



Mitzvot and Making a Difference Entering into a Brit & LaShon Hara- The Power of Words

Submitted by: *Floyd M. Sobczak*

Subject Area: Religious Education

Target Age Group(s): Middle School Students grades 6-8

Abstract:

This class sets the groundwork for understanding Mitzvot as well as setting up the needed terminology to understanding ones own responsibility in taking on Mitzvot. The students will take part in creating a definition for what we really mean when we use the word Mitzvot and how to put that into action.

In a Mitzvot that we choose to take on how do we “Hear the voice of G-D” that helps us to make the Mitzvot our own, form our personalities, help mold us into the adults we are becoming and in how we choose to interact and treat others.

Materials Needed

- A copy of the 613 Mitzvot
- A large beach type ball
- Vocabulary List
- Pomegranate

Procedure

- The idea of Mitzvot is introduced by viewing the pomegranate along with the belief in a sited Midrash that within this pomegranate lays 613 seeds equal to the amount of Mitzvot.
- As the class examines a list of the 613 Mitzvot discussion will begin with the Mitzvot that focus on ‘animal sacrifice’ as a means to get their attention.
- The next Mitzvot we will highlight are the ethical and personal Mitzvot. The students will discuss how in their lives they have had opportunity it ‘seize the day’ ‘take on a Mitzvot’ by getting involved.
- Next to get a full taste of as many Mitzvot as possible we will pass around a ball (we used a cloth/stuffy Matzah ball) as it goes around the circle you may choose to sing a familiar song (Hinei Mah Tov, Sim Shalom...) When you’re ready shout out ‘STOP’ have the person call our any number from 1-613 and have a student read out loud that Mitzvot. Briefly discuss. Repeat this several times.
- To begin our semester study of a variety of Mitzvot we will end this first class with a discussion of Mitzvot #28 Not to wrong anyone in speech (Lev. 25:17) – LaShon Hara or Sh’mirat HaLashon (weigh your words)



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- Our last activity will consist of pairing students off with a new student and have them share things about themselves to each other with a 10-15 minute time frame, 'getting to know you'. Then we regroup and each student has to share things they learned about the other by discussing what was interesting and good about them. A reverse LaShon Hara.

Questions to consider

1. How do we as Jews define and fulfill our end of the covenant or "contract" with G-D?
2. What do we really mean when we use the word Mitzvot?
3. How do 'I' define Mitzvot?
4. Why should 'I' do them?
5. Why should 'I' care?
6. How do we put the word Mitzvot into action?
7. What chance do 'I' have of really changing the world or making it a better place?
8. How do we make a difference?
9. Why shouldn't I talk badly about someone?
10. How is Judaism structured to give us the ability to listen to our hearts and minds?

Comments and Feedback

One of the results of this lesson is that students will be able to understand what it means being in a covenant with G-D. They will also understand the idea of being 'commanded' to perform Mitzvot to fulfill this covenant. And finally how they can make the fulfillment of the covenant by performing Mitzvot pertinent to their lives especially now as they prepare for their Bar and Bat Mitzvah.

Appendix

Vocabulary/Terms

1. **Brit:** agreement, covenant, contract between G-D and the Jewish people.
2. **Mitzvot:** commandment from G-D.



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3. **Ethical Mitzvot:** Mitzvot that define our relationship with G-D's creations. The more "public/community" side of Mitzvot.
4. **Ritual Mitzvot:** Mitzvot that center around our own relationship with G-D. The more "personal" side of Mitzvot.
5. **LaShon Hara:** Literally "the evil tongue", a statement that is said for a mean or hurtful purpose.

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Mitzvot and Jewish Text

Submitted by Floyd M. Sobczak

Subject Area: Religious Education

Target Age Group(s): Middle School Students grades 6-8

Abstract:

In this class students will begin to understand the relationship of Mitzvot to Jewish text. Jewish text will be examined as a source for understanding the relevance, ritual, practice, and history of these commandments. Students will become familiar with and be able to identify a variety of Jewish text. Such as: A Chumash, Talmud, Shulchon Oruch, and the Misnah.

Material:

- Chumash
- Talmud
- Shulchon Oruch
- Misnah
- List of 15 positive Mitzvot (with the exclusion of animal sacrifice)
- An assortment of Kosher foods & treats
- An assortment of Jewish music (preferably contemporary artists that includes rock, folk, rap, & heavy metal)

Procedure:

- Class begins with the following question. ‘Who remembers how many Mitzvot there are?’5 minutes.
- Given the number of Mitzvot that exist, how do you think a Jew learns about each of the Mitzvot?10 minutes.



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- After a brief discussion a variety of Jewish text will be passed around. (Chumash, Talmud, Shulchon Oruch, and Mishnah) Students should be allowed to examine these texts.30 minutes.
- The students will thumb through the text and asked to read something they found out loud for discussion. Discussion will center on different Mitzvot found.....15 minutes.
- From here students will be given a list of 15 Mitzvot and asked in small groups to prioritize these Mitzvot. Discussion will follow this exercise so student will be able to highlight what criteria they developed in making one action more important than another.30 minutes.
- Next the class will focus on the Mitzvot that include Kashrut.....15 minutes.
- After a brief discussion the class gets to have a Kosher Taste Testing session.15 minutes.
- This is followed by a listening session of contemporary Jewish music to enhance the students positive Jewish Identity.15 minutes.

Questions to Consider

1. How do the texts of Judaism influence how we act?
2. How do the texts of Judaism help us to understand our laws and the reason for their development?
3. How can we find contemporary examples of Mitzvot interpretation and application?
4. What is the purpose of the Chumash?
5. What can you learn from the Talmud?
6. Why do you think there are many different commentaries?
7. Why are the Jews called the People of the Book?
8. What do you think an observant Jew looks like?
9. What are some of the laws of Kosher?

Comments and Feedback

One of the results of this lesson is that students will be able to understand the relationship between Jewish text and the commandments. They will also experience the Jewish text that is important to understanding the Mitzvot. The following is a list of the important text they will be exposed to: Chumash, Talmud, Shulchon Oruch, and the Mishnah. Students will literally get a taste of kosher food and be able to discuss the laws of Kashrut. They will even experience contemporary Jewish music to put Judaism into



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the context of today. These Mitzvot, books, kosher items are not just part of our history but can be part of our present life.

Appendix

Vocabulary/Terms

1. **Chumash:** The first five books of Moses plus commentary.
2. **Talmud:** A series of books recording the Oral Law (Mishnah) and the rabbinic discussions of the Mishnah known as the Gemara.
3. **Kitzur Shulchon Oruch:** The classic guide to the everyday observance of Jewish law.
4. **Chevruta:** Study partner.

List of 15 Mitzvot to rearrange in order from most important to least important can be found on the next page.



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-please read the follow list of Mitzvot, rearrange the list in what you think is most important to least important, be ready with answers that back up your reasoning-*

**Torah Study
Following the first Ten Commandments
Keeping a kosher home
Observing Shabbat
Believing in G-D
Observing the High Holy Days
Giving money to any charity
Having a Bar/Bat Mitzvah
Giving money to Jewish charities
Saying prayers outside of services
Learning Hebrew
Attending synagogue services
Attending a Passover Seder
Contributing money to Israel
Honor our parents**

was there a Mitzvot that was not included in this list that you would have liked to see on this list?

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Personal Mitzvot and Tefillah

Submitted by Floyd M. Sobczak

Subject Area: Religious Education

Target Age Group(s): Middle School Students grades 6-8

Abstract:

This class helps students to learn the meaning of prayer to them. It helps them to see that prayer is a personal act between themselves and G-D. Also that prayer can be a personal form of reflection, a way to emphasize the 'Divine Spirit' in all of us. Students will also be able to identify Mitzvots 22-24 on Prayer and Blessings.

They are:

22. To pray to G-D (Ex. 23:25; Deut. 6:13)
23. To read the Shema in the morning and at night (Deut. 6:7)
24. To recite grace after meals – Birkat HaMazon (Deut. 8:10)

Material:

- Quotes about prayer sheet
- Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul
- DVD on Step into Liquid (a film about surfing) a 15 minute excerpt from the special features which can be found in the deleted scenes section which shows the Surfing Rabbi, as he presents an analogy about prayer and surfing – a contemporary look at prayer.



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Procedure:

- Class begins by placing up on the blackboard the word “Prayer”.
- The students are asked to respond spontaneously with the first word that comes to mind when they think of Prayer.
- While the students are shouting out their responses write on the board all their words.
- Through their words have students come up with a definition of what prayer means to them.
- During the discussion it helps to interject historical facts about the development of prayer, including definitions from the dictionary, Talmud and Siddur.
- After this discussion the students are divided into small groups and given a handout that includes a list of quotes about prayer.
- The small group is to examine the list and decide on which quote resonates with their own definition of what prayer means.
- After the students get a chance to speak about the quote that resonates with them and why, we will examine Mitzvots #22-24 on Prayer and Blessings. Students will discuss these Mitzvots.
- From here the class will share some ‘kosher snacks’ and state appropriate blessings over their snacks.
- While students are munching away they will listen to a story out of ‘Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul’ that features the power of prayer.
- Once the story is complete the students will get the opportunity to discuss any reactions.
- Then we move to a more contemporary look at prayer through the words of the ‘Surfing Rabbi’ this is followed by a discussion of things we do that can be related to a prayer experience like surfing. (i.e.: skateboarding, yoga, meditation, dancing, etc.)
- Final we will revisit our class definition of prayer and decide if it needs to be changed.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do we pray?
2. How does prayer bring us closer to G-D and ourselves?



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3. How do we go about praying and why were the Jewish rituals developed?
4. What is the purpose of the Siddur?
5. What is the difference between ritual prayer and prayer from the heart?
6. How do we make prayer purposeful for ourselves?
7. Do you think a persons definition of prayer changes with age?
8. After examining all the different types and definitions of prayer in class has your own opinion of prayer changed?
9. What is your definition of prayer?

Comments and feedback

Tefillah is the soul's yearning to define what truly matters and to ignore the trivialities that often masquerade as essential. But prayer in many situations has been reduced to a line or paragraph of rote words. This lesson can hopefully bring to life the essence of prayer as ones individual experience with G-D and oneself.

Appendix

Vocabulary/Terms

1. **Tefillah:** Prayer. The soul's yearning to define what truly matters and to ignore the trivialities that often masquerade as essential.
2. **Maveh:** The word used in the Talmud to define man(woman) as a creature who prays.
3. **Sages:** Scholarly Rabbis' throughout Jewish history.
4. **Bal Shem Tov:** Hasidic Spiritual Master.

Find on the next page quotes & definitions on prayer



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Prayer serves not only as a petition to god, but as an influence upon ourselves. Our sages, centuries ago, voiced the thought echoed by the great poet George Meredith, who declared, “he who rises from his worship a better man, his prayer is answered.” Prayer has the double charm of bringing god down to man, and lifting man upward to god.

Herbert Goldstein

Even a deeply pious Jew will rarely be able to say all prayers at all times with real kavanah [total concentration]. All of us, and the most pious persons perhaps even more than others, occasionally succumb to the danger of praying by rote. Martin Buber, in criticizing the way in which the Torah is frequently read in some synagogues, once spoke of “leprosy of fluency.” This leprosy of fluency threatens organized prayer, too. Prayer must be alive, not the mechanical mumbling of words. Routine destroys kavanah and transforms prayer from a dialogue with god into the mechanical fulfillment of a routine assignment.

Akiba Ernst Simon

A musician must practice by pre-arranged schedule, regardless of his inclination at the moment. So with the devout soul. It may not rely on caprice or put its hope in chance. It must work. The man on the other hand who folds his hands, waiting for the spirit to move him to think of God-who postpones worship for the right mood and the perfect setting, a forest or mountain peak, for example-will do little of meditating or praying.

Milton Steinberg



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A man needs no fixed places to say his prayers, no synagogues; among the trees of the forest, everywhere one can pray.

Israel Baal Shem Tov

Prayers must spin out like a thread. The slightest interruption and the thread snaps.

Shneur Zalman of Lyadi

Prayer is the search for harmony between man and God, the quest for communion between the finite and the infinite.

Solomon B. Freehof

The focus of prayer is not the self. A man may spend hours meditating about himself, or be stirred by the deepest sympathy for his fellow man, and no prayer will come to pass. Prayer comes to pass in a complete turning of the heart toward God, toward His goodness and power.

Abraham Joshua Heschel



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We don't pray that God will stop a catastrophe. For example, with the Holocaust, we can't say that because of our sins, one million Jewish children were killed. The logic is bad. The theology is worse. I don't believe a post Holocaust world can think that way...It turns God into what atheists make of Him-a cruel, wrathful deity. Prayer, instead, is meant to move the God within us.

Harold Schulweiss

True prayer is not a petition to God; it is a sermon to our own selves. The words which are its raiments are addressed to us. They speak of God and the divine in man, and thus make man find himself the God that so often is forgotten when the battles rages and the batteries roar.

Emil G. Hirsch

The purpose of prayer is to leave us alone with God.

Leo Baeck

A man should praise God even for misfortunes as much as he praises Him for happiness [say the Rabbis in the Talmud]. Whether this lofty courage is attainable by the average Jew or not, he learns to feel and to express, or perhaps to express and thus to feel, a constant sense of gratitude to the Master of the Universe. Prayer in Israel teaches man to overcome bitterness and self-pity; to think not of what the world owes him, but what



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**he owes the world and God. It is not primarily piteous pleading
but is essentially grateful communion with the Infinite.**

Solomon B. Freehof

I pray that I may be able to pray.

(The) Tanzer Rebbe

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