commanded***

gain: we would have a clear structure of what to do and how to do it  
gain: we would always know if we were doing something right or wrong  
gain: everyone would do everything the same  
gain: we are pleasing God, because God gave us these commandments  
loss: we would not be able to change ancient or outdated laws  
loss: minorities such as women and LGBTQ would have less rights  
loss: we wouldn’t be able to have creativity or flexibility within the system

### ***chosen***

gain: we are free to make the choice whether to do these laws or not  
gain: allows Jews to see the text as written by people, but still sacred  
gain: can change or choose to discard ancient our outdated laws  
gain: allows for progress and is more accepting of minority groups  
loss: might have less unity among Jews if everyone is doing something different  
loss: some might choose to drop “easier” laws without learning about them first  
loss: less connection to tradition

This tension will be illuminated with a commanded vs chosen debate! First the class chooses a certain mitzvah that will be debated. Then, students are divided into two

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<sup>2</sup> Mitzvot traditional Jews no longer practice include agricultural mitzvot, mitzvot regarding the Temple and animal sacrifices, mitzvot one can only do in Jerusalem, and mitzvot considered to be outdated, such as those revolving around indentured servitude.

groups- one group debates that we should do this mitzvah because we choose to, the other because we are commanded to.

Give the “chosen” team the 1999 Principles of Reform Judaism, as well as the CCAR Responsa website (on which they can search responses for that particular mitzvah); for the “commanded” team, students can search for either verses in the Torah or halachah online regarding this mitzvah. Students should have 15 minutes to research, and 7 minutes for each team to argue.

Afterwards, reveal that students themselves are the judge - raise their hands for whether the chosen or commanded arguments swayed them.

Conclude with these points:

1. commanded mitzvot suggests mitzvot are passive, and are done out of external obligation - *but*, sometimes that motivates us more
2. chosen mitzvot suggests mitzvot are active, and are done out of internal motivation - *but*, choosing not to can lead to taking the “easy way out” or not doing mitzvot at all
3. There are other ways to define a mitzvah that can resolve these two together. First, ask if anyone can think of some, and try to get as many answers as possible. Then, suggest these:
  1. The mitzvot you choose to do make up your Jewish identity
  2. You learn about mitzvot, try them, and then choose to do them - and this repeats as you get older
  3. You can be commanded by human decency/yourself to do the universally ethical mitzvot, and then choose to do them in a Jewish way
4. Regardless, if there are 613 mitzvot for us to choose from, then there is something really important about our tradition that commands us to do and act in a morally upright way - this is a Jewish value.

*Closure - Questions for the clergy - 5 minutes*

Everyone leaves a question they still have about mitzvot for the rabbi or clergy member; next lesson they will visit to answer their questions! Please send the clergy person the questions beforehand so they can prepare.

*Note: If multiple clergy members are available, you can also have the Q&A session next time in small groups.*



## Resource 1.2: Mitzvot<sup>3</sup>

When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him.  
- Exodus 23:4

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt. - Exodus 23:9

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk - Exodus 23:19

The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning - Leviticus 19:13

You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. - Leviticus 19:14

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 of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. - Leviticus 23:22

These are the offerings by fire (sacrifices) that you are to present to the Lord: As a regular burnt offering every day, two yearling lambs without blemish. - Numbers 28:3

Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. - Deuteronomy 5:12

Honor your father and your mother. - Deuteronomy 5: 16

You shall not murder. - Deuteronomy 5:17

You shall not steal. - Deuteronomy 5: 17

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. - Deuteronomy 5:17

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. - Deuteronomy 6:5

When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which God has given you. - Deuteronomy 8:10

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Mitzvot activity thanks to Dr.Isa Aron.

You shall not make cloth combining wool and linen. - Deuteronomy 22:11

You shall make tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself. - Deuteronomy 22:12

## Resource 1.2b: Mitzvot categories

- Ethical vs ritual
- Between people vs between God
- Positive vs negative (do's and dont's)
- what to do vs who to be
- universal (everyone does) vs pluralistic (just Jews)
- things Reform Jews do (generally) vs things Reform Jews don't do

*note:* If a group comes up with additional categories within these (such as a midway category between universal and particularistic) they can add.

# Lesson 3: What is a mitzvah? (Part 2)

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...(see last lesson)

- Choose a Jewish quote about suffering that has personal meaning to them, and explain their choice.
- Compose questions for a clergy member about mitzvot
- Challenge confusing or non-compelling responses clergy members offer

## Suggested Activities:

*Activity 1 - Mitzvah quotes - 20 minutes*

Post mitzvah quotes (below) either on pieces of paper, or if you can, large poster board, around the room or another space. Have students silently walk around the room, reading all of the quotes. After students have read them all, ask them to stand by a quote that resonates with them. Go around and have each student (or, if you have a large group, one from each quote) briefly explain which quote they chose and why.

As a group, discuss:

- How does your quote compel you to act in the world?
- Thinking about the last lesson, does your quote suggest that mitzvot are chosen, commanded, or both?
- What does this quote have to say about alleviating suffering?
- What does this quote have to say about the *Jewish* way that we alleviate suffering?

Explain that the mitzvot we will encounter in this course all have a similar purpose: to help motivate, inspire and compel us to alleviate suffering in the world. Some of these mitzvot, such as visiting the sick, are universal; that is, any person can visit a sick person - and they're doing just as good a deed as we are. However, the mitzvot and our tradition create a particular Jewish lens for studying, experiencing and reflecting on these acts.

*Activity 2 - Q&A with the rabbi or clergy member - 20 minutes*

Have a clergy member answer students' questions from the last session, as well as any new questions that have come up. (Or, as mentioned before, have multiple clergy members work with students in small groups answering their questions.) Encourage students to push back and ask the clergy member more questions if they do not feel that a question has been answered completely, or if they can think of a situation that doesn't fit their answer.

Be sure to take note of any questions that might become more relevant during the year so you can refer back to them.

## Resource 1.3: Mitzvah Quotes

מצוה גוררת מצוה; עברה גוררת עברה

A mitzvah causes another mitzvah; a transgression causes another transgression. - Pirkei Avot 4:2

שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו אבד עולם מלא. וכל המקים נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קים עולם מלא.

Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world. - Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:9

לא תעמד על-דם רעך: אני, יהוה

You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor; I am God. - Leviticus 19:16

ואהבת לו כמוך--כי-גרים הייתם, בארץ מצרים:

You shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am Adonai your God. - Leviticus 19:34

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין להיבטל ממנה

It is not upon you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. - Pirkei Avot 2:19

צדק צדק, תרדוף

Justice, justice you shall pursue - Deuteronomy 16:20

# Lesson 4: Approaches to suffering

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Identify 3 different approaches to suffering in ancient Jewish texts.
- Select and modify one approach for a modern situation involving suffering, and then defend their choice.

## Suggested Activities:

### *Set induction activity - Music- 5 minutes*

As students come in have a song about sadness or suffering playing. One good, modern example is “The Sunshine Song” by Jason Mraz.<sup>4</sup> Print the lyrics for students to read while sitting quietly as everyone listens to the song.

Ask: what’s this song about?

Last time we talked about mitzvot that alleviate suffering. Many times this leads us to ask about suffering in the first place. This is a question that has been asked by all of humanity, in every generation for thousands of years. One of the great masterpieces of the Bible, the Book of Job, has been a response to this question for thousands of years, and it remains as relevant as ever today.

### *Activity - Job text study - 40 minutes*

Ask students what they remember about the beginning of the Job story. Be sure to touch on main points: Job has a happy life with both material wealth (riches, crops, animals) as well as many children; Satan challenges God to test Job and see if he will still be righteous; Job loses all of his wealth and all of his children are killed.

Throughout the book, Job talks with his wife and three friends; Job expresses his own views; and God responds. The role of Satan disappears into the background, and many critics believe that Satan was simply a literary device to put Job in this situation.

Divide students into four groups. Each group will study one of the above characters (or groups of characters), answer the questions, and create a short summary (see below). Note that along with the Job text is a short commentary from an article about Job by

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMAFaqOxyOc> - skip to 1:40

<sup>5</sup> All commentaries and translation in the text studies are from the Kepnes article as cited in the Bibliography.

Steven Kepnes.<sup>5</sup> Afterwards, one member from each group forms a new group, and shares with each other their group's summary (use word "jig saw").

Students regroup all together. Ask students for reactions to each approach. Then, ask students to individually think about a modern situation involving suffering—either a global problem such as homelessness or poverty, or a more individual form of suffering such as grief or depression. Designate each corner of the room for one Job approach—Job's wife, his friends, Job himself, or God. Students move to the corner of the room that they think best responds to this kind of suffering.

Each student shares the suffering they picked and defends their choice—other students are welcome to respectfully push back.

As a conclusion, read this passage from the end of the Kepnes article. Describe that Kepnes also talks about the Holocaust and reading Job through the lens of the Holocaust, drawing a parallel between Job's inner peace and rebuilding a new family at the end of the book to the Holocaust survivors and new rebuilt generation of Jews after the Holocaust. He writes:

“After the Shoah and in a time in which there is a restored Jewish commonwealth, we are no longer a passive chosen people but an active choosing people....it is indeed incumbent upon us to become active agents of God's justice and redemption in the world. After the Shoah we see the dangers of nihilism, of giving up on God or looking away from the pain and suffering of others. With Job's friends we clearly see the scale of justice but with Job we know that it is our and not God's responsibility to ensure that justice prevails in the world. God has distributed the blessings of life and power to us. It is our responsibility and challenge and God's test for us to be God's agents, to live up to our potential and ensure the end to human suffering.”

# Resource 1.4 Job text study

## Job's Wife:

Then Job's wife said to him [Job], 'Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God, and die.' - Job 2:9

*note: this is the only line she says in the entire book of Job.*

***Keptnes commentary:*** When Job's wife appears in the narrative, a new perspective is brought to Job's suffering. After all, Job's losses [of his children and wealth] are also her losses. We hear frightfully little about her reaction. But her brief words suggest that she sees something that Job has not seen...From the perspective of Job's wife, the suffering of the innocent has one clear meaning: God is unjust. God is unjust and because of this life on earth is intolerable. For if the God of the universe is unjust, there is no exit save death. "Curse God and die" is the nihilistic yet utterly understandable response to a God in which the innocent suffer...Indeed, the simple fact is that the suffering of the innocent, whether at the level of the individual or at the broader level of the suffering of the collective, make us believe that God is unjust.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Summarize Keptnes' commentary of Job's wife in your own words.
- Why do you think Job's wife reacts this way?
- Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt helpless in the face of suffering?
- What does an unjust God imply about the world? About suffering?
- If you were Job, how would you respond to Job's wife?
- Please summarize the view of Job's wife and your discussion for the other groups.



## Job's Friends Eliphaz, Bildad, Shuhite, Zophar & Elihu:

[Bildad to Job] "Will God disregard justice? Really, will the Almighty God disregard justice? If your children sinned against God, God dispatched (killed) them for their sins".  
- Job 8:3

[Eliphaz to Job] You know that your wickedness is great, and that your flaws have no limit. - Job 22:5

[Eliphaz and Elihu to Job] "God's deeds...cannot be fathomed"; "God is great and beyond our knowledge." Job 5:9; 36:26.

*Keptnes commentary:* The friends seek to maintain God's justice but...they must do so at the expense of Job's and his children's righteousness. They praise God with platitudes about justice which continually miss the severity of Job's suffering. Like passive bystanders to the suffering of the innocent, the friends are mainly concerned with providing quick rationalizations for Job's plight that will allow them to dismiss their own responsibility to help him...God is just and in control

### **Discussion Questions:**

- In your own words, what are the different arguments Job's friends make?
- Why do you think Job's friends are so desperate to maintain God's justice in the world? What's at stake for them?
- When a friend or family member was suffering, how were you a friend or form of support to them? Is it hard to decide what to say?
- Do you think that Job's friends were actually being friends in this case? What could they have done differently?
- Please summarize the view of Job's friends and your discussion for the other groups.

# Job:

Until I die I will maintain my integrity.  
I persist in my righteousness and will not yield;  
I shall be free of reproach as long as I live. - Job 27:5-6

As God lives who has taken away my right  
And the Almighty God who has dealt bitterly with me,  
All the while my breath is in me,  
And the spirit of God is in my nostrils,  
Surely my lips shall not speak unrighteousness...  
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me...  
For what is the hope of the godless  
Though he get him gain,  
When God takes away his soul  
Will God hear his cry? - Job 27:1-9

*Kepnes commentary:* Job's power and the strength of the book as a resource to address human suffering lies in Job's decision to throw off restraint and give voice to his suffering...Where the friends believe that Job's anger will "tear him to pieces," and seek to silence it, the expression of Job's anger is actually a key to allowing him to cope with his suffering. It contributes to his ability to to preserve his integrity despite his appearance, his pain, his shame, and the universal disgust he evokes in the world....Thus Job stands alone, by himself, still the honest and righteous man supported by himself and his thoughts alone as his only advocates.

## Discussion Questions:

- Before Job speaks up, his friends tell him that God must be punishing Job and his family for sins they must have done. How is Job responding to them through his words?
- Why do you think it is so important for Job to speak up and express his suffering to God?
- Have you ever found expressing suffering, or anything at all, without restraint cathartic and helpful?
- What do you think about Kepnes' argument about Job's theology?
- Why is Job lonely in his expression?

## God:

Who is this that darkens counsel,  
Speaking without knowledge?  
Gird your loins like a man;  
I will ask and you will in form me.  
Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? (Job 38:2-3)

*Kepnes commentary:* The basis for Job's hope and the ground for redemption is, of course, contact with God. So that where Job first only wanted to have his case heard...Job is moved to a more profound desire no longer to be heard and to hear, but to simply "see" God and re-experience God's presence [and he does]...It is crucial to note the form in which God appears. God discloses himself out of the winds of nature and as the God of creation...and not God of history who brought Israel out of bondage in Egypt. The God of creation does not intervene in history to repair its injustices. This God does not erase the pain and cruelty of human suffering. Nothing is explained, nothing adjusted; wrong has not become right, nor cruelty kindness...the mystery remains unsolved. This means that the answer to Job is the answer of Job's life and the life of the natural world which still exists around him.

### Discussion Questions:

- What surprises you about God's response? How might you have expected God to respond before reading this passage?
- How does the "God of creation" respond rather than the "God of history"? How do you think the God of history would have responded?
- Why do you think the author(s) of Job *chose* to not give God, and therefore Job and the audience, an easy answer to the question of suffering? What might this teach us?

# Lesson 5: Who is in need today?

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Identify 5 groups of people who are vulnerable or in need today.
- Articulate what “tikkun olam” is in their own words.
- Define tikkun olam as a process rather than a quick fix.

## Suggested Activities:

### *Set Induction - “Tikkun Olam” Definition - 5 minutes*

First, please be aware that most students might be aware of tikkun olam as “fixing the world” or “repairing the world,” or they haven’t heard about it at all. Like the mitzvot lesson, do a quick whip-around and have students react to the first word or phrase they think of when they hear tikkun olam. If most students use the above phrases, say that this is usually the way we learn what this phrase means, but we’re going to learn a different, deeper definition today. If students aren’t aware of what tikkun olam is, use the above phrases as the most popular definitions, but we’re going to learn a different, deeper definition today.

Do not reveal just yet to students, but the deeper definition we’re going for is that tikkun olam is the slow, complicated process of healing the world. It isn’t a simple, quick fix, nor is the process ever really over. We might not be able to completely heal every damage we do to each other and the world, but we still need to keep trying to alleviate suffering.

### *Activity 1 - Tikkun Olam - 10 minutes*

Write these two questions on opposite sides of a wall in your room: “What does the phrase tikkun olam mean?” and “When I am doing tikkun olam, what does that look or feel like?” With two different colored post it notes (such as blue for the first question and yellow for the second question), have students individually write their responses for each question, and stick the post it note near that question.

Then, divide students into two groups. Each group is in charge of a different question. Silently, that group must group the responses in as many categories as they choose. After they are done categorizing, create a phrase or word that best summarizes each one. Once they are finished, students share their word/phrase summaries with the other group.

Ask: What are some general statements we can now make about tikkun olam? Is there any disconnect or misalignment between how we think about tikkun olam, how we do tikkun olam, and how problems should actually be solved?

### *Activity 2 - Who is vulnerable today? - 15 minutes*

Have students brainstorm on the board different major news sources, such as CNN, BBC News, Guardian, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, MSNBC, USA Today, and so on. Create small teams, and each team takes one of these news sources. On laptops, tablets or even their phones, teams search for any groups mentioned in their news source that are vulnerable or in need, and list as many as they can find.

After seven minutes, each team shares what they found; try to brainstorm other groups in need that weren't mentioned.

Ask: were any of these groups mentioned in our earlier tikkun olam activity? Do some not fit those actions we brainstormed at all? How do these groups help ground tikkun olam into reality?

### *Activity 3 - Tikkun olam as process - 15 minutes*

Divide students into different teams and give them Jenga blocks, or other similar blocks with which they can stack and play Jenga. Without explanation, have students play the game like normal. After several minutes, when there is a considerable number of blocks removed, announce that you are changing the rules of the game: the goal is no longer to take out the blocks, rather put their blocks *back in*. See what happens, and afterwards ask:

- Were you successful? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Was it easier to take out the pieces or put them back in, and why? (After doing this lesson with high schoolers, it was easier for them to put the blocks back in)
  - How did you help each other put the blocks back in? (Some might have helped to steady the tower, encouraging or guiding each other)

Big reveal: The Jenga game is a metaphor for causing and alleviating suffering! Have students look at the remaining holes in their Jenga game, and imagine that these are the problems, needy and vulnerable groups, all kinds of suffering in the world.

- Is healing the world as easy as sticking a Jenga block back in? why or why not? (*note that sometimes damage is irreparable*)
- What are some of the ways that tikkun olam, repairing the world, is actually a long, complicated and arduous process? (for example: *getting people educated and motivated, making action happen, overcoming politics, finances, and resources*)
- Did any of you give up when the blocks kept falling, and choose to stop helping? Why?
  - What happens when we become complacent with, or even apathetic to, the things that need fixing in our world?
- Did any of you start building different structures after the blocks fell? Why?

- What kind of creativity do you think we might need to solve the biggest problems in our world?

Ask students to come up with another image or metaphor that better communicates this new idea of tikkun olam as a long process.

At the end of class, ask students to think about some cause that they are passionate about over the week (or until your next class)

# Lesson 6: My “suffering soapbox”

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- choose a particular kind of suffering that they are passionate about alleviating
- design a proposal for how they/their community can help alleviate their selected type of suffering.
- debate the amount of responsibility each person has to alleviate all or some of the suffering in the world.

## Suggested Activities:

### *Activity 1 - walking activity - 10 minutes*

Either clear a space in your room, or move to an open area. Designate this space as a “grid,” in which students can freely walk, but only in straight lines. If students walk towards each other one or both can turn away to avoid a collision. Encourage students to not walk with each other, rather form their own path. (Your space should be proportionate to the number of your students so they don’t run into each other often.)

Have students begin walking, and as they walk, you are going to call out particular statements. Have students act out, through their walking, posture and facial expressions, these statements, and ask them to observe each other without “breaking character.” Feel free to add statements if you choose.

This is how I feel...

- at the beginning of the day
- during school
- at the end of the day
- when I find something I’m interested in
- when I’m learning my favorite subject
- when I see something on the news that upsets me
- when I see some sort of injustice that angers me
- when I feel that nothing in the world is really going to change
- when I feel helpless toward someone else’s suffering
- when I feel like I have impacted someone’s day in a small way
- when someone says “thank you” to me
- when I volunteer or go out of my way to help someone
- when I find a cause that I am passionate in
- when I tell someone else about the cause I feel passionate about
- when I feel like I can do something to help others

Have students stop walking and sit where they are. Ask, how did you and your peers change throughout this exercise? Did the feelings accompany the actions? How did this relate to our tikkun olam session from last time? (*I felt my expressions, the way I walked and my body language change; I felt the atmosphere and my feelings change as things got sadder and then happier again; I found it hard to concentrate on both myself and everyone else; tikkun olam is a slow process that happens in different ways like we just acted out*)

### *Activity 2 - Suffering Soapbox - 35 minutes*

Ask students to choose a particular kind of suffering or injustice that they are particularly angry or passionate about. It can be a cause they already know a lot about, or something that is relatively new to them. For 15 minutes, students write (on their own) a “soapbox” in which they vent about this particular injustice - let them know they will be sharing it. Examples might be big causes such as hunger and homelessness; lack of effective giving or volunteering; class disparity; apathy towards non-local suffering, and so on. After 15 minutes, students present their soapboxes, with as much anger and emotion as they can.

Discuss:

- How did it feel to hear others' soapboxes?
- How did it feel to deliver their own soapbox?
- Do they feel more powerful, or more powerless, about the suffering going on in the world?
- Do you believe that one person can make a difference?
- How much is one person responsible for in terms of fixing the world?

Conclude: If Judaism *didn't* believe that one person can make a difference, we probably wouldn't have mitzvot, or laws about giving *tzedakah*, or the idea of *tikkun olam*. Of course, we do these things as a community, but Judaism seems to put a huge value on individuals doing everything they can (within reason) to make the world a better place, whether it's on a communal, interpersonal, or internal level. These are all ideas we will continue to explore in our course.

Describe the assessment and how this soapbox can be a jumping off point for the assessment, or they can choose a different cause.

Congratulate students for completing the first unit!



# Unit 2 - Care for the Widow and Orphan

*How do we alleviate suffering in our communities?*

## **Enduring Understandings:**

- It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. (Rabbi Tarfon, Pirke Avot 2:21)
- Ethical mitzvot are engaged in and internalized through both action and study.

## **Essential Questions:**

- What kinds of suffering exist in our communities?
- What is my responsibility to alleviate suffering?

## **Unit Goals:**

- To expose learners to suffering that exists in their communities, without overwhelming them
- To teach about how Jewish tradition treats the vulnerable and the stranger.
- To inspire learners as they choose their own chosen suffering to research more for their Authentic Assessment.

## **Unit Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Identify at least 3 groups of people who are vulnerable and considered strangers today.
- Assess if Abraham can be a model for doing justice and upholding mitzvot while still being deeply flawed as a human being.
- Have an opportunity to experience the mitzvah of alleviating suffering for those vulnerable in our community.
- Create a public service announcement reflecting on their experience to share with the synagogue community
- Prioritize the value of donating time and money to nonprofit organizations
- Create a post or video that could be posted and shared with the synagogue community, as a reflection for the visiting the vulnerable experience.

## **Key Terms**

- Mitzvah
- Tikkun Olam
- Widow and Orphan
- Stranger
- Tzedakah (“justice,” not charity)

# Authentic Assessment:

- Learners should decide on their chosen cause by Lesson 1; they should determine, even generally, what kind of suffering they would like to focus on, as well as at least one idea of where to research and at least one idea of how to take action and have some hand-on experience.
- Students can continue to revise and add to these idea, and turn in to you either as a hard copy or by email by the end of this unit
- **Build in a class sometime in this or the next unit so that students have time to engage in their chosen suffering.**

# Lesson 1: Caring for the Widow and the Orphan

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Explain at least three definitions of what “vulnerable” can mean.
- Examine how we are all vulnerable.
- Generate ideas of the cause they would like to choose for the Authentic Assessment.

## Suggested Activities:

### *Activity 1 - Vulnerability: the Widow and Orphan- 15 minutes*

Divide groups into 2 teams, and tell them that we will be playing a mock *Family Feud* game! The game’s themes are relevant to today’s lesson. Three players from each team come up to the front of the room, and one player each volunteers to go first. Give each team a button or some other object to hit, or action to do, to indicate that they have an answer. When you ask a question, the first person to react guesses one of the top 5 answers. If they are correct, the numbers next to the answer represent the number of points they accrue. Then, the rest of the players of the team try to guess the remaining answers. If they get two incorrect, the play goes to the other team. After each round, have three more volunteers from each team come up.

Below are the questions and top five answers:

Question 1: What does vulnerability mean?

- Capable of being wounded or hurt (50)
- Open to attack or criticism (40)
- Unable to defend one’s self (30)
- Powerless (20)

Question 2: Who are some vulnerable people in the world today?

- The poor (50)
- The elderly (40)
- The malnourished (30)
- People who are sick (20)
- People without clean water (10)

Question 3: Who are vulnerable people according to the Torah?

*hint: the answer is not “the Jew.” Think about people who have lost someone in their family, or who aren’t Jews.*

- The widow (30)

- The orphan (20)
- The stranger (10)
- The Levite (10)

After the game, distribute these quotes and have students read aloud:

"Don't cause anguish to any widow or orphan" (Exodus 22:21)

Observe the Feast-of-Booths [Sukkot] for seven days when you gather the harvest from your threshing-floor and your wine-vat. Rejoice at your festival: you, your son, your daughter, your servant, your maid, the Levite, the foreigner, and the orphans and widows who live in your neighborhood. (Deuteronomy 14: 13-15)

At the end of every third year, gather the tithe from all your produce of that year and put it aside in storage. Keep it in reserve for the Levite who won't get any property or inheritance as you will, and for the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow who live in your neighborhood. That way they'll have plenty to eat and God, your God, will bless you in all your work. (Deuteronomy 14:29)

Every third year, the year of the tithe, give a tenth of your produce to the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow so that they may eat their fill in your cities. - (Deuteronomy 26:12-13)

Make sure foreigners and orphans get their just rights. Don't take the cloak of a widow as security for a loan. (Deuteronomy 24:17)

Explain: What do widows and orphans have in common in the ancient world? As you can see they become their own kind of separate classes. Specifically, they can't own property and they don't have an income. Orphans are too young, and in the ancient world, women were entirely dependent on men, from father to husband after they married.

Ask: What does that put widows and orphans at risk for? How does this make them vulnerable?

Explain: Who else are mentioned as separate groups? Levite - priestly class that couldn't own property and therefore didn't make an income; and foreigners, or non-Israelites living among Israelites.

Ask: What things specifically does God demand people to do for the widow and orphan? Why do you think God prioritizes these needs, and commands people to give multiple times?

Read this:

Shai Held on Parashat Mishpatim<sup>6</sup>: “One who reads of God’s (com)passionate concern for the plight of widows and orphans should perceive in the Torah’s words **a broader mandate to champion the cause of the vulnerable and powerless—whoever they may be in a particular society.**”

Ask for students’ reactions to the quote.

### *Activity 2 - We are all vulnerable - 25 minutes*

Watch Brene Brown’s TED Talk on “The power of vulnerability,” approximately 20 minutes long. You can find it at this YouTube link or on the TED.com website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMz1F7o>

Ask: How are we all vulnerable? What does vulnerability also mean? (*Opening up and sharing your story, doing or saying something that puts you on the line; asking someone out, standing up for yourself, getting help*)

We make ourselves vulnerable when we open up ourselves, when we reach out and help others. Can that be scary or anxiety-raising for some, and why? (*Opening ourselves up means putting ourselves on a limb and that can be scary; it’s hard to ask for help; there’s a risk for being disappointed or being told no*)

How do we treat the vulnerable as human beings just like us, and not differently (such as treating them with pity, staring, feeling “weird” or grossed out)?

### *Activity 2 - Brainstorm Chosen Suffering - 5 minutes*

For the rest of class, students brainstorm which vulnerable people in their community they feel most passionately about helping for their chosen cause. Be sure students write legibly and add their names at the top, so you can keep their brainstorms for the end of the unit.

Announce that during the next class, there will be some strangers coming to visit us - but don’t reveal who they will be! See the next lesson for further details.

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<sup>6</sup> Held, Shai. “Hearing the Cries of the Defenseless, Or: We Are All Responsible.” *Machon Hadar*. Web. <http://www.mechonhadar.org/torah-resource/hearing-cries-defenseless>

# Lesson 2: Welcoming the Stranger

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Identify strangers in the community
- Generate the steps it takes for a person to no longer feel like a stranger.
- Reexamine Abraham as a seemingly flawless patriarch of the Bible
- Compare Abraham as flawed but still capable of greatness to their own experiences
- Choose the suffering they would like to explore more in the Authentic Assessment
- Propose several ways that the synagogue community could be more welcoming to strangers.

## Suggested Activities:

### *Activity 1 - Abraham - 15 minutes*

Divide students into two groups. One group reads the first set of texts, the second station reads the second set of texts (see below). Instead of each character's name, the names have been replaced with T.G., to stand for "that guy." Tell students that they might know the character we're talking about, but to refrain from revealing it. After reading the text each group lists as many adjectives as they can that they feel describes the character they just read about. <sup>7</sup>

After 10 minutes, students come back together. Have one student from each group summarize their texts and share their lists of adjectives. Showing the lists, side by side reveal that all of the texts were about the same person, Abraham.

Ask: what were your ideas about Abraham before the lesson? Are there any stories in here that surprise you, maybe because we don't read them as often? How is it possible that the same person who welcomed in strangers also tried to pass off his wife as his sister?

Abraham, considered to be one of our greatest Jewish heroes, is still a deeply flawed person who is far from perfect. The text doesn't try to hide his imperfections, or only one of these groups of texts would exist! But even with his shortcomings and mistakes, Abraham is still a character from whom we learn hospitality and justice. The way he and Sarah treat the visitors - to cook and take care of them during the hottest part of the day - is where we learn the mitzvah of welcoming guests, or *hachnasat orchim*.

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<sup>7</sup> Translations from Message Bible; Genesis chapters 12, 18, and 22.

*Activity 2 - Who are Strangers in our community? - 10 minutes*

Watch about a minute of an old “stranger danger” information video,<sup>8</sup> that hopefully the students will find funny, entertaining and nostalgic. Ask students if they ever watched a video like this in school. Ask: What does our society think about strangers, and how do we teach “strangers” to children? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an outlook?

For those of you who read the Abraham text in which he welcomes the strangers, how do strangers appear in the Bible? (They’re secretly angels who bless Abraham and Sarah with a son) Similar to Greek mythology, strangers were considered welcome and even holy people as they might be gods or holy messengers in disguise.

What does it mean to be a stranger? (someone who is unknown, maybe regarded as scary, someone you haven’t met yet)

Have students brainstorm potential strangers in our community and list them on the board. Welcome respectful questions and pushback from students if they disagree with what another said. Here are some examples: immigrants, new students, exchange students, people who have just moved here, interfaith families to the synagogue, an LGBTQ person who has just come out or in transition, visitors.

Ask: how many of you didn’t know each other at the start of this class? Would you call each other strangers now?

Next to the list of potential strangers, ask students to list the steps needed to make someone no longer a stranger. Examples might include: knowing someone’s name, knowing basic information about them, having a conversation, when the stranger is welcomed into a conversation or community, when the stranger lives there for a while, having a connection between yourself and the stranger, when the “stranger” no longer feels like the stranger anymore.

*Activity 3- Passover: All who are hungry, come and eat - 25 minutes*

Have a student volunteer open the door to your classroom and announce that whoever wants to join your class and learn is welcome to do so. Before class, arrange for several strangers to be “loitering” outside, and choose to come in. For this memorable moment, I encourage finding a group of their peers, such as another confirmation class from a neighboring synagogue, a high school church group, a college class, etc. Of course, the group you choose might also require different preparation and explanation

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<sup>8</sup> See one example here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Psp9cj9LsQs>

See how your students respond and what they might do to be welcoming! Don't encourage or give suggestions - let the experience happen.

Have your guests remain in the classroom as you debrief this short experience with everyone. What was this like, both strangers and newcomers? What was awkward? How were you welcoming, and how could you have been more welcoming?

During Passover, we open our doors and say "all who are hungry come and eat." The Torah tells us to welcome the stranger, because we too were strangers in Egypt. Has anyone ever said this before? Has anyone welcomed a complete stranger into their homes? Reference a movie like *Blindside* as an example. How do we actually open our doors, literally or figuratively, and be more welcoming?

Remind students of their projects, and how they have an opportunity to open their door and explore some kind of suffering that they want to help alleviate. Give them several minutes to decide what kind of suffering they want to choose, write it down and hand it in to you. For the remaining time, have students who are finished choose a stranger group from the second activity, and brainstorm several ways that the synagogue community could be more welcoming. I highly encourage you propose these ideas at the next board or staff meeting.



## Resource 2.1: Abraham Texts #1

TG (That Guy, remember, our mystery character!) was sitting at the entrance of his tent. It was the hottest part of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing. He ran from his tent to greet them and bowed before them.

He said, "Master, if it please you, stop for a while with your servant. I'll get some water so you can wash your feet. Rest under this tree! I'll get some food to refresh you on your way, since your travels have brought you across my path." They said, "Certainly. Go ahead." TG hurried into the tent to his wife, saying, "Hurry! Get three cups of our best flour; knead it and make bread." Then TG ran to the cattle pen and picked out a nice plump calf and gave it to the servant who lost no time getting it ready. Then he got curds and milk, brought them with the calf that had been roasted, set the meal before the men, and stood there under the tree while they ate.

Later, God said to TG, "The cries of the victims in Sodom and Gomorrah are deafening; the sin of those cities is immense. 21 I'm going down to see for myself, see if what they're doing is as bad as it sounds. Then I'll know." ... TG confronted God, saying, "Are you serious? Are you planning on getting rid of the good people right along with the bad? What if there are fifty decent people left in the city; will you lump the good with the bad and get rid of the lot? 25 Wouldn't you spare the city for the sake of those fifty innocents? I can't believe you'd do that, kill off the good and the bad alike as if there were no difference between them. Doesn't the Judge of all the Earth judge with justice?"

God said, "If I find fifty decent people in the city of Sodom, I'll spare the place just for them." TG came back, "Do I, a mere mortal made from a handful of dirt, dare open my mouth again to my Master? What if the fifty fall short by five - would you destroy the city because of those missing five?" God said, "I won't destroy it if there are forty-five." ... [TG keeps bargaining with God] He wouldn't quit, "Don't get angry, Master - this is the last time. What if you only come up with ten?" "For the sake of only ten, I won't destroy the city."

## Resource 2.2: Abraham Texts #2

A famine came to the land. TG (That Guy, remember, our mystery character!) went down to Egypt to live...As he drew near to Egypt, he said to his wife, "Look. We both know that you're a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you they're going to say, 'Aha! That's his wife!' and kill me. But they'll let you live. Do me a favor: tell them you're my sister. Because of you, they'll welcome me and let me live." When TG arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians took one look and saw that his wife was stunningly beautiful. Pharaoh's princes raved over her to Pharaoh. She was taken to live with Pharaoh. Because of her, TG got along very well: he accumulated sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, men and women servants, and camels. But God hit Pharaoh hard because of TG's wife; everybody in the palace got seriously sick. 18 Pharaoh called for TG, "What's this that you've done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she's your wife? Why did you say, 'She's my sister' so that I'd take her as my wife? Here's your wife back - take her and get out!" Pharaoh ordered his men to get Abram out of the country. They sent him and his wife and everything he owned on their way.

Isaac said to TG his father, "Father?" "Yes, my son." "We have flint and wood, but where's the sheep for the burnt offering?" TG said, "Son, God will see to it that there's a sheep for the burnt offering." And they kept on walking together. They arrived at the place to which God had directed him. TG built an altar. He laid out the wood. Then he tied up Isaac and laid him on the wood. TG reached out and took the knife to kill his son. Just then an angel of God called to him out of Heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Yes, I'm listening." "Don't lay a hand on that boy! Don't touch him! Now I know how fearlessly you fear God; you didn't hesitate to place your son, your dear son, on the altar for me." TG looked up. He saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. TG took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

## *A Guide for the Educator: The Visiting the Vulnerable Experience*

The goal of this visiting experience is for learners, as one community, to encounter the vulnerable and the stranger in a powerful way.

Some guidelines for the visit:

- This visit should be to some local organization that seeks to improve the wellbeing of the needy, such as a soup kitchen, Ronald McDonald House or homeless shelter. I highly encourage choosing somewhere that will be easy to accommodate all families, particularly if you choose to carpool from the temple.
- The visit can certainly include a tour of the organization's facilities, and will hopefully provide students with important information about this vulnerable group in regards to your area. However, the trip should also include some aspect in which students are able to interact with that group, such as serving meals, reading to children, and so on.
- Make sure the visit occurs during the same date and time as a regular session, otherwise it will be very difficult to coordinate every student's schedule for another date and time.

By Lesson 2:

- Coordinate the visit with the organization
- Send permission slips to families
- Coordinate who will help carpool to and from the field trip

# Lesson 3: Visiting the Vulnerable Experience

## **Objective:**

Learners will have an opportunity to experience the mitzvah of alleviating suffering for those vulnerable in their community.

## **Suggested Activities:**

*Set induction - Description of where we are going - 5 minutes*

Briefly welcome the class and introduce the place where they are going. Outline the visit, making sure they are aware of the “active aspect” mentioned before. Remind students about the vulnerability lesson, and to think about how they would like to fulfill these important mitzvot by welcoming and caring for the vulnerable and the stranger. Ask if students have any questions before departing.

# Lesson 4: Debrief of the Experience

## **Objective:**

Learners will have the opportunity to reflect on the tikkun olam visit experience through a public service announcement, such as a blog post or video, for the synagogue community.

## **Suggested Activities:**

### *Activity 1 - Discussion - 20 minutes*

Below are some guiding questions for the discussion. Hopefully, you will act more as a facilitator and students will have a lot to share and discuss.

- What was this experience like?
- What felt natural, and what felt awkward?
- What felt challenging, and what felt rewarding?
- Was there a moment where you felt particularly vulnerable? Where you felt someone you were interacting with was vulnerable?
- At any point, did you feel like a stranger?
- How do we make sure that the vulnerable and needy keep their dignity and integrity as we help them?
- Recall that a mitzvah is both commanded and chosen (Unit 1, Lesson #2). Imagine you were to go back to visit this place a second time. Do you think this would feel commanded (i.e., that something other than yourself was willing you to visit), or chosen (that you were doing it out of your own free will)?

### *Activity 2 - Reflections - 20 minutes*

Give students these three options, all of which allow them to not only reflect on their experience but also share it with their wider synagogue community. Students divide into groups of three depending on which choice seems most appealing to them; you might need to take some time at the end of the next lesson to finish these projects if students need it.

- Written reflection for the synagogue bulletin
- Video or post about what they experienced to post on synagogue's Facebook page
- Thank you note to the coordinator for the organization you went to.

# Lesson 5: Nonprofit Organizations

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Debate the value of donating time and money to nonprofit organizations
- Defend why, in their opinion, one particular kind of giving is preferable to another depending on the person in need.

## Suggested Activities:

*Set induction activity - 5 minutes*

Ask if any students have had any experience with a nonprofit organization.

*Non-Profit Fair - 15 minutes*

Around the room, post the below posters and information regarding different nonprofit organizations: Red Cross, Magen David Adom, AJWS, The Water Project, Mazon, and the California Wildlife Center<sup>9</sup>. I also recommend finding their logos and other promotional images online and printing those out as well as a visual. Students go around the room reading about the different nonprofit organizations as well as how donating their time and money would impact that organization.

*Decision making and posting - 35 minutes*

Divide students into groups and hand out post it notes (see below). Each group has an imaginary \$300 to donate, as well as two 'once a month' and two 'once a year' days to volunteer. Tell the groups they must collectively decide to which organizations they would like to allocate their resources. Representatives from the group can go back up to the posters to refresh their memory, or you can have extra copies of the posters to distribute to each group.

## Post-it Note Guide:

*Money*

Color 1 - \$100 x1

Color 2 - \$50 x1

*Time*

Color 3 - Once a month x1

Color 3 - Once a year x1

Once the group decides, write monetary/time amount on the post it note and stick it by

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the poster that they are donating the money/time to.

Groups share what they chose to donate and why. Note when groups choose to donate their entire sum or volunteering time to one organization, versus allocating smaller resources to more places. Ask:

- What did your decision making process look like? How did you eliminate what? Was it hard to come to a consensus with your group?
- The value of giving time versus money--what was harder to give away? What do you think was more valuable for the respective organizations?
- Did you try to give less of your time/money to more organizations, or did you pool all your money towards one? What are the advantages/disadvantages to doing so in real life?
- Did you feel more strongly about giving to Jewish versus non-Jewish organizations?

# Resource 2.3: Nonprofit Posters text

## The Red Cross

- **Disaster Relief**
  - The Red Cross responds to approximately 70,000 disasters in the United States every year
- **Supporting Military Families**
  - The Red Cross helps military members, veterans and their families prepare for, cope with, and respond to the challenges of military service.
- **Blood Supply**
  - Provides more than 40% of America's blood supply.
- **Health and Safety Services**
  - Teaches CPR, First Aid and Lifeguard training.
- **International Services**
  - 13 million volunteers in 187 countries, helping communities around the world.

**Donate your money:** Which will help provide relief items and other services for disaster responses, services for military members, veterans and children, and vaccinations.

**Donate your time:** By giving blood or hosting a blood drive; taking, teaching or hosting a class; or volunteer to do humanitarian work.

## Magen David Adom

- The “American Red Cross” of Israel
- MDA's work is mandated by the Israeli government, but it's not government funded (and therefore relies on donations and support)
- Provides a rapid and skilled emergency medical response, including disaster, ambulance, and blood services, to Israel's 7.8 million people each year.
- Responsible for maintaining Israel's blood supply
- MDA is committed to helping anyone and everyone in need in Israel, regardless of citizenship, background, religious or political affiliations.



**Donate your money:** By helping MDA continue to have ambulances, medical supplies and facilities.

**Donate your time:** By starting a fundraising campaign for MDA.

## Mazon

- A nonprofit organization working to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the United States and Israel.
- Only national Jewish organization dedicated exclusively to abating hunger in the USA and Israel.
- Works to ensure that hungry people have access to the nutritious food they need today and working to develop and advance long-term solutions for tomorrow.
- MAZON supports a nationwide network of nearly 300 highly effective hunger fighters, including food banks that receive & distribute tons of perishable donations and backpack programs that provide meals for children to take home for the weekend.

**Donate your money:** To help Mazon with their food resources and outreach (making sure the food goes to the right places).

**Donate your time:** By volunteering as a “hunger fighter” in a food bank or backpack program.

## AJWS (American Jewish World Service)

- AJWS pursues lasting change by providing financial support to local grassroots and global human rights organizations working in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and by mobilizing American Jews and others in the U.S. to advocate for policies that will benefit people in the developing world.
- Supports women, girls and LGBT people so that they can stop violence and discrimination, gain control over their lives and bodies, and live in health, safety and dignity.
- Aids communities in their work to recover from conflicts such as civil wars, fight oppression, speak out against injustice and create vibrant, peaceful societies that respect the rights of all citizens.

- Supports communities that are protecting the land, water and natural resources that they depend on for survival. These crucial resources are too often threatened by exploitative development projects, including digging mines and building dams.

**Donate your money:** To support more than 500 social justice organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Your support will make it possible for activists to fight for the rights of women and girls, battle poverty and respond to intolerance and injustice.

**Donate your time:** By becoming an AJWS volunteer; fundraising help fight poverty, hunger and disease throughout the developing world; by advocating for the passage of the International Violence Against Women Act, which supports innovative, cost-effective programs that have been shown to decrease violence against women and girls.

## The Water Project

- The Water Project brings relief to communities around the world who suffer needlessly from a lack of access to clean water and proper sanitation, like in Africa.
- The Water Project works closely with local in-country teams and partners to develop clean water programs alongside these heroes. We carefully select implementing partners who have long term relationships and commitments to the people they serve.
- Providing access to clean, safe water helps capable and determined people realize the hope they have for their own futures.

**Donate your money:** Every donation goes towards a specific water project helping a community in Africa.

**Donate your time:** By starting or helping with a fundraiser, or participating in a water challenge: only drink water for two weeks, and use the money you saved from not drinking soda, iced tea, etc, to donate to The Water Project.

## California Wildlife Center

- CWC focuses on the rescue and healing of sick, injured and orphaned native wildlife, supported by state-of-the-art animal care and rehabilitation facilities, professionally-trained staff, dedicated volunteers and an engaged community.
- Since 1998, CWC has experienced a steady increase in animal patients, caring for more than 32,000 wild animals, many whose injuries were caused by the impacts of their urbanized environments.
- A long-term goal of the center is to promote protection of wild habitats and the environment through education, training and partnerships with the communities it serves.

**Donate your money:** To help CWC with the facilities and resources needed to help rescue and heal wildlife, as well as fund classes and training for volunteers.

**Donate your time:** Volunteer by training about animal care and marine mammal rescue, or joining an awareness campaign.

# Lesson 6: Conclusion

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Categorize Rambam's ladder of tzedakah, according to their own beliefs
- Apply Rambam's ladder to their Visiting the Vulnerable Experience
- Identify the importance of anonymity in Rambam's ladder
- Apply the importance of anonymity to the masks and alter-egos of superheroes
- Decide how important it is to preserve the dignity of those we help who are vulnerable.
- Decide upon their chosen cause for the Authentic Assessment

## Suggested Activities:

*Set induction: What does tzedakah mean? - 5 minutes*

Go around the room and have each student say in one word what they think tzedakah means, and have the class take a vote for most popular definition. It will probably be "charity."

*Activity 1 - Rambam's ladder of Tzedakah- 15 minutes*

Divide students into small groups of about 4-5 people. Give each group Rambam's ladder of tzedakah with each statement on a separate slip of paper. Have each group order it from what they think is the least effective form of tzedakah at the bottom, to the greatest form of tzedakah at the top. After 5 minutes, read out the correct order and see if anyone got the correct order all the way through.

Ask: Why do you think Rambam places the bottom rung at the bottom, and the top one at the top? Why is making the receiver self-sufficient important? Do you see any connections between the highest rung and what we experienced at the homeless shelter?

Ask: do you think that your responsibility is to help each and every needy person you meet become self-sufficient? What are some problems you see with this? How do you personally determine how much is enough to give?

*Activity 2 – Superheroes and Dignity - 15 minutes*

Divide students into teams and have them play superhero charades on the board. With a larger class, you can divide students in half, and then into teams from there - if there isn't enough space on the board, you can get smaller whiteboards for teams. One student from a team draws a superhero and their team has to guess it within a minute. Words and numbers cannot be drawn! If students are drawing a blank on superheroes you can

give them a minute or two to search on their phones - they can also think of the movies for inspiration.

After the game, ask students how many of the superheroes they drew wore masks. (Almost all superheroes do except Superman, Wonder Woman and Hulk- but be sure to mention that even Superman and Hulk are still not recognizable from their alter-egos) Why do you think superheroes wear masks in the first place? Which level of Rambam's ladder are superheroes fulfilling? How does wearing a mask preserve the dignity of the people they save, not just the identity of the superhero?

Ask students: why do you think anonymity is important to the Rambam? Why is it higher for the receiver to not know who gave them the tzedakah? How is integrity involved here? Explain that while giving is important for *us* to do, it's equally important to maintain the dignity of the person in need - they're still a full person, and receiving help can be embarrassing.

### *Activity 3 - Brainstorming Chosen suffering - 15 minutes*

Hand back their chosen suffering brainstorm all the way back from Lesson 1. With fifteen minutes, students should have enough time to decide which chosen cause they would like to pursue for the rest of the course. Students are welcome to brainstorm with each other and look up information online.

## Resource 2.4: Rambam's Tzedakah Ladder

Note for the educator: these are in order from highest to lowest.

The giver should help the receiver so that they no longer need to be dependent upon someone else, such as finding them a job.

The giver does not know who the receiver is, and the receiver does not know who the giver is.

The giver knows who the receiver is, but the receiver does not know who the giver is.

The giver does not know who the receiver is, but the receiver does know who the giver is.

The giver gives to the receiver before being asked.

The giver gives to the receiver after the receiver asks.

The giver does not give enough to the receiver, but does so gladly and with a smile.

The giver gives reluctantly.

# Unit 3 - Love your Neighbor as Yourself

## *How do we alleviate suffering between people?*

### **Enduring Understandings:**

- One who saves a life, saves an entire world. - Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a
- Ethical mitzvot are engaged in and internalized through both action and study.

### **Essential Questions:**

- Who owns suffering?
- How can I help someone else in pain?
- Does prayer heal?

### **Unit Goals:**

- To teach learners about three ethical mitzvot between people: bikkur cholim, l'vayat hameit, and iyun tefilah.
- To inspire learners to become sensitive, supportive caregivers when people they know are suffering or in pain.

### **Unit Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Identify three mitzvot that alleviate suffering in another person.
- Identify at least 3 rewards, tensions and stigmas associated with these mitzvot.
- Contrast Levinas' philosophy with their own experiences of being compelled to help someone.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to the experience of bikkur cholim (visiting the sick).

### **Key Terms:**

- Mitzvot between people ("bein adam l'chavero")
- Emmanuel Levinas
- *Bikkur Cholim*
- *Vayat HaMeit*
- *Iyun Tefilah*

# Authentic Assessment

- Students should have chosen their desired topic in Unit 2
- In this unit, learners should know where they are going to have their experience and should give you at least one date when they will have this experience
- Set up at least one meeting with each student - could be coffee, could be before/after sessions, to check in with them and discuss their experiences so far. Some questions you can ask during the check in:
  - Why did you choose this particular topic? What resonates with you about it?
  - What are your personal goals with this experience?
    - How has your experience gone so far? What has surprised you? What's been rewarding? What's been challenging?
    - What are you most excited to share in your presentation? What are you most hesitant about sharing?
    - How can I best help you moving forward?



# Lesson 1: Emmanuel Levinas

## *seeing the face of the Other*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Identify one face-photograph that resonates with them personally.
- Articulate Levinas' philosophy in their own words
- Evaluate Levinas' philosophy in regards to doing mitzvot

### **Materials:**

- Face posters
- Levinas text studies A & B
- Laptops or iPads (or students can use their phones!)

### **Timeline:**

:00 - :05 Set induction - Faces

:05 - :20 Art Gallery

:20 - :40 Levinas jigsaw text study

:40 - :45 Conclusion

### **Procedure:**

#### ***Before class: art gallery setup***

Before class, set up an "art gallery" with different posters and images of faces. Please use photographs, rather than painted or drawn images, but not ones that feature celebrities or other well-known people. One great example is the famous National Geographic photograph, "Afghan Girl."<sup>10</sup> The art gallery should preferably be set in the same space that you have class, so you can reference them during your discussions.

#### **Set induction: Faces - 5 minutes**

To introduce class, ask students to get into pairs and face each other. Students close their eyes and think about their mood; when they open their eyes, they should communicate that mood with their face, as expressively as they can (but without words!) to their partner. Then, students close their eyes again, and emulate the mood they saw back to their partner.

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<sup>10</sup> You can find it here: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2002/04/afghan-girl/original-story-text>

For this lesson, we will be introducing our next unit by focusing on *faces* and how we interact with each other face to face.

### **Art Gallery<sup>11</sup> - 15 minutes**

Before students walk into the “art gallery” room, let them know that they should silently walk around and look at each of the images. After seven to ten minutes, or until it’s clear that everyone has seen the images, everyone regroups and discusses:

- What was that experience like?
- Which photo resonated with you the most and why?

### **Levinas jigsaw text study - 20 minutes**

Explain that our last unit was about alleviating suffering for those who are vulnerable in our community. However, these mitzvot, while very important, don’t exactly focus on each person as an individual. In this next unit will focus on mitzvot that we do “face to face,” between people. Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas had a lot to say about these kinds of mitzvot, and he’s going to help us get acclimated to this kind of thinking.

Students split into two groups; each of which studies the Levinas text (below). Using the text study sheets, students read the adapted quotes together and conduct their own discussion for approximately 10 minutes. Have students be in different spaces, if possible.

After 10 minutes, ask students to conclude. Then, groups A and B split into two groups each. Half of group A and half of group B meet in person and share their discussions. The other halves of each group remain in separate spaces, and *either* discuss over their cell phones via conference call, or discuss via Facebook messenger, or some other group chat online.

Have all students regroup in your classroom together; ask for representatives from each group to summarize what they learned about Levinas’ philosophy.

Then lead the class in this discussion:

- For the second subgroup, what was it like to not see the other group while discussing? (*it felt awkward, didn’t know who to talk first; some might say it was normal because we’re used to talking with others that way*)
- For the first subgroup, what were some advantages to speaking face to face? (*Had nonverbal cues, were able to respond to each other immediately, maybe had a more organic conversation*)

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<sup>11</sup> Activity inspired by lesson from Jordanna Flores.

- What are some things we do face to face that we can't do from a distance? (*Hug and show physical affection, show nonverbal cues like smiling, physically help a person, see them*)

### **Conclusion - 5 minutes**

Our new unit is going to be about alleviating mitzvot between people, and being “face to face” with those people who need help.

- How is this easier said than done? *hint: have you ever called or texted someone who was sick instead of visiting them? (Takes time, sometimes is difficult or scary to see another person in need)*
- If students are finding this question difficult, we'll revisit it next time!

# Resource 3.1: Emmanuel Levinas Text Study

“The face is meaning all by itself. You are you. The relation to the face is straightaway ethical.”

“The first word of the face is “Thou shalt not kill.” It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. And me, whoever I may be, but as a “first person,” I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call.”

“Since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for them, without even having taken on responsibilities in their regard; their responsibility *is incumbent on me*. Usually, one is responsible for what one does oneself. I say that responsibility is initially for the other....to say: here I am. To do something for the Other. To give. To be human spirit, that’s it.”

“I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is his affair.”

“In the access to the face there is certainly also an access to the idea of God.”

Basically, in conversational English...

- Levinas’ “Other” means any person other than ourselves.
- When I see the face of the Other, and I see suffering on it, I am compelled and responsible to alleviate it. There is no turning away from it, and there is no asking for something in return
- To do something for the Other is humanity; the relationship that is formed between me and the Other is justice.
- There is some connection between my relationship with the Other’s face and my relationship to God.

Discussion Questions -

- What problem(s) in the world do you think Levinas is responding to?
- What does it mean “to do something for the Other”? What do you think are some specific actions of “doing” that Levinas might be thinking of?
- How would Levinas define ‘tikkun olam’?
- What do you like about Levinas’ ideas? Can you see it working within your own theology? Within Reform Judaism?
- What problems do you find with Levinas’ ideas? What are the limits?
- Does Levinas’ theology work for you? How so or not so?

# Lesson 2: Bikkur Cholim

## *visiting the sick*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Define “bikkur cholim” in their own words
- Articulate why bikkur cholim is a mitzvah
- Identify at least three tensions inherent within bikkur cholim
- Hypothesize what being a visited sick person and a visitor to a sick person looks and feels like
- Role play the mitzvah of bikkur cholim

### **Materials:**

- None

### **Timeline:**

:00 - :05 - Set Induction

:05 - :20 Web activity

:20 - :40 Bikkur Cholim guided imagery and role play

:40 - :45 Tensions

### **Procedure:**

#### **Set Induction: One word association - 5 minutes**

Going quickly around the room, ask students for an immediate 1-word reaction to the word “sick.”

#### **Web activity - 15 minutes**

Introduce our first mitzvah of the unit: bikkur cholim, or visiting the sick. Before we start talking about the mitzvah of visiting the sick, however, let’s first talk about what it means to be sick in the first place.

Divide students into small groups - preferably 3-4 people, depending on class size. Each group receives one of the below words, and from it, makes a web or list on the board of all related words or ideas they can think of. Examples are in parenthesis. Give students five minutes to do this.

Physical illness (cold, flu, cancer, stroke, wound)

Non-physical or intangible illness (depression, lupus, eating disorders)

Medical terms associated with sickness (disease, symptom, diagnoses, surgery)  
Negative emotions associated with sickness (alone, confusion, in pain, fear, deterioration)  
Positive emotions associated with sickness (healing, support, community, new normal)

After five minutes have students look at other groups' webs.

Ask:

- Just saying "visiting the sick" might imply only one type of situation. Instead, what does our huge web imply? *(there are many different kinds of sickness, sickness isn't just one thing that happens in one place, sickness changes depending on the person and what the sickness is, we can't see or assume to understand all illnesses)*
- "Bikkur," or visiting, can also be related the word "bikoret," to research or investigate.<sup>12</sup> What does a person visiting a sick person have to investigate? *(What the sick person's needs and wants are from visitors, how they're feeling, if they even want a visit, what will help them feel better and less alone)*

### **Bikkur Cholim guided imagery and role play - 20 minutes**

Have students find a comfortable spot in the room and close their eyes. Have them go through their minds and think about a friend or family member being sick in some way. Focus on that person and what their sickness might like. Have students willing to share what that sickness was raise their hands so you can call on them. *(My friend having the cold/flu, breaking their arm, having surgery, getting a disease like cancer)*

Regardless of your feelings for this person, think about that sickness. What scares you about it? What might make you want to stay away from it? Students silently contemplate this, and then share in a sentence or less *(it's physically off putting, it scares me about my own mortality, it's contagious, I don't like hospitals)*

Imagine sending this person a text. Imagine giving this person a call. Imagine dropping off food for them. Imagine going to visit them. What does each look like? How do you feel about it? How do you think your friend or family member feels about it? Think about this quietly.

After a few moments, ask students go back to a time when they were feeling sick. Really try to bring back the feelings of what that sickness looked and felt like. Have students willing to share what that sickness was raise their hands so you can call on them *(When I had the flu, when I broke my arm, when I had to go to the hospital).*

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<sup>12</sup> The Visitor's Halachic Guide to Hospitals - Rabbi Zvi Goldberg <http://www.star-k.org/kashrus/kk-HalachicGuidetoHospitals.htm>

When you were sick, think about what you had to miss because you needed to stay at home or in the hospital. How did you feel? Were you lonely?

Imagine a friend, who sends you a text. Imagine a friend giving you a call. Imagine a friend dropping off food for you. Imagine a friend taking the time to visit you. What does each look like? How do you, as the sick person feel about it? How do you think your friend or family member feels about it? Think about this quietly, then share with students' eyes still closed (*The visit sounds really impactful and thoughtful, the food takes a lot of time but not as much effort as a visit, it feels really selfless*).

Ask:

- What does it mean to feel lonely or isolated when you're sick person? (*You're taken out of your routine, you're alone at home or in a hospital, sometimes you can't be physically touched*)
- What is different about *visiting* someone who is sick, as opposed to other ways to connect with the person, such as calling, texting, or emailing? (*It's the only one that involves face to face, it takes the most time and effort*)
- Earlier in the course we talked about being vulnerable. How does vulnerability play into visiting the sick? (*The visitor is saying that getting sick themselves is less important than helping the other person feel better; you are opening yourself up to seeing sickness and sharing someone else's pain; the person being visited becomes vulnerable in sharing their pain and sickness with others.*)

Please be sure to remark on the last sample answers if they are not contributed by the class.

Have one student volunteer role play their imagined sickness, and another volunteer role play what they imagined it would be like to visit a sick person. See how it plays out and then ask the class to praise and recommend even better ways to have visited that person. Have two more volunteer pairs role play.

### **Wrap up activity - 5 minutes**

Read this Talmudic story: "Rabbi Hebo fell sick," the Talmud tells us, and no one visited him. Rabbi Kahana rebuked the sages: "Did it not once happen," he reminded them, "that one of Rabbi Akiva's disciples fell ill and the sages did not visit him? So Rabbi Akiva himself visited him, and because (he arranged to have the floor) swept and washed, the sick man recovered. "My master," the sick man said to Rabbi Akiva, "You have revived me." Rabbi Akiva went out and taught, "He who does not visit the sick is like a shedder of blood." - Nedarim 39b-40a.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jewish Literacy by Rabbi Telushkin, page 585.

Tell students there are a lot of tensions involved with bikkur cholim that makes it a mitzvah with a lot of intention and sensitivity. Say these statements and have students finish the sentences, in order to illuminate some of the tensions of bikkur cholim.

- The visitor fulfills the mitzvah, but.... *(it isn't about the visitor - it's about the sick person)*
- The sick person might be contagious, but.... *(it's important to visit them anyway - as long as you aren't putting yourself in danger)*
- You need to take time to visit a sick person, but how do you know...*(how often and how long to visit?)*
- The sick person's needs come first, but how do you know... *(what those are and how to take care of them)*

Let students know that we will be planning and conducting visits to those in our community who are ill, to actually experience this mitzvah. Ask students if they know anyone in their family, a friend or the synagogue who is sick who might want to be visited. (You should start looking into the synagogue community as well.)



## *Resource 3.2: A guide for the educator: The Bikkur Cholim Visiting Experience*

The goal of this visiting experience is to give learners the opportunity to plan a visit to someone in their community who is sick; to experience the core of alleviating someone's suffering face to face, and confront the awkwardness, tensions, and also incredible reward from it.

Deciding who to visit:

- The sick person should be known personally either by yourself, a family, or the congregation. Students should not be visiting strangers' homes.
- Ask the synagogue - rabbis, bikkur cholim committee, social action committee, and so on - for members who are sick and might be open to high school visitors. Any congregant who has a personal connection with students is preferred.
- Call or email the sick person or their family, asking them:
  - if they are open to this kind of visit
  - approximately how many students they are comfortable with visiting
  - their general interests
  - any other preferences they might have for this visit that students can prepare for

Some guidelines for the visit:

- The visits should preferably occur on the same date and time that your class meets, in lieu of a lesson.
- Please be sure each home's location is not too far from the synagogue due to transportation.
- Visits should last approximately twenty minutes, unless the ill person would prefer a shorter visit.
- You will use your best judgment to decide what kind of illnesses students will be able to emotionally handle; for example, if students are ready to encounter terminal illnesses. Group students carefully and sensitively, and I suggest not sending students to sick persons who might have contagious illnesses.
- On that note, I encourage having students visit in homes rather than hospitals. Hospitals can be very overwhelming and even scary places for those who haven't yet visited them, and the guide does not allow enough time for separate preparation for visiting a hospital. However, if students feel strongly about visiting a particular person in a hospital, you may use your best judgment.

By Lesson 3:

- Choose the student groups and where they will be visiting. I suggest that the groups aren't so large that they are overwhelming (more than 7), but also that there aren't so

many small groups that it is difficult to coordinate (more than 3 might be logistically difficult).

- In Lesson 3, students will have an opportunity to plan their visit together. During the rest of the week students will hopefully finish planning and preparing anything they are going to bring for the visit.

After Lesson 3:

- Start sending permission slips and also organizing parent transportation. It might be easiest if all groups meet at the synagogue first and then driving to all locations. Additionally, parents will be serving as chaperones for the visits and can either observe or participate in the visit itself.
- Confirm with the sick person or their family regarding which students will be coming as well as the date and time.

# Lesson 3: Bikkur Cholim Planning

## Objectives:

- Students will have the opportunity to react to visiting the sick (bikkur cholim).
- Students will then have the opportunity to reflect on visiting the sick through guided questions, creating a “get well” card, and creating their own bikkur cholim ladder.

## Materials:

- Printouts of “The Visitor’s Halachic Guide”
- Blank paper
- Highlighters or pens

## Timeline:

- :00 - :05 Set Induction: Free Write
- :05 - :15 The Visitor’s Halachic Guide to Hospitals
- :15 - :20 Addendums
- :20 - :45 Planning the visit

## Procedure:

### Set Induction: Free Write - 5 minutes

For five minutes, have students privately free write or type their feelings about preparing for this visit. Let students know from the outset this will not be shared, but to be aware of their feelings moving forward.

### The Visitor’s Halachic Guide to Hospitals - 10 minutes

Pass out to students copies of “The Visitor’s Halachic Guide to Hospitals,” by Rabbi Zvi Goldberg.<sup>14</sup> Note that even though this guide is geared towards hospitals, most of the guide is about visiting sick people in general, no matter what environment they might be in. With different colored highlighters or pens, have students mark statements that stand out to them.

Afterwards, ask:

- What do you notice about this guide? (*there are very clear rules about how to visit the sick*)

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.star-k.org/kashrus/kk-HalachicGuidetoHospitals.htm>

- What stood out to you in particular?
- How does the guide connect to elements of *bikkur cholim* that we've brought up last time? (*the mitzvah is all about catering to the sick person, the sick person is always thought about beforehand*)
- Was there anything you disagreed with? why? (*perhaps saying a prayer might not sit well with students- we'll have a future lesson about it!*)

### **Addendums - 5 minutes**

Have each student contemplate and then write out at least one additions to Goldberg's guide; these can either be additional suggestions or they can be further clarifications.

### **Planning the visit - 25 minutes (until end of class)**

Divide students into their visit groups, as well as the information about the person they are visiting. In groups, have students share their three commandments with each other, and, with these in mind, plan their visit.

Please remind students that planning the visit doesn't need to be scripted -they don't need to plan a skit, or dialogue. Instead, they might want to form some general guidelines about how to act; what questions to ask the person they're visiting; a funny story or news article to share.

Ask students to fill out the below resource sheet - you can edit the sheet however you would like - and turn it in and have it approved by you before the end of class. I strongly suggest typing up their resource sheets and sharing them with families via Google Docs, so students can finish planning, and so there is complete transparency between you and your families.

# Resource 3.3: Bikkur Cholim Sheet

Group members:

Person visiting:

Amount of time for visit:

Plans for visit:

*notes:* Below, plan out how you want your visit to go. This plan should *not* be scripted - that is, you don't have to plan exactly who says or asks what. Rather, keep these questions in mind and create a "game plan" as best you can.

*things to keep in mind:*

- Who are you visiting? What are their interests?
- How would you feel if you were in their shoes? What kind of visit do you think you would want?
- What might you want to understand about their illness before visiting?
- What questions can you ask him/her?
- Are there stories or jokes they might like?
- Are there videos (funny YouTube videos, show clips), articles, or news they might find valuable?
- Are there gifts (flowers, snacks) that you can bring them?
- What do you think is the best way to open and close the visit (for example, do you need to introduce yourselves)?

# Lesson 4: The Bikkur Cholim Visits

## **Objectives:**

- Students will have the opportunity to react to visiting the sick (bikkur cholim).
- Students will then have the opportunity to reflect on visiting the sick through guided questions, creating a “get well” card, and creating their own bikkur cholim ladder.

## **Materials:**

- Printouts of their plans for the visit

## **Procedure:**

As students arrive for their visits, hand out copies of their group’s planning sheet, making sure they are finalized.

When everyone arrives, welcome them to this experience and celebrate their commitment to do this incredible mitzvah. Say the shehecheyanu blessing together. Then, make sure everyone knows their groups and which parent is in charge of their transportation.

I encourage you to join a group, but to observe and not participate!

# Lesson 5: Bikkur Cholim Debrief

## Objectives:

- Students will have the opportunity to react to visiting the sick (bikkur cholim).
- Students will then have the opportunity to reflect on visiting the sick through guided questions, creating a “get well” card, and creating their own bikkur cholim ladder.

## Materials:

- Notecards
- Pencils, pens and colored pencils

## Timeline:

:00 - :20 Discussion

:20 - :35 Get well notes

:35 - :45 Conclusion - Bikkur Cholim ladder

## Procedure:

### Before Class

Have this quote written on the board: “Whoever visits a sick person removes one sixtieth of their illness” - Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 30b

### Discussion - 20 minutes

Below are some guiding questions for the discussion. Hopefully, you will act more as a facilitator and students will have a lot to share and discuss. The sample answers are only a guide to some responses you might hear but they will likely range depending on how the visits went.

- What was this experience like? (*Awkward, rewarding, I was anxious at first but left feeling great*)
- What felt natural, and what felt awkward? (*It felt natural once the conversation started; it felt awkward at the very beginning; it felt awkward to see them sick*)
- What felt challenging, and what felt rewarding? (*It was challenging to see the person who was sick in pain and know I couldn't help them heal, but it felt rewarding to see them smile and appreciate us being there; it felt rewarding to bring them flowers/food/a story*)
- Can you find any similarities between what you all experienced among your different visits? (*we all experienced similar awkward and natural moments, challenging and*

*rewarding moments; we all had positive experiences; we all feel that planning ahead of time was beneficial)*

- Did you feel any of the bikkur cholim elements that we discussed in our last session? *(Putting the sick person's needs before myself, the value of being prepared)*
- Recall that a mitzvah can be commanded and/or chosen (Unit 1, Lesson \_).
  - How artificial did it feel to visit this person because I assigned you? Do you think mitzvot have some artificiality to them? *(there is a tension between doing something because you want to and because you have to; I'm not sure I would have done it had I not been assigned, so I needed that push)*
  - Do you think you would have chosen to visit this person had I not assigned you and made it totally optional? Why or why not? *(I think I might have called or texted them, but I don't think I would have gone to visit because I would have said I didn't have the time, but deep down I didn't want to see it or feel awkward)*
  - Imagine you were to go back to visit this person a second time. Do you think this would feel commanded (i.e., that something other than yourself was willing you to visit), or chosen (that you were doing it out of your own free will)? *(I think it would feel totally chosen)*

### **Get-well notes - 15 minutes**

Draw students' attention to the quote on the board.

- What do you think about this claim the rabbis are making?
- Do you agree? Why or why not? *(Some might say yes, brightening a sick person's day can help them feel better, supported and loved, and more optimistic and motivated to get better; others might disagree, that medically they must still fight this illness on their own)*
- One sixtieth is a really small amount! Do you think this is intentional? *(It's a very small amount but every little bit can help; it might be the first sixtieth on the road to recovery)*

Explain that one-sixtieth of a recovery might not seem like a lot, but it might not only be uplifting to the person receiving it, that particular kindness might be a kind of healing only other people can alleviate.

Ask if students have ever made "get well soon" cards for *bikkur cholim*. Do you think these cards fulfill the mitzvah? *(Yes because you are going out of your way to do something for the sick person and let them know you're thinking of them; but perhaps no, because it isn't the same as a face-to-face interaction, doesn't take much effort.)*

Tell students they are going to create "level two" bikkur cholim cards, that hopefully have an added meaningful layer since they actually visited the sick person. These cards will provide an extra boost of support for the sick person to let them know you're still thinking of them even after your visit. Students can either work on their own or in pairs (within their groups).



Cards can be decorated on the outside however students choose; on the inside, students should express:

- Gratitude for being able to visit the sick person
- Well wishes for the person to recover
- Some sort of insight from their visiting experience

After students have completed their cards, ask how they have felt completing this mitzvah. How would they do it differently in the future? How is visiting in person different than texting, making a card, or calling on the phone?

### **Conclusion - Bikkur Cholim ladder - 10 minutes**

Remind students of the Tzedakah ladder from Rambam that they encountered in Unit 1 (Lesson 7); if needed, show them the ladder again. Recall that Rambam thought the smallest amount one could give was begrudgingly, while the highest rung was allowing that person to become self-sufficient. In groups or as an entire class, students create their own Bikkur Cholim ladder from “weakest” to “strongest” actions (weak actions might be texting or emailing the sick person, while strong actions might be an in-person visit, cooking a meal for them, and so on.)

*after class:* Please review, compile and send/deliver the cards.

**Note for next lesson:** For the next lesson about *Evayat HaMeit* (comforting mourners), a majority of the lesson will be a guest panel. The panel can consist of any of these members: a rabbi and/or cantor who has experience with funerals, a funeral director, a member of a *hevra kadisha* (burial committee - ask funeral director), the head of an outreach program or shiva coordinator at the synagogue, and if you can find one, a congregant who has gone through a period of mourning.

# Lesson 6: L'Vayat HaMeit

## *Comforting mourners*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Define “comforting mourners” as a mitzvah.
- Articulate why, in their own words, comforting mourners is a mitzvah.

**Materials:** none

### **Timeline:**

:00 - :25 L'Vayat HaMeit panel

:25 - :40 Discussion

:40-:45 Wrap up

### **Procedure:**

#### **Panel - 25 minutes**

Explain to students that one of the greatest mitzvot one can do is “L'vayat hameit,” or comforting mourners. Today we have a range of guests with us who are going to talk with us more about what vayat hameit is, how it works, and why it is such an important mitzvah to fulfill.

Ask guests to explain the following subjects - I suggest giving them these topics beforehand, so they can prepare. Of course, this might change depending on which guests are available for the panel.

*rabbi and/or cantor:*

- their role of guiding a mourning family through the death of a loved one and a funeral
- any experiences that stand out to them
- important rituals that mourners go through (funeral and shiva)
- the importance of comforting mourners as a mitzvah, in their opinion

*funeral director:*

- their role of guiding a mourning family through the death of a loved one and a funeral
- any experiences that stand out to them
- important rituals that mourners go through (funeral and shiva)
- the importance of comforting mourners as a mitzvah, in their opinion

*member of a hevra kadisha:*

- their role of purifying a body before the funeral
- why a hevra kadisha is anonymous
- the importance of comforting mourners as a mitzvah, in their opinion

*outreach program or shiva coordinator:*

- any experiences regarding visiting shivas and comforting mourners
- the importance of comforting mourners as a mitzvah, in their opinion

*congregant who has been in mourning<sup>15</sup>:*

- their experiences as a mourner
- particular moments of being comforted and supported that stood out to them, throughout the process
- how would they advise others who want to comfort someone in mourning? things to do, say and ways to act

### **Discussion - 15 minutes**

Students divide into small groups (either voluntarily or you can assign them) with each of the guest members. Allow for an open debrief discussion in which students and guest panelist can delve more deeply into a certain topic, students can ask the panelist questions, or the panelist can ask the students questions. Encourage panelists to ask students for their opinions so they can participate.

### **Wrap up - 5 minutes**

Ask for the panelists to mention a highlight from their breakout discussion, and see if there are any other questions from students.

On a blank piece of paper, ask students to write the importance of comforting mourners as a mitzvah, in their opinion. Please make sure students are aware that they will be turning this into you, to serve as 'feedback' for you as the teacher to determine what they have learned.

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<sup>15</sup> If you cannot find a congregant who has been in mourning, you can ask any of the above panelists if they personally have gone through this process as a mourner, and if they would like to share their experiences.

# Lesson 7: Iyun Tefilah

## *does prayer help heal?*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Identify Mi Shebeirach and Mourners Kaddish as prayers for healing
- Debate whether or not prayer helps those in need of healing

### **Materials:**

- Guitar, or ask a rabbi, cantor or song leader to join you
- Prayer books

### **Timeline:**

:00 - :15 Synagogue Experience

:15 - :25 Debrief

:25 - 40: Prayer as a response to being human

:35 - :45 Wrap up

### **Procedure:**

#### **Synagogue Experience - 15 minutes**

Begin the session in your synagogue, chapel, or another spiritual place other than the classroom. Ask students to stand together.

Along with either a rabbi, cantor or song leader, lead students in an opening Jewish or secular song that you think will create a warm, spiritual atmosphere. For my high school students last year, “Rivers and Roads” by The Head and The Heart was particularly moving for them. Ask for the cantor or song leader’s opinion. A good fallback is always Hinei Mah Tov.

Then, tell students we are going to offer a prayer for healing with Mi Shebeirach. Ask students to name aloud anyone in their lives who is in need of physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. If they are not mentioned, be sure to include the sick people students visited earlier in the unit. Once students have finished giving names, both you and the rabbi/cantor/song leader lead students in Debbie Friedman’s Mi Shebeirach. If you think students have not memorized the prayer, give them prayer books to follow along.

After Mi Shebeirach, tell students we are now going to think of those who have died who are no longer with us, with Mourners Kaddish. Again, ask students to name anyone for

whom they are saying Kaddish, has a yahrzeit around this time, or are simply remembering. Then lead students in Mourner's Kaddish - again, students can use prayer books if they wish.

End with either Hinei Mah Tov or the song you started with, and then return to your normal classroom. Make sure the prayer books also come with you to the classroom.

### **Debrief - 10 minutes**

Ask students:

- What was this experience like? (*perhaps awkward to be saying these prayers without the rest of a service, might have been meaningful, spiritual, sad*)
- Have you ever participated in one of these blessings at synagogue, camp or in another setting? (*Hopefully most will say yes*)
- Why do you think we have a prayer for healing and a prayer for mourning? (*to pray that the sick person gets better; to become a caring community; to recognize mourners in our community; to ask God to make that person better*)

Believe it or not, praying with intention is a mitzvah. We're now going to look closer at these prayers to try to answer the question: does prayer heal?

### **Prayer as a response to being human - 15 minutes**

Ask if any students know the Hebrew for the word "to pray." It's l'heet-pa-leil (לְהִתְפַּלֵּל). The "heet," or hay-tav, of the word, means that 'to pray' is reflexive. The verbs to dress yourself and to shower are also reflexive, because they are things you do to yourself. So, why do you think "to pray" is reflexive? (*you are talking to your own soul, you are reconnecting with yourself*)

Let's put aside the definition of prayer as "talking to/with God," even if some of us believe that. Let's look inward to some other ideas about prayer.

Below are several general statements about the human condition. In pairs, students find passages in their prayer books that could be potential responses to them (as you can see below there is no one correct answer). Students "translate" that response into modern language. Divide up the statements evenly among groups; if they finish their responses early they can search for the other ones. Please read the example statement and response below so students can get an idea of the activity:

Example statement: "I feel alone."

Example response 1: The daily blessing about being made a Jew - you are always part of the Jewish community.

*Example response 2: Elohai Nishama - every person has a soul, or part of the divine in them, so you are never truly alone.*

*Example response 3: Mi Sheberach - as a community we are here to help support you.*

After ten minutes, or until all students are finished, go through each statement and have student pairs share their responses.

Ask: are these statements unique to Judaism? *(No; most if not all human beings think or feel these ways at some time or another.)* What does that tell us about prayer? *(it reaches us on a human level and responds to our basic feelings and needs, but in a Jewish way.)*

Prayer is a response to the human condition, in all its forms, as you just explored. Prayer also helps us elevate our thinking and feeling, of gratitude, awareness, and the people in our community.

### **Wrap up - 10 minutes**

Ask: So, does prayer help?

- prayer does not necessarily physically heal someone - and sometimes this isn't possible, but:
- prayer can help send 'good wishes'
- prayer can remind us of people who are in need
- prayer can motivate us to continue visiting and supporting those in need
- it can be tremendously comforting for a sick person to know that they are being prayed for

Why do you think praying with intention is a mitzvah? *(Without intention, prayer loses its power to do all the above; we are commanded to think about others who are hurting and in need of our love and support)*

# Resource 3.5: Prayer Search

Statement: "I feel alone."

Response:

Statement: "I feel happy."

Response:

Statement: "I feel sad."

Response:

Statement: "I want to be part of a community."

Response:

Statement: "I am in pain."

Response:

Statement: "I want to become a better person."

Response:

Statement: "I feel connected to nature."

Response:

Statement: "I'm afraid of dying."

Response:

Statement: "I want to remember others who are in need."

Response:

Statement: "I want to understand what God means to me."

Response:

Statement: "Thank you for everything I have been given."

Response:

Statement: "I'm sorry for everything I have done."

Response:

Statement: "Life is an incredible gift."

Response:



# Lesson 8: Conclusion

## *Love your neighbor as yourself*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Assess the balance between the needs and anxieties of the visitors and mitzvah do-ers
- Critique the list of mitzvot in Eilu Divarim as “without measure” according to what may seem like outliers.
- Define what “without measure” in Eilu Divarim means for themselves
- Recommend additional mitzvot that are also without measure

### **Materials:**

- Text study copies

### **Timeline:**

:00 - :10 Set Induction: Mirroring exercise

:10 - :25 Discussion

:25 - :40 Eilu Divarim text study

:40 - :45 Wrap up

### **Procedure:**

#### **Set Induction: Mirroring Exercise - 5 minutes**

Students form pairs and stand facing each other. One person is the leader who slowly moves in any way they choose, and the other is the mirror who has to follow their every move, including facial expressions. After two minutes have the leaders and followers switch.

#### **Activity 1 - Discussion- 15 minutes**

Discuss the previous activity with these questions:

- Was this activity easy or difficult, and why? (*It was easy because the other person moved slowly enough that I was able to copy them; it was difficult because I couldn't move at the same pace as the other person, or what they were doing was unpredictable*)
- What were some of the skills you needed in order to be successful? (*Attentiveness, a lot of awareness and concentration, willingness to follow someone else*)
- How are these skills similar doing the mitzvot we have learned about in this unit? (*We need to be really aware and present for the people we're doing these mitzvot for; we are following the other person's lead, and they are more of the focus than us*)

- Was anyone anxious during this activity, and if so, why? (*I felt anxious because I had no idea what my partner was going to do next, I was afraid of making the wrong move, I was afraid of looking awkward or silly so I made really boring movements*)
- What about these mitzvot can raise our anxiety? (*When a person is sick or mourning, or vulnerable in any way, we don't know how they are going to react or what they need; we are afraid of feeling vulnerable ourselves or being reminded of sickness or death*)
- How do we overcome these anxieties and take care of ourselves while doing these mitzvot? If students are having trouble have them think about their bikkur cholim visits (*Not doing it alone; naming and becoming aware of our anxieties (such as the free write before our bikkur cholim visit) beforehand; preparing and having a plan going in; debriefing and reflecting afterwards; try to leave those anxieties at the door*)
- What could help you improve and become a better sick-visitor? (*Getting more comfortable by just doing it more often; becoming more self aware of my anxieties beforehand*)

### **Activity 2 Eilu Divarim Text Study - 15 minutes**

Pass out Eilu Divarim text sheets (below); students divide into groups of two and go through the sheets together.

*note: If students are struggling, “without measure” means that one does these mitzvot not for one’s self, but for someone else, or for something greater than themselves. There is no expectation of reciprocity (as Levinas too describes) or any particular reward.*

### **Activity 3 - Wrap up - 10 minutes**

Students do the mirroring activity again, in different pairs, except instead of moving their bodies, students can only change and mirror their faces.

Ask students if they remember Levinas, and the face art gallery from the very beginning of this unit. If not, please summarize it again. Has your understanding of the face and seeing the other changed throughout the course of this unit? (*I feel like I can better understand Levinas’ idea that we are compelled to help one another from our bikkur cholim visit; I feel like I can help the people around me and fulfill the call of the other*)

Contrast this unit with the one before it, that focused on suffering in the community - is it possible to see each and every person’s face individually? Not on a large scale, but remind students that no story is alike; just because you have experienced the same sickness or loss as another, that doesn't mean you completely understand them. Even when looking at large groups in need, we have to remember that each and every person is an individual with their own story, their own suffering, and we have to meet them at it.

## Resource 3.6 Lesson 7: Eilu Divarim

EILU d'varim she-ein lahem shiur,  
she-adam ocheil peiroteihem  
baolam hazeh  
v'hakeren kayemet lo laolam haba.  
V'eilu hein:  
kibud av va-eim,  
ug'milut chasadim,  
v'hashkamat beit hamidrash  
shacharit v'ar'vit,  
v'hachnasat orchim,  
uvikur cholim,  
v'hachnasat kalah, ul'vayat hameit,  
v'iyun t'filah,  
vahavaat shalom  
bein adam lachaveiro,  
v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam.

אֵלֵּי דְּבָרִים שֶׁאֵין לָהֶם שְׁעוֹר,  
שֶׁאָדָם אוֹכֵל פְּרוֹתֵיהֶם  
בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה  
וְהֶקְרָן קַיֵּמֶת לוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.  
וְאֵלֵּי הֵינּוּ:  
כְּבוֹד אָב וְאִם,  
וּגְמִילוֹת חֲסָדִים,  
וְהַשְׁכַּמַּת בֵּית הַמִּדְרָשׁ  
שַׁחֲרִית וְעַרְבִית,  
וְהַכְּנַסַּת אוֹרְחִים,  
וּבְקוֹר חוֹלִים,  
וְהַכְּנַסַּת כֶּלֶה, וְלַגִּית הַמֵּת,  
וְעִיּוֹן תְּפִלָּה,  
וְהַבָּאָת שְׁלוֹם  
בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבֵרוֹ,  
וְתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגֶד כָּלֶם.

THESE ARE THINGS that are limitless,  
of which a person enjoys the fruit of this world,  
while the principal remains in the world to come.  
They are: honoring one's father and mother,  
engaging in deeds of compassion,  
arriving early for study, morning and evening,  
dealing graciously with guests, visiting the sick,  
providing for the wedding couple,  
accompanying the dead for burial,  
being devoted in prayer,  
and making peace among people.  
But the study of Torah encompasses them all.

Eilu Divarim is a text from the Mishnah, Peah 1:1. This version is from the prayer book Mishkan Tefilah, page 44.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Think about doing these mitzvot- what might they have in common?
2. With this in mind, what can “these are things that are limitless” mean?
  1. The ancient rabbis believed that one experiences reward for one’s good deeds in the afterlife. What do you think makes these mitzvot worthy of more reward than other?
3. How are some of these mitzvot different from each other, and why?
  1. Do the three mitzvot we studied (visiting the sick, comforting mourners (called here accompanying the dead for burial), and being devoted in prayer) stand out to you in any way?
4. What are some other mitzvot that you would add to this list?

# Unit 4 - Answer, Return, Repent

## *How do we recover?*

### **Enduring Understandings:**

- One who saves a life, saves an entire world. - Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a

### **Essential Questions:**

- How do we respond to, grow from, and experience joy in alleviating the suffering of others?
- How do we balance helping others with allowing the sufferer to take their own journey of recovery?
- What changes about suffering when it is internal?

### **Unit Goals:**

- To teach learners about teshuva as a long, transformative recovery process, for others and for themselves
- To teach learners about the AA recovery process as a means for alleviating suffering
- To inspire learners to be compassionate and supportive for loved ones who are in recovery

### **Unit Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Describe a time they did teshuva.
- Identify at least three forms of addiction in their own lives.
- Critique Rambam's definition of and steps for teshuva according to how we give tzedakah in modern times, and whether making someone self-sufficient is the best form of giving.
- Construct their own definitions of teshuva, addiction and recovery.
- Hypothesize why God wants us to do teshuva.
- Have the opportunity to experience listening to AA members' stories about suffering, addiction and recovery.
- Have the opportunity to experience an AA meeting observation.
- Create an artifact that creatively explains to an outside audience how to support a friend or loved one in recovery.

### **Key Terms:**

- Recovery
- Healing
- Teshuva

- Addiction
- AA
- Forgiveness

**A note to the educator:**

I strongly recommend sending an email or other form of correspondence to parents before beginning this unit. Addiction and recovery are intense topics, and could incite different emotional responses in your students. Additionally, addiction and recovery might be a part of their families, and parents should be aware that these topics are going to be discussed in class.

Please note that this unit has been intentionally placed towards the end of the course, because it has the most intense material. By this point, students should have created a classroom community and safe space for each other to experience this material and have discussions about it.

The material regarding addiction and substance abuse is *not* designed to preach to students (“don’t abuse alcohol and drugs,” etc). Rather, AA is a case study for recovery for alleviating internal suffering. There are not opportunities in this unit for students to share their own experiences with drugs and alcohol, and I would discourage any student for doing so.

# Authentic Assessment

By this point in the course, students should...

- Finish their one experience of their chosen cause
- Meet with the educator to discuss their experience, their connection to the cause, and which outside group they would like to present to.
- Start gathering artifacts for presentation and begin thinking about the presentation

# Lesson 1: Teshuva

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Describe a time they did teshuva
- Choose which teshuva quotes best match different aspects of teshuva.
- Critique Rambam's definition of and steps for teshuva as only one way to achieve teshuva, rather than achieving teshuva in different ways for different people.
- Construct their own definition of teshuva
- Hypothesize why God wants us to do teshuva.

## Materials:

- Teshuva quotes
- Rambam text study materials
- String
- Scissors

## Suggested Activities:

### *Activity 1- Free Write - 10 minutes*

Learners write about a time in which they sought forgiveness from someone else. Ask for volunteers to share. Then, ask for learners to again individually write about a time in which they sought forgiveness from *themselves*. Again, ask for volunteers.

Discuss similar or different processes the learners went through to ask forgiveness, to introduce the idea of teshuva.

### *Activity 2 - Teshuva Quotes- 15 minutes*

Print out the below quotes, one to each page, and post them around the room. Ask students to walk around, reading the quotes; then, they will stand by the quote that best fits each definition of teshuva:

- Teshuva means repentance.
- Teshuva means turning.
- Teshuva means answer.
- Teshuva means being forgiven.
- Teshuva as something we do on Yom Kippur
- Teshuva is something we do between people
- Teshuva is something I do between myself and God.

Ask: why do you think there are so many aspects to teshuva?



*Activity 3 - Teshuva Text Study- 15 minutes*

First, please introduce who Rambam is: Rambam is also known as Maimonides, but his real name is Moshe ben Maimon. He lived in Spain and Egypt in the 12th century and is one of the most famous Jewish commentators and philosophers; he was also a physician.

This Rambam text is traditionally accepted as “the” traditional teshuva text study. Divide students into small groups to study using the text sheet below. After 15 minutes, the class comes back together and have them share their answers to the last question.

In their small groups, challenge students to create their own definition of teshuva, encompassing the text they have just learned. Ask for groups to share after 5 minutes. If these below aspects aren't mentioned be sure to do so afterwards:

Teshuva is...

- both commanded and chosen
  - you *have* to do it (everyone has flaws and makes mistakes, so no one is exempt)
  - but also self motivated - no one else can tell you to do it
- both individual and communal
  - asking forgiveness and repenting is usually private
  - but we also confess sins communally on Yom Kippur
- Just as much between people as it is with God
- *doing teshuva is both an inner and outer process - there isn't just one way to do it.*

***Activity 3 - God wants us to do teshuva / recovery is part of being human***

Give each student a long piece of string and scissors. Give students these instructions: first, think about a flaw or transgression you have committed, and cut the string with the scissors. Then, take some time to think about how they sought forgiveness from others, themselves or God, and how they are continuing to work through it and improve; then, tie the two cut ends back together. Tell students this isn't a race, but to really dwell on their thoughts and go through this process privately. Let students find their own space in the room and do this at their own pace for 10 minutes.

After 10 minutes, regroup and hold a discussion, using these guiding questions:

- Ask about the experience. What just happened?
- How did it feel to cut the string when thinking about a transgression you made? What might this action be a metaphor for?
- How did it feel to retie the string in a knot when thinking about forgiveness and improvement? What might this action be a metaphor for?
- What happened to your string by the end of the activity? What might this knotted piece of string represent?

Tell this story which is from our Hasidic tradition: Imagine that every human being is tied to God by a rope. The rope is severed when we commit mistakes and transgress, but when we do teshuva, the connection is reformed by tying a knot.

Ask: Why might God want us to do teshuva?

It sounds counterintuitive, but doing teshuva, even though it began with a mistake, can not only make us closer to God, but also to better understanding ourselves, and to becoming better people.

Ask for students' reactions and thoughts.

# Resource 4.1: Teshuva Quotes

Every human being is endowed by his Maker with two eyes. With one he is expected to look at his neighbor, fastening his gaze on his virtues, his excellences, his desirable qualities. With the other eye, he is to turn inward to see his own shortcomings in order to correct them. - Rabbi Israel Salanter

Humility is the root and beginning of repentance. - Bachya ibn Pakuda

Rabbi Eliezer said, "Repent one day before your death." His disciples asked him, "Does then one know on what day he will die?" Rabbi Eliezer replied, "All the more reason he should repent today, lest he die tomorrow." - Bavli, Shabbat 53a.

Teshuvah is not simply apologizing or making right the damage we have done, though these are the prerequisites. It is only this: The Return. Teshuvah is the hardest thing in the world...but it is also the easiest thing, since the process of teshuvah begins with the simple thought of wanting to begin [to change]... - Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, Moment Magazine

Repentance cannot be comprehended rationally; it does not really make sense. Even the angels do not understand what repentance is. - Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik

This is the substance of the confession ... in which the person acknowledges that no other cause is to be blamed for his misdeed and its consequences but he himself. - Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

"Teshuva insists that we can liberate ourselves from our past, defy predictions of our future, by a single act of turning . . . as long as we do it now." - Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Self knowledge and self-improvement is very difficult for most people. It usually needs great courage and long struggle. - Abraham Maslow

"For transgressions between a person and God, Yom Kippur atones. But for transgressions between people, Yom Kippur does not atone until one seeks forgiveness from the other directly." Babylonian Talmud, Mishnah Yoma 8:9

## Resource 4.2: Rambam Text

“What is teshuva? First, it is when the transgressor leaves one’s sin...and concludes in their heart to not do it again. The transgressor must regret what they did in the past, and needs to confess verbally and speak out about it.

When has a person truly completed teshuva? If the sinner has the opportunity of committing once again the sinful act and it is quite possible to repeat it, and yet the person refrains from so doing because they have repented.”

- Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What is the advantage to having clear steps for teshuva?
- Do you agree with these steps?
- Are there any steps you would add or change and why?
- Which quotes around the room does this Rambam text support?
- Are there any quotes around the room that contradict, or offer something different, from Rambam?
- How can we have all these different aspects of teshuva at once?

“Teshuvah atones for all sins. Even a person who was wicked his whole life and repented in his final moments will not be reminded of any aspect of his wickedness.”

**Do you agree with Rambam? How so, not so?**

# Lesson 2: What is addiction?

## *And how do we heal from it?*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Identify at least three forms of addiction in their own lives
- Rank the 12 Steps in their own order, and defend it
- Compose a question for an AA speaker for next session

### **Materials:**

- Post it notes
- Pens
- Slips of The 12 Steps
- The 12 Steps in order

### **Suggested Activities:**

#### *Activity 1 - Defining addiction - 15 minutes*

Explain to students that before we talk about recovery, we first need to define addiction.

Write on the board these statements:

- \_\_\_\_\_ is a bad habit that I do too often
- I impulsively \_\_\_\_\_ without thinking too much about the consequences
- I depend on (*habit/object*) \_\_\_\_\_ so much, I would have a hard time adjusting to living without it.

Give these examples to put it in context:

- *Checking Facebook* is a bad habit I do too often.
- I impulsively *eat unhealthy food* without thinking too much about the consequences
- I depend on *my cell phone* so much, I would have a hard time adjusting to living without it.

Note that the third example is a habit or object, *not* a person or feeling (such as family or love).

Give each student three post-it notes, and students write responses to each question. Once they are finished, put the post it notes on the board. Divide students into three groups, and have them silently categorize the post it notes for each question. Afterwards, groups summarize their categories.

Reveal to students that these are addictions. Usually we think about addiction as purely substances like drugs and alcohol - but every single one of us has some sort of addiction in our life.

Why do you think this is? (*it has to do with being human, compensating for loneliness, acting on our impulses*)

The thing is, the way that we are addicted to our cell phones or other technology, destructive habits to our bodies, and other addictions that you mentioned - in the same way, people are addicted to substances like drugs and alcohol. It's just become such a part of their brain chemistry that they literally can't stop themselves from doing it.

### *Activity 2 - The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous - 20 minutes*

Divide students into small groups (depending on your class size). For each group, give students the AA 12 Steps in slips (see below). Ask each group to decide what they think the order is, and be prepared to defend it. Give students 10 minutes to work, and then each group presents and defends their order.

Read the order to students and have each group reorder their slips to the correct order. Ask, what do you notice about the steps? Where does spirituality come in? Note that AA has their own bible, and that the road to recovery is not just mental or physical, but also spiritual.

### *3 - Questions for Speaker - 5 minutes*

Tell students that we will have a very special guest for the next session; a person who is recovering is going to come and share their story with us. Have students write a question they would want to ask a person recovering from addiction; make sure their name is on it so you can hand it back to them next session. Please review these in advance for appropriateness and clarity between sessions, before handing them back to the students.

## THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we *understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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## *Resource 4.4: A guide for the educator: The AA Meeting Observation Experience*

The goal of this visiting experience is for learners to encounter the intense, emotional, and incredibly supportive healing process of AA (or some other anonymous meeting) through observation.

Some guidelines for the visit:

- Contact a local AA Central Office in your area; your clergy or outreach coordinator of your synagogue might have this information. If you are in Los Angeles, Beit T'shuva is a phenomenal contact and I highly suggest being in touch with them.
- Usually Thursday evenings are open to family members and friends to visit, so this is the ideal time for students to also observe.
- Try to find as many meetings as possible for students to observe, so that they can visit as small groups as possible. Large groups can become uncomfortable and awkward for the AA members. With each one, make sure that observation is approved by the office.
- It is preferable for some of the AA members, or coordinators, be the people you reach out to for the upcoming panel in Lesson 3; this way, students will already have a familiar face at the meeting.
- These meetings should be in place of a class; it is counted as a lesson below.
- Once you are able to confirm several meeting times, you will need to organize which students attend which meeting. I suggest speaking with parents to make sure that their child attends a meeting that is convenient for them driving-wise; once the groups are decided, the groups can decide amongst themselves if they would like to carpool or not (or if one of the students drives other students, if they have their license). Regardless I highly encourage parents *not* attending the meeting with their children, so that students feel as comfortable in this space as possible.
- Even though I am speaking in terms of Alcoholics Anonymous, students can observe a different anonymous meeting as long as it is age appropriate.



# Lesson 3: Addiction and Recovery

## *Listening to others' stories*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Have the opportunity to experience listening to AA members' stories about suffering, addiction and recovery.

### **Materials:**

- Questions from last lesson
- Paper and pencils/pens to take notes

### **Suggested Activities:**

#### *Activity 1 - Recovery Speaker - 45 minutes*

Invite a member from the AA meetings or your own community to share their stories of addiction and recovery. Please note that your guest does not have to be Jewish, nor did he/she need to have a particularly Jewish recovery process. I would recommend having only one speaker, or at the most two, so they can really share their story and not rush through it.

Redistribute students' questions that they wrote last time, and give them paper and pens/pencils to write down additional questions. Have your speaker share their story and then take questions from the students. Below are some sample questions that you can ask first, if their story didn't naturally answer them, and if students don't ask:

- What does "recovery" mean to you?
- How did the 12 steps help you in your journey to recovery?
- Did you face any setbacks or struggles as you were recovering? How did you overcome them?
- What did your support system look like as you began your recovery?
  - What does good support look like to you?
- Was there a particular text, story or teaching (Jewish or otherwise) that has particularly resonated with you during your recovery?
- Our students are going to be observing AA meetings later in the course. What are any suggestions or tips that you would give them as they prepare for this experience?

# Lesson 4: Preparation for AA Meeting

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Define what a “safe space” is in their own words, and articulate what it looks like
- Analyze the value of having a safe space among family, friends and other recovery support systems, while in recovery
- Generate at least five adjectives for a safe space, and apply them both to a recovery meeting as well as their class
- Evaluate if their class is a safe space for them.

## Materials:

- Questionnaire
- Paper or Google form

## Suggested Activities:

### *Activity 1 - Private Share, version 1 - 15 minutes*

Create a yes/no questionnaire of increasingly personal questions, that perhaps begin with something like “I brushed my teeth today” to “There are things about myself that I do not like”<sup>16</sup>; learners fill out the questionnaire as usual, but then randomly switch them with each other, such as crumpling them up, throwing them in the middle of the circle, and redistributing the questionnaires. Now, with a sheet that is not theirs, students then respond to the questions as they appear on the new questionnaire.

Afterwards, discuss:

- What was this experience like?
- Were there questions many people answered the same? Differently?
- What surprised you?
- Do you think you could answer these questions with your name attached to them? Why or why not?
- What is a safe space? How could it have altered the anonymity (or lack thereof) of our questions?

### *Activity 1 - Private Share, version 2 - 15 minutes*

Have learners anonymously share something that no one else knows about them. This can be done several ways. Typically, students write on pieces of paper that are gathered

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<sup>16</sup> See list of examples here: <http://bit.ly/1sHyw44>

in a box. The educator then pulls them out and says them aloud. Or, students can fill out a Google Form (without using their name), the results of which are projected on the wall.

Afterwards, discuss the experience—what felt comfortable or uncomfortable? In option 2, if silly statements came up, ask what they think might have caused this reaction without calling anyone out or shaming them. Ask, what is a safe space? What creates a safe space? Do you think we have one here in our classroom? How can we help foster a safe space moving forward?

*Activity 2 - Mock AA Meeting - 30 minutes*

Using the resources below, simulate an AA meeting for your class. Instead of using alcohol, consider using another topic that both reaches your class but is not so personal that it will make them uncomfortable. One example might be Facebook/Internet/cell phone addiction.

<http://www.aasf.org/forms/SuggestedMeetingFormat.pdf>  
<http://www.darvsmith.com/dox/aa.html>

Afterwards, discuss the experience—what felt comfortable or uncomfortable as they shared or observed the process. If classmates tried to be silly or act out, ask (without shaming them right) what they think might have caused this reaction. Ask, what is a safe space? What creates a safe space? Do you think we have one here in our classroom? How can we help foster a safe space moving forward?

*Note* - During this class period, or the last class period before the AA meetings, be sure that students have signed up for their preferred AA meeting (which should be in lieu of a class that week), and also determine if transportation will be the responsibility of the parents or through the synagogue. I strongly encourage staggering the meetings so you can attend each of them as well.

# Lesson 5: AA Meeting Experience

## **Objective:**

- Students will have the opportunity to react to observing an AA meeting.
- Students will have the opportunity to reflect on the experience of observing an AA meeting through guided questions and a thank-you letter to the AA group they observed, as well as creating an artifact that creatively explains how to support a friend or loved one in recovery.

**Materials:** none

## **Suggested Activities:**

During the AA meetings, I encourage you to be in touch with either driving parents or the students directly, if you have their cell phone numbers, to make sure they have arrived and are attending the meetings. Feel free to join one of the meetings (or more, if they are taking place at other times) as an observer.

# Lesson 6: Debrief from AA Meeting

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Contrast the different meetings that students attended
- Suggest at least three reasons for why these meetings are successful for those in recovery
- Students will have the opportunity to reflect on the experience of observing an AA meeting through guided questions and a thank-you letter to the AA group they observed, as well as creating an artifact that creatively explains how to support a friend or loved one in recovery.

**Materials:** none

## Suggested Activities:

*Set induction - One-word share— 5 minutes*

Ask learners to think of one word that describes what they observed in their meetings. After giving them several moments to think, go around the room and have each student say their word without explaining or justifying it.

*Activity 1 - Group discussion and reflection, version 1 - 20 minutes*

Create small groups in which at least one student represents a different meeting that was observed. (Depending on numbers, this might not be exactly even.) Each student in their respective groups will summarize their group and what they observed, and they will then investigate what worked in their groups, and why.

You can create a guided discussion sheet that asks these or similar questions:

- What was this experience like for you? Did anything surprise you?
- What was similar about all of your groups? what was different?
- What was the feeling like in the room? Think of specific examples that might have illustrated trust, friendship and honesty in the group.
- As a group, come up with at least three specific reasons why you think these groups work for those in recovery.

After 20 minutes, groups come back together and share their 3 reasons. Create a collective list on the board, noting any similarities.

*Activity 1 - Group discussion and reflection, version 2 - 20 minutes*

*note: this version will be shorter if you are working with a time constraint.*

Create small groups for different meeting that was observed. Groups recap what they observed, and they will then investigate what worked in their groups, and why.

Create a guided discussion sheet that asks these or similar questions:

- What was this experience like for you? Did anything surprise you?
- What was the feeling like in the room? Think of specific examples that might have illustrated trust, friendship and honesty in the group.
- As a group, come up with at least three specific reasons why you think these groups work for those in recovery.

After 20 minutes, groups come back together, present what they observed, and share their 3 reasons. Create a collective list on the board, noting any similarities.

*Activity 3 - Creative presentations for loved ones and friends - 25 minutes*

Students will create an artifact that creatively explains to an outside audience how to support a friend or loved one in recovery. Students can create a short blog post, a short video, written or filmed PSA, or a different medium they suggest with your approval. Students present their “first drafts” at the end of class, and peers make suggestions on ways to improve it before they finish it.

*note: Please keep these as they will be completed during the next session.*

# Lesson 7: Conclusion

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Create an artifact that creatively explains to an outside audience how to support a friend or loved one in recovery.
- Suggest revisions to help strengthen other groups' artifacts
- Articulate how their ideas about recovery and healing have changed throughout the unit.

## Materials:

- Sparkling cider
- Paper and pencils
- Materials for creative presentations, as needed

## Suggested Activities:

### *Activity 1 - Finish and Present Creative Presentations - 30 minutes*

Students finish the creative suggestions from the previous lesson. (Students who are creating some sort of video can “film” it on a smartphone.) Once finished, students present their creations to each other.

Toast students' achievements and finishing this unit with sparkling cider. Ask: how can these creations be used outside of our classroom? How can we share these resources? *(Examples may include posting on the synagogue website or blog, sharing on social media, submitting to local paper, showing to younger religious school grades, emailing to parents and families, creating a Confirmation ritual in which this is shared once a year with wider community)*

### *Activity 2 - Reflections on this unit - 15 minutes*

Discuss as a group:

- How have your ideas about recovery changed?
- Was there a specific experience or piece of learning that facilitated this change?
- How would you describe addiction and recovery to someone else?
- How would you help a loved one or friend going through recovery?
- How is recovery Jewish?

For the final five minutes of class, ask students: “How can you apply what we’ve learned to your own life?” This might bring up thoughts about students going through their own kinds of healing, or other friends or loved ones who are recovering. Students write privately to themselves, and keep their writing at the end of class.

# Unit 5 - *Lo Alecha Hamlacha Ligmor*

*It isn't up to you... but you aren't off the hook!*

## **Enduring Understandings:**

- It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. (Rabbi Tarfon, Pirke Avot 2:21)
- One who saves a life, saves an entire world. (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a)
- Ethical mitzvot are engaged in and internalized through both action and study.

## **Essential Questions:**

- Are mitzvot commanded or chosen?
- How have we changed throughout the year?
- What matters most to me in fixing the world?

## **Unit Goals:**

- To teach learners about the balance between study and action in ethical mitzvot
- To celebrate learners' commitment, struggles and experiences throughout the course.
- To inspire learners to both individually and communally commit to being ethical, dedicated and involved Jewish citizens in the world, who consistently strive to alleviate suffering.

## **Unit Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Contrast their current views of the mitzvot with their views from the beginning of the curriculum
- Assess the importance of action and study in performing ethical mitzvot.
- Design a shared rubric for their presentations of their chosen cause.
- Create and defend mock presentations for their chosen cause.
- Create a communal mitzvah contract to last beyond the course.

## **Key Terms**

- Mitzvah (concluding definitions)
- Study
- Action



# Authentic Assessment: Presentations and Culmination

By the end of Unit 4, students should have:

- chosen and been engaged in their cause at least once
- met with the teacher at **least twice** to discuss. (If meeting in person is not possible, these meetings can be conducted over Skype, FaceTime or Google Hangouts, or over the phone - I strongly discourage having this conversation over email)

At the beginning of Unit 5, you will want to determine which dates will be presentation dates. The number of days will depend on the amount of students and dates available throughout the year. Students should:

- Be made aware that they are responsible for choosing and organizing a talk with an outside group for a presentation about their cause. This “outside group” means it is not their family or this class, but could be another class in the religious school, one of their high school classes, a Hebrew High class, or another group they would like to speak with. They will give mock presentations in class in order to prepare them. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes long and detail their cause, why it is important to them, their personal experiences in the cause, what the audience can do to help, and why it deserves their attention and effort.
- This presentation should be a Powerpoint or Prezi presentation along with at least five “artifacts”. These artifacts are some sort of tangible evidence regarding their chosen suffering - either the suffering itself, or steps taken to alleviate it. The artifacts can be photographs, videos, interviews, physical items, and so on, depending on their focus.
- Sign up for presentation dates, but not work on them just yet until Lesson 3 (Designing a Rubric).
- Start thinking about which outside, non-confirmation or synagogue group they would most like to present their cause to.

This assessment, and their experiences in these causes, can also be integrated into your Confirmation ceremony, but confirmands should still be required to give this presentation to their chosen audience.

# Lesson 1: Action vs Study

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Reiterate Akiva and Tarfon's different opinions about Torah study
- Critique or defend Akiva and Tarfon's positions, drawing on the year's experiences.
- Debate if action or study is more important in enacting ethical mitzvot.

## Suggested Activities:

### *Activity 1 - experiencing study or action - 20 minutes*

Split the class into two groups, each of which receive a set of directions. The first group is given a pair of candlesticks, grape juice, a kiddish cup, and challah, along with the blessings, and is instructed to prepare and act out the Shabbat blessings. The second group is given a text about Shabbat, and asked to study it and discuss their reactions. Whenever the first group is finished with the blessings, groups switch.

Then rejoin as a group and discuss: what was different about each of the two groups? Which group, do you think, learned more about Shabbat? When you switched, how did your experiences have changed? Do you think going from action to study or study to action was better, or was one experience more rich just jumping into it first? What is more important, acting or studying? Explain that this became a source of debate to the ancient rabbis, who weren't sure if performing or studying the mitzvot were more important.

### *Activity 2 - Text Study - 15-20 minutes*

Ask students to take a few moments and quietly think of a time when action was more important than study, and vice versa. Students then share with a neighbor, and then volunteers share with the entire class. Discuss any commonalities between these experiences and if there are any overall patterns. Then conduct a text study using the resource below. Students can either work in pairs, the same small groups as the set induction activity, or as an entire class.

# Resource 5.1 Shabbat blessings

## Resource 5.2: Shabbat text sheet

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto God, in it you shalt not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days God made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore God blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. - Exodus 20:7-10 (*the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai*)

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as God commanded you. Six days shalt you labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath for God, in it you shalt not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor thine ox, nor your mule, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates; that your man-servant and your maid-servant may rest as well as you. And you shalt remember that you was a servant in the land of Egypt, and God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. - Deuteronomy 5:11-14 (*Moses recites the Ten Commandments before the Israelites enter the land of Canaan*)

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What are the similarities between both recitations of the commandment to keep Shabbat?
- Each commandment gives a different reason to keep Shabbat. What are they?
- The Israelites were far more agricultural and settled by the book of Deuteronomy. How might that influence the change?
- “Remember” and “Observe” are two different things. How do we remember on Shabbat? How do we observe? (note: this is the reason why we have two Shabbat candlesticks!)

## Resource 5.2: Kiddushin 40b

Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were once reclining in the upper story of Nithza's house, in Lod, when this question was posed to them: Which is greater, study or action?

Rabbi Tarfon answered, saying: Action is greater.

Rabbi Akiva answered, saying: Study is greater.

All the rest agreed with Akiva that study is greater than action, because it leads to action.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Imagine that Tarfon and Akiva both continued their arguments with “because...”. How do you think they each would have made their case?
2. We can probably assume that this argument is within the context of Judaism, or more specifically, mitzvot. Why do you think this debate was important to the rabbis?
3. Whom do you personally agree with and why? Has learning something ever shaped a later experience of yours, or has an experience ever spoken for itself? Draw on the experiences we have had together as a class this year, as well as the experiences with your own chosen cause.
4. Why do you think the rabbis sided with Akiva?
5. Do you think study leads to action? Does the process end there?
6. How might the tension between “mitzvah as commandment” and “mitzvah as chosen” play into this argument?

# Lesson 2: Action vs Study (Part 2)

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Recall Akiva and Tarfon's different opinions about Torah study
- Analyze how action or study are equally important for enacting ethical mitzvot.
- Create their own physical representation of the relationship(s) between the two (action and study).

## Suggested Activities:

*Set Induction - Tarfon / Akiva debate reminder - 5 minutes*

Give two volunteers the text sheet from last time and, with one acting as Tarfon and the other as Akiva, them improvise a skit to remind the class.

*Activity 1 - Action vs Study Debate - 35 minutes*

As a group, brainstorm action's pros and cons, and study's pros and cons (see example below, and be sure to mention any that the class don't bring up ). Then, split class into two teams; each team now represents either Rabbi Tarfon or Rabbi Akiva's side of the debate. Imagine that today, the CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis) is holding this exact same debate for Reform Jews today. Should Reform Jews primarily act out the ethical mitzvot, or should they be studying them more? (They are not swayed by the conclusion of "the people" from the text.)

Teams should use the brainstorming activity to form the foundation of their arguments, but now in their teams, they will construct opening and closing statements in a mock trial. Sides can also role play any witnesses they may want to call to the stand. Teacher acts as the CCAR (or judge). I suggest that each student plays a different role (that is, one student does opening argument, another main argument, and so on), rather than one student playing lawyer for the entire case.

Structure is as follows: opening arguments by both teams; main argument by Action, including witnesses; one-cross examination question for each witness; main argument by Study, including witnesses; one-cross examination question for each witness; closing arguments.

This is the verdict that you should share with the students: After two fantastic arguments, I have decided that Action is more important than Study. It is better to fulfill the mitzvah without completely understanding it, than to study all day without ever doing the actual mitzvah. However, Study is still invaluable to adding to the intention

and understanding of the mitzvah, which can make it all the more fulfilling, and motivate the person to continue fulfilling mitzvot. “Mitzvah goreret mitzvah,” a mitzvah leads to another mitzvah.<sup>17</sup>

*Activity 2 - Expressing the relationship between action and study - 20 minutes*

Ask students: do you agree or disagree with me, and why? What do you think the relationship between study and action looks like visually?

In small groups, students create their own physical representation of the relationship between study and action. This might look like a ‘recycle’ sign, a yin-yang, or perhaps an infinity sign. Students must defend their representation to the class explaining how it can inform their own ideas about performing and studying mitzvot.

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<sup>17</sup> Pirke Avot 4:2/

## Resource 5.3: Sample Pros and Cons

### Action

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One is actually fulfilling the mitzvah</li> <li>- Everyone can do it, regardless of how much they know</li> <li>- Can lead to motivation to learn more about the mitzvah</li> <li>- One is making a difference, rather than just learning about it</li> <li>- The act of going good might be just as rewarding as understanding what it is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May not have the correct understanding of the mitzvah</li> <li>- Might make a mistake (such as, say something insensitive to a sick person or mourner)</li> <li>- Might not be alleviating the suffering in the most impactful way</li> <li>- Not having correct understanding might not lead to same fulfillment</li> </ul>

### Study

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One is preparing to do the mitzvah correctly and in a Jewish way</li> <li>- One understands what the mitzvah is, what to do and what not to do</li> <li>- Might create better intention going into the mitzvah</li> <li>- Makes sure to be sensitive to the other people involved in the mitzvah</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can become too comfortable with just studying</li> <li>- Learning about the mitzvah might not be as important as doing it</li> <li>- Becoming too focused on the details could lead to not being present or not being flexible for other situations</li> </ul>



# Lesson 3: What have we learned?

## *Reflecting personally on the year*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Compare their current views of the mitzvot with their past views from the beginning of the curriculum
- Analyze their Jewish connection and engagement until now according to their timelines
- Hypothesize where their “mitzvah” level will be over the next several years
- Interview past Confirmation students

### **Suggested Activities:**

#### *Activity 1 - Mitzvah web - 10 minutes*

If you have a big whiteboard, write “Mitzvah (then)” and “Mitzvah (now)” on opposite sides of the whiteboard. You can also do this with large sheets of paper on opposite sides of the room. As students walk in, give each of them a dry erase marker, or pen, and ask them to quietly write on each side of the board/paper how they defined mitzvah at the beginning of the course, as opposed to now. If students see a word another student has written that they agree with, they can add a check mark next to it.

Afterwards, students look at both halves together and discuss how they have changed and why, and what might have stayed the same as well. What is the biggest aspect of the word “mitzvah” that has changed for you? What questions about mitzvot do you feel have been resolved for you? What new questions or tensions have arisen?

#### *Activity 2 - How have you grown - 15 minutes*

Individually, students fill out on a sheet of paper their own definitions for words: mitzvah, tikkun olam, suffering, responsibility, and Judaism. Afterwards, volunteers read out definitions.

Surprise! We did this activity at the beginning of the year - hand back the word association activity sheet from Unit One (Lesson 1). Students first review and compare their sheets privately by answering the below questions, and then discuss with a partner (you can write this on the board or create a questionnaire for them):

1. What are some of the differences you see among your definitions?
2. Was there a particular moment during our course that inspired a change in one of your definitions?

3. Does anything surprise you?
4. Your definitions might be different, but how do you think you might have changed between the beginning of the course and today?

*Activity 3 - Jewish timeline - 20 minutes<sup>18</sup>*

On large pieces of paper, students individually create their own timeline. On the X axis students chart their age, in whichever increments they choose; and on the Y axis they measure their “mitzvah,” however they choose to define it (perhaps as Jewish engagement, connection with community and God, and so on). After their current age, in a different color, students chart how they envision the next several years in relation to “mitzvah.” Students spend about 15 minutes to create their timelines and share in small groups.

*Activity 3 - Confirmation student interviews - 30 minutes*

If possible, either welcome past confirmation students in-person, or coordinate a Skype interview with several past students. They either could have done this, or another Confirmation curriculum. In small groups (depending on the number of guests), discuss with the past students what their Confirmation experience was like and what it meant to them, how their Jewish identity has changed during college, and so on. This can be a really wonderful opportunity to strengthen community bonds among your teenagers and also foster a “Confirmation alumni” culture in your synagogue as well.

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<sup>18</sup> adapted from exercise developed by Tali Zerkowicz.

# Lesson 4: How do we inspire others?

## *Designing a rubric for presentations*

### **Objectives:**

Learners will be able to...

- Analyze famous speakers and assess how they were successful.
- Articulate what makes a particular speaker or figure inspiring or motivating in five adjectives
- Design a shared rubric for their presentations.

### **Materials:**

- iPads or laptops to watch video clips
- Blank rubric

### **Suggested Activities:**

#### *Activity 1 - Inspirational leaders - 30 minutes*

Ask students: has a person ever inspired you to change your behaviors, or even how you see the world? What causes people to galvanize and rally around a cause? We can look to some modern figures of today who have inspired us and have created change in our society. Break students up into groups.

Each group will watch 10 minutes of a video clip of a speech by one speaker (see below) - students can either choose on their own or you can assign them. *If students are unfamiliar with the speaker, have them search and skim through their Wikipedia page to get a sense of context first.* Then, students discuss with the questions below what was inspiring about that particular speaker, choosing 5 adjectives that effectively summarize that speaker's "ingredients" for change. Groups write their adjectives on the board, present to each other, and look for patterns or commonalities. Ask, how can we use these strategies in our upcoming presentations?

#### *Activity 2 - Designing a Presentation Rubric - 30 minutes*

Using the adjectives as a starting point, students create a rubric for their presentations. Explain to students that they are creating the rubric so they can hold themselves to their own highest standards, and they are accountable for their own excellence. Have students come up with categories along the left side and then determine what is emerging, intermediate or advanced in each category (see sample and blank rubrics below). It's usually easiest to start with the highest level and work down to the lowest. Tell students they will be using the rubric for constructive feedback for their peers during their mock presentations.

*Note: If the class does not have time to design their own rubric, you can use the sample below for presentations. Please hand it out and go over it during this lesson so students can use it while preparing for their presentations.*

*Activity 3 - Which groups should we present to? - 20 minutes*

Remind students of their upcoming presentations. They now have an opportunity to become that inspiring leader and initiate change in the world! On the board, students brainstorm all the different potential groups they could present to (reminding them that families are excluded.) This could include a religious school class, high school class, high school faculty, Hebrew high class, synagogue group (brotherhood/sisterhood, adult education, board, etc), sports team, any groups their parents are involved in, and so on. Then, ask students to think about their own cause. Which group *most* needs to hear about your cause and why? Which group is most likely to be inspired by you and by your cause? Split into small groups (either voluntary or preassigned), which collectively help each member determine which group to present to. Assign a due date by which students should have made contact with their group (make sure their presentation is after their mock presentation in class).

\*Note - all activities might be important for the assessment moving forward; I suggest doing all three activities, splitting into two lessons if needed.

\*\* Second note - I would also suggest to allow either at least two weeks between this lesson and presentations so students can prepare, and perhaps dedicate at least one session for students to prepare in class if students feel they are not able to make their own time outside of class.

# Resource 5.4: Inspirational Leaders

Malala Yousafzai's Nobel Prize Speech

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOqIotJrFVM>

Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" Speech

<http://youtu.be/3vDWWy4CMhE>

Jane Goodall, "Sowing the Seeds of Hope" (*skip to 5:55*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vibssrQKm60>

Steve Jobs, Stanford Commencement Speech

<http://youtu.be/VHWUCX6osgM>

Aung San Suu Kyi's Nobel Prize Speech

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRYyEk-5zoI>

Baz Luhrmann, "Everybody's Free To Wear Sunscreen"

<http://youtu.be/sTJ7AzBIJo>

Emma Watson's He for She Speech at the United Nations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkjW9PZBRfk>

Randy Pausch: "Achieving Your Childhood Dreams"

[http://youtu.be/ji5\\_MqicxSo](http://youtu.be/ji5_MqicxSo)

Robyn Roberts, Arthur Ashe Courage Award Speech, 2013

<http://youtu.be/L5AG3dVMwhw>

Questions:

- What inspires you about this speaker, even though he/she is only speaking?
  - Try to be specific: does the speaker use repetitions, tones, physical gestures, stories, humor, or something else that grabs you and motivates you in some way?)
- How have you been inspired in your own life? Can you find any similarities?
- In five adjectives, try to summarize the "ingredients" of your speaker's effectiveness for change.

# Resource 5.5 Presentation Rubric (sample)

	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Emerging</b>
<b>Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concise and compelling</li> <li>- Has a very clear direction</li> <li>- Clear, sophisticated expertise in their cause</li> <li>- Gives attainable and accessible means for audience to support their cause</li> <li>- Answers all questions effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generally effective presentation</li> <li>- Sometimes strays or tangents but otherwise has a clear direction</li> <li>- Has strong understanding in their cause</li> <li>- Has less clear means for support</li> <li>- Answers most questions effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Muddy, unclear content that does not follow a clear direction</li> <li>- Often strays or tangents</li> <li>- Does not show strong understanding of their cause; makes sweeping generalizations and cannot answer questions</li> </ul>
<b>Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shows strong passion in their cause</li> <li>- Speaks with emotion but without being preachy</li> <li>- Uses a range of methods (humor, questions, tones)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shows passion in their cause, and occasionally speaks with emotion</li> <li>- Uses a few delivery methods (humor, questions, tones) but could have harnessed more for greater effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does not show clear passion in their cause</li> <li>- Delivery is mostly stiff and monotone only with moments of emotion</li> <li>- Uses very few delivery methods</li> </ul>
<b>Aesthetic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation is visually compelling</li> <li>- Makes use of more than just a powerpoint with text, such as items, pictures or videos</li> <li>- <i>if powerpoint</i>: Clear, easy to follow, and “clean” - doesn’t have distracting graphics and animations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation is nicely composed visually</li> <li>- Is mostly frontal and only several non-text elements, such as a picture, item, or video</li> <li>- <i>if powerpoint</i>: Clear, easy to follow, but with some distracting graphics and animations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation is frontal and does not use any creative elements</li> <li>- <i>if powerpoint</i>: Only uses text; either too cluttered with graphics and no information, or blocks of text that are read to the audience</li> <li>- Has many spelling and grammatical errors in text</li> </ul>
<b>Inspiration (subjective)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Audience member feels strongly moved by presentation and will commit to learn or act more for the cause.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Audience member feels generally by presentation but is not sure if they will commit to learn or act beyond the presentation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Audience is interested in the cause but not likely commit to learn or act beyond the presentation.</li> </ul>

## Resource 5.6: Blank Sample Rubric

	Advanced	Intermediate	Beginning
Content			
Delivery			
Aesthetic			
Inspiration			

Note: If there are any additional aspects of the presentation that students want to add into the rubric, of course you are welcome to add more.

# Lesson 5: Presentation sessions - 3 models

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Present mock presentations for their chosen cause
- Provide feedback that describes strengths and weaknesses of the presentations?

## Materials:

- Copies of rubric for each student, for each presentation
- Grape juice and small cups

## Suggested Activities:

### *Set induction - Toast - 5 minutes*

With sparkling grape juice or cider and hors d'oeuvres, start off the presentations with a congratulatory celebration to students for arriving at this culmination of their learning and for all of their hard work during the year. Toast a l'chaim with your students!

Below are three different models you can use during your presentation. I recommend choosing the one that best fits your classroom setting, as well as the amount of time you have to work with. Also, you can decide as a class if rubrics will be anonymous or if students will write their names so that the presenter can follow up with more questions to classmates. Students should know which group the presenter is planning to speak to as well.

Finally, I suggest creating a shared Google Doc on which students type their feedback, as well as a volunteer who types up the questions as well. This will allow the presenter to immediately receive their feedback, and also see all other students' feedback as well. You can also do this with a Google form.

### *Model 1 - 5 minutes of feedback time*

- During presentation, students make notes about presentation and are then allowed a few minutes to circle statements on the rubric. On the other side of the page, students should also write 3 sentences, one of each starting with "I notice," "I appreciate," and "I wonder" as kind but genuine ways to offer constructive feedback.
- After each presentation students ask questions only about the presenter's cause. Hand in rubrics to the presenter.

### *Model 2 - 10 minutes of feedback time*

- During each presentation students make notes about presentation and are then allowed a few minutes to circle statements on the rubric.



- After each presentation, students ask questions about the presenter's cause as well as general feedback about the presentation. Encourage students to start sentences with "I notice," "I appreciate," or "I wonder" as kind but genuine ways to offer constructive feedback. Presenter can ask for specific feedback as well.
- Hand in rubrics to the presenter

*Model 3 - 15 minutes of feedback time*

- During each presentation students make notes about presentation and are then allowed a few minutes to circle statements on the rubric.
- After each presentation, students ask questions about the presenter's cause as well as general feedback about the presentation. Encourage students to start sentences with "I notice," "I appreciate," or "I wonder" as kind but genuine ways to offer constructive feedback.
- The presenter mentions any elements on the rubric that they would like feedback on, if any, and the class has a longer discussion about both the strongest aspects of the presentation rubric-wise, as well as greatest opportunities for improvement.

# Lesson 6: Where do we go from here?

## Objectives:

Learners will be able to...

- Rephrase the “Lo Alecha Hamlachah Ligmor” teaching in their own words
- Apply Spider-Man’s story to the teaching Lo Alecha Hamlachah Ligmor
- Prioritize what “work” they are not free to desist from, and what “work” they will leave to others to complete.
- Create a community brit.

## Materials:

- Guitar and songleader (yourself, cantor, rabbi, student)
- Pirke Avot song sheet
- Copies of Spider-Man story

## Suggested Activities

### *Set induction - Lo Alecha song - 10 minutes*

With either a student, rabbi or cantor who plays guitar (or yourself, if you can!), teach students the “Lo Alecha” song, with copies of the lyrics below. Preferably done arm in arm in a circle, to hopefully create a community feeling. I would recommend closing the session with the song as well.

### *Activity 1 - Lo Alecha discussion - 15 minutes*

Looking at the song sheet, ask:

- What do you think the Pirkei Avot quote is trying to say, in your own words?
- Think about the causes you have all become so passionate about over the last year. What does “completing the work” mean in that case? It could be curing a disease, solving poverty or homelessness, etc.
  - What would happen if we tried to complete that work all on our own? What would happen if each person gave up on it, thinking the problem was too big to conquer?
- How do we decide which work to leave to other people?

### *Activity 2 - Spider-Man - 20 minutes*

Students read the Spider-Man issue titled, “Spider-Man, No More!” This can be found in the paperback collection *The Essential Amazing Spider-Man, Vol. 3*, available at most book stores and Amazon<sup>19</sup>. In this issue, Peter Parker becomes too overwhelmed with the

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.amazon.com/Essential-Amazing-Spider-Man-Marvel-Essentials/dp/0785118640/>

responsibility of being Spider-Man; he chooses to stop being a superhero in order to focus on his relationships and school.

In small groups, discuss:

- Why does Peter stop being Spider-Man? Do you think he's being selfish, or does he have a right to a personal life?
- What causes him to return to being Spider-Man?
- How does Peter's dilemma relate to *Lo Alecha Hamlachah Ligmor*?
- How is "completing the work" like being a superhero?

### *Activity 3 - Collective Community brit - 20 minutes*

Ask students: What are some ways that we can encourage each other to not desist from our work? Not just hold each other accountable, but continue the existence of our community after our class is over?

Propose to students that they set up some kind of social media network that they can all contribute to, as a sort of modern *brit* for their class. This can look like a Facebook group, a Twitter or Instagram hashtag, Tumblr account, or any other platform the students can think of. Students can use this platform to post pictures of the mitzvot they are performing, share resources and articles of their causes, invite students to events, or ask questions. Use the remaining time for students to decide or vote on a platform and begin setting it up, as well as decide what the students will communally commit to. Regardless of the platform make sure that you, as the educator, are NOT included — you are not responsible for holding students accountable. That is their own commitment!

# Resource 5.7: Lo Alecha Hamlacha Ligmor

Original text: Pirke Avot 2:21

Adapted by Benny Lipson

<i>Lo Alecha Hamlachah Ligmor</i>	לא עֲלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגִמּוֹר
<i>v'lo atah ben chorin lehivatel mimena*</i>	וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לְהִבְטֵל מִמֶּנָּה

You might think the world is big  
But that doesn't mean you're small  
You can't let the world go untouched  
And never try at all

The job's not done, the war's not won  
It's not time to disappear  
So take a chance and take a stance  
Let the whole world know you're here

\* "It is not upon you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it"

# LO ALECHA

LIPSON

C#m7 A C#m7 A

5 (A) C#m7 A C#m7 D9

LO A LE CHA HAM LA CHA LIG MOR V' LO

9 G#m7 C#m7 F#m A B(SUS4) B7

A TAH BEN CHO RIN L' HI VA TEL MI ME NA

13 (B) C#m7 A E

YOU MAY THINK THE WORLD IS BIG BUT IT DOES N'T MEAN YOU'RE SMALL

16 C#7 F#m A B(SUS4) B7 TO CODA

YOU CANT LET THE WORK GO UN TOUCHED AND NE VER TRY AT ALL

19 1. E A C#m7 A

23 2. E

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25 **D** **(C)** **E**

THE JOB'S NOT DONE\_ THE WAR'S NOT WON\_ IT'S NOT THE TIME\_ TO DIS AP PEAR

27 **D** **F#m** **B7(SUS4)** **B7**

SO TAKE A CHANCE AND TAKE A STANCE LET THE WHOLE WORLD KNOW YOU'RE HERE\_

30 **E** **C#7** **F#m**

YOU CAN'T\_ LET THE WORK\_ GO UN TOUCHED

33 **RITARD** **A** **B(SUS4)** **B7** **E** **A** **E**

AND NE VER TRY\_ AT ALL\_

# Annotated Bibliography

Alcoholics Anonymous Website. <http://www.aa.org>. Web.

**Adler, Rachel. “Bad Things Happen: On Suffering.” *Jewish Approaches to Coping with Challenge*. p170-173.**

Rachel Adler’s article about suffering has been a seminal piece for me while designing the curriculum. I highly encourage the educator to read Adler’s treatment of different approaches to suffering and the Jewish responses.

**American Jewish World Service Website. <http://ajws.org/>. Web.**

The American Jewish World Service is a nonprofit organization that has many different social justice resources that might be useful to you in the second unit.

**Beit T’shuvah Website. <http://www.beittshuvah.org/>. Web.**

Beit T’shuvah is both a residential treatment center and a full-service congregation offering religious services, holiday celebrations and study, residing in Los Angeles. Their website is not only full of resources about AA and Jewish healing, but also contact information if your classroom is in Los Angeles and are planning to organize AA visits.

**Frishman, Elyse D., ed. *Mishkan T’filah*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007.**

The *Mishkan T’filah* siddur is the central prayer book used by Reform Judaism. It will not only be helpful during the *iyun tefilah* section of Unit 3, but also to make connections between the material and the prayer book that (hopefully) students used for their *b’nai mitzvah*.

**Goldberg, Tzvi. “The Visitor’s Halachic Guide to Hospitals.” Star K Online. Web. <http://www.star-k.org/kashrus/kk-HalachicGuidetoHospitals.htm>**

This online guide describes the halachah (Jewish law) behind fulfilling the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick. As students will notice, many of the laws in this guide highlight how to protect the dignity and comfort of the sick person being visited.

**Goldstein, Niles and Peter S Knobel, ed. *Duties of the Soul: The Role of Commandments in Liberal Judaism*. UAHC Press: New York, 1999.**

This book is an anthology of many different writers who present their views on mitzvot and the roles they play in Reform Judaism. Learners will be engaged in this conversation

throughout the guide, and this book provides a wide but fascinating landscape into this current debate.

**Held, Shai. “Hearing the Cries of the Defenseless, Or: We Are All Responsible.”** *Machon Hadar*. Web. <http://www.mechonhadar.org/torah-resource/hearing-cries-defenseless>

This d’var Torah by Rabbi Shai Held eloquently makes the connection between the Torah’s command to protect the widow and orphan, and alleviating suffering among the vulnerable in our own communities.

**Kepnes, Steven. “Rereading Job as textual theodicy.”** From *Suffering Religion*, ed. Robert Gibbs and Elliot Wolfson. Routledge, London: 2002.

This excellent article reviews four different theodicy perspectives in Job: Job’s wife, Job’s friends, Job himself, and God. An excellent commentary on this Biblical masterpiece on suffering, and will be worthwhile to engage with before students grapple with Job and Kepnes’ commentary in the first unit.

**Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*.** Trans. Richard Cohen. Duquesne University Press: Pennsylvania, 1985.

This book outlines Levinas’ philosophy about the face of the Other, and the command to respond to it and alleviate suffering. Students will be engaging with Levinas in unit 2.

**Mechon Mamre Website.** [www.mechon-mamre.org](http://www.mechon-mamre.org). Web.

This helpful website has the entire Bible online in English and English with Hebrew side by side. It is an older translation that I have updated for several text studies, but is also a helpful resource should the educator decide to include other Torah texts.

**Message Bible Website.** <http://www.biblestudytools.com/msg/>. Web.

The Message Bible is a free online Bible with a modern, updated translation. This translation very accessible and relevant, especially for teenagers causing me to include many of its translations in this guide. However, it is *not* designed for Jewish audiences, nor is it translated from the original Hebrew; therefore there were several translations I edited or re-translated to be more true to the Hebrew. I suggest using with caution should you decide to include other Torah texts, or corroborating with other Jewish translations.

**Olitzky, Kerry and Stuart Copans. *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery*.** Jewish Lights Publishing: Vermont, 1991.



This book serves as an excellent resource during the fourth unit on recovery and addiction. Rabbi Olitzky and Dr. Copans examine AA's The Twelve Steps through a Jewish lens and provide many Jewish texts on healing as well.

**Steinberg, Paul. *Recovery, the 12 Steps and Jewish Spirituality*. Jewish Lights Publishing: Vermont, 2014.**

Like Olitzky and Copans' book, this book is an excellent recovery resource, yet it is more personal than the former. A recovering alcoholic who now serves at Beit T'shuvah, Rabbi Sternberg parallels his own personal journey with the twelve steps and the road to healing. This is an ideal book for an educator who has not engaged in learning or teaching about recovery, particularly due to Rabbi Steinberg's candor, accessible writing style, and humanizing perspective.

**Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy*. William Morrow: New York, 1991.**

Rabbi Telushkin's seminal work is a phenomenal reference for any topic relating to Jewish tradition, history, law, and culture. It is a fantastic tool for the educator to reach for if an unfamiliar name, term, mitzvah or topic arises in the guide.