

Choosing and Using Primary Texts Webinar
Session Two – Using Jewish Texts to Teach Jewish Values

1) **Why Use Jewish Texts to Teach Jewish Values**

Forward Rabbi Roundtable “Are There Such a Thing as Jewish Values?”, November 28, 2017

<https://forward.com/opinion/388394/we-asked-21-rabbis-is-there-such-a-thing-as-jewish-values/>

Rabbi Rebecca W. Sirbu, Post-Denominational, Rabbis Without Borders: *Judaism is a unique and special tradition. However, many of the values we teach can be found in other religions and groups. What is unique about Judaism is the way everything comes together. **We have our own language, history, sacred texts, culture, music and art. We express what are universal values in specifically Jewish ways.***

2) **The Jewish Value of Chesed – Lovingkindness**

A. Step One - Sefaria

- Navigate to [Sefaria.org](https://www.sefaria.org)
- Check out their Topics page - <https://www.sefaria.org/topics>
- Search for Kindness, or Lovingkindness, or Chesed
- You'll notice that the Kindness section is further divided by topic - have a look at the subtopics and see which ones fit into your lesson plan!

Ethics of Our Ancestors 1:2

https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.1.1?ven=english|Open_Mishnah&lang=bi

שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מִשְׁגֵּרֵי כְּנֻסֹת הַגְּדוֹלָה. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הַעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים:

Shimon the Righteous was from the remnants of the Great Assembly. He would say, "On three things the world stands: on the Torah, on the service and on acts of lovingkindness."

B. Step Two – M2 Values in Action

- Navigate to the Values in Action website <https://valuesinaction.live/>
- Click on the three lines in the top left corner
- Click on "Explore Values" and then on "Lovingkindness"
- There you will find a Lesson plan on "Love in a time of Polarization" navigate your way to the "Jewish Anchor" section to find Jewish texts.

Love in a time of polarization - Values In Action

Jewish Wisdom 10-12 mins

Let's look at the story of an argument that happened ages ago in a synagogue in Tiberias (a city in the northeast of Israel). In that synagogue, there was a door with a bolt that had a thick knob on its end (okay stay with me... I promise it gets more interesting!). The rabbis at the synagogue were

trying to figure out whether it was considered a “vessel” and thus permissible to move it on Shabbat or whether it was considered “raw material” and therefore could not be moved on Shabbat.

Two Rabbis, Elazar and Rabbi Yosei argued over this until they became so upset that they ripped a Torah scroll in half in their anger. The Gemara interrupts the story to clarify that we must say “a Torah scroll was torn through their anger. In the heat of their debate they pulled the scroll from one side to another until it tore.”

(Yevamot 96b)

- Imagine that you were in the room when this argument happened. What are some things you think the two rabbis might have said to each other? How might they have felt after the Torah scroll tore?
- What is your reaction to the Gemara’s interruption, “we must say a Torah scroll was torn through their anger?” Why, if at all, is it helpful to clarify that the anger caused the rip rather than the two people? How, if at all, does this distinction affect your understanding of the story, and your feelings about the two rabbis?

Note to facilitator: Invite the learners to discuss the next two questions in hevruta pairs. Then come back together and take some responses.

- Think about that topic from the beginning of our gathering – the one that you felt heated about. Imagine that you were disagreeing about that topic with someone close to you, someone you wanted to stay in a relationship with. What would be challenging about that conversation? How might you avoid getting swept up in anger or the heat of the debate?
- When, if ever, do you think it is important to prioritize being right over being kind? Why?

C. Step Three – Bimbam Videos

- Navigate to <https://bimbam.com>
- Search for Kindness/Chesed
- You'll find a great video by Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg where she outlines the values of chesed (lovingkindness), tzedek (justice), and tzedakah (charitable giving). <https://bimbam.com/chesed/>
- You can research each of those values on [Sefaria.org](https://www.sefaria.org) in their topics section!



<https://bimbam.com/chesed/>

Chesed, Tzedakah, and Tzedek: What's the Difference

By [Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg](#)

Do you know the difference between these Jewish practices?

Understand the differences between chesed (loving kindness), tzedakah (charitable giving) and tzedek (justice) with Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg and learn how you can use them to change the world for good.

Chesed is the Jewish practice of loving kindness or caring for someone else. It is voluntary and individual. That means that we choose to give something over to someone else out of personal connection. Some examples of chesed are giving food to the hungry or visit someone who is sick.

Tzedakah is the Jewish practice of charitable giving or donating money. Jews are obligated to give some of our money those who are in need.

How do racism, sexism or homophobia contribute to someone falling into poverty or in need of help?

Tzedek, or justice, is a Jewish practice that is focused on changing the systems in place in our society so that there is greater equality and resources for those who need it.

D. Step Four – My Jewish Learning

- Navigate to <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/>
- Search for Jewish Ethics - You'll find lots of articles on Jewish values [here](#)
- One example is <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/acts-of-loving-kindness/> - an article FULL of great sources about the concept of Kindness/Chesed

Acts of Loving-Kindness: The Foundations of Jewish Service Learning

By [Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow](#)

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/acts-of-loving-kindness/>

Very often the term *gemilut hasadim* is translated as acts of loving-kindness. It is used to describe everything from the work done by synagogue *bikur holim* committees [that visit the sick] to service



projects designed for high school students to lessons on how to treat a homeless person you pass on the street. The words *gemilut* and *hasadim* actually communicate some very specific ideas as well.

In one of the first adult education classes I was teaching on Judaism and service, a woman asked, "What does *gemilut* mean?" The dictionary meaning of the root g-m-l that is most supported by Talmudic usage is reciprocal acts. *Gemilut* signals that these are acts done in the context of a relationship with a built-in notion of benefit or compensation in return for the act. This immediately differentiates our tradition from those that emphasize the selflessness of service. The Talmud supports this, stating that the reward for service is in this world, not in the world to come (Shabbat 127a). Service can and should be valuable in some way to the person engaged in it.

Chesed appears in the Torah to communicate God's kindness and love toward humanity as well as human kindness and love toward each other. *Chesed* emerges as one of the essential ways humans engage with God to sustain creation.