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# The Tzedek Project: A Guide for B'nai Mitzvah Students

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RHSOE Capstone  
Curriculum Guide  
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## Introduction

There is a long-standing disconnect between the b'nai mitzvah<sup>1</sup> and the mitzvah project. Some of this disconnect comes from the fact that there is no one clear definition of what a mitzvah project is or ought to look like. Based on feedback from Jewish professionals from all over the country<sup>2</sup>, it appears that the concept of the mitzvah project has often been pushed to the bottom of the educators' to-do lists. From Seattle to New York, the message is the same. Still, it is difficult to prioritize all of the components of the b'nai mitzvah and devote all the time necessary to the number of students they have in addition to all their other responsibilities many Jewish professionals state that they wished there was a comprehensive mitzvah project program when they were b'nai mitzvah students so that they had been able to in a meaningful way. Often, students do not even know what a mitzvah project is and why they are doing it. Salkin (2005, 2007) has even added a chapter to both of his books about 'putting the mitzvah back in [B'nai] Mitzvah.' He includes this chapter in both books to emphasize the value of mitzvot throughout the b'nai mitzvah process for both the students and the parents. Salkin never specifically mentions a mitzvah project in the capacity we know today but highlights examples of ways b'nai mitzvah students can explore *mitzvot* and *middot*.

I believe students should know that their voices matter and that even at the age of 13, they can make a difference. This curriculum enables them to find their voice by learning about and engaging in *tikkun olam*. The mitzvah project is a stepping-stone into Jewish adulthood because part of being a Jewish adult is accepting the additional

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<sup>1</sup> I am choosing to use b'nai mitzvah as a preferred method of discussing this process in gender-neutral terms.

<sup>2</sup> Personal conversations with educators from January 2023 through March 2024.

responsibility of caring for others, the world, and your community. This sense of added responsibility has been central to the idea of the mitzvah project for many decades, as seen in many books and workbooks (Salzman, 1991; Olitzky, 1994; Loeb, 1997; Golub, 1994) that encourage mitzvah projects. Many of these books were written in the 1990s or early 2000s, though they are still found on synagogue bookshelves today. Nearly thirty years later, we are still trying to focus families and students on this aspect of becoming b'nai mitzvah. While it is essential to note the constant focus on the mitzvah project as a timeless piece, projects that were the focus twenty years ago may not work for today's students.

Perhaps Jewish educators are looking at the mitzvah project all wrong. Is the goal to complete the task (i.e., do a *mitzvah*), or is the goal to pursue justice (i.e., learn how to achieve equity in the world)? From Deuteronomy, we have undoubtedly, one of the most well-known verses in the Torah in the Jewish educational world:

### **צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדָּף**

“Justice, Justice you shall pursue” (Deuteronomy 6:19).

In modern religious schools, we hear the word “*zedakah*,” which is often used to describe the act of giving. “Did you bring *zedakah* today?” However, many words can be made from the Hebrew root of *zedek* (ק - ד - צ) that help build the understood definition of *zedakah*. *Tzedek* is a noun meaning justice; *tzadik* means a righteous person.

There is no better Jewish text than Deuteronomy 6:19 to help guide and facilitate students' conversations about Torah and *zedek*. This text underscores the timeless and vital nature of the pursuit of justice by drawing attention to its centrality within Judaism's

ethical and moral framework. Artson (n.d.) explains justice as “one of the eternal religious obligations of Judaism.” For numerous generations of activists, this expression has served as a recurring motif as they strive to fulfill the prophetic duty of addressing and rectifying the faults present in our world.

As Jews, following the ideas of pursuing justice is deeply rooted within the religion. What is justice, and how can you pursue something intangible? In a world where kindness, compassion, and community play pivotal roles, the concept of *tzedek* goes beyond the ideas of equity and fairness. צדק צדק תרדף emphasizes the importance of achieving justice by saying צדק twice. *Tirdof* means to pursue. I want our students to explore the concept of justice and find a way to connect to Torah. This guide will help students resonate with the values of equity, righteous acts, and pursue these ideas of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam* as a part of the responsibility of becoming a Jewish adult.

When creating a mitzvah project, students often think “inside the box” about what their project might look like. Many students fall into the same old ideas of collecting nonperishable foods, playing with the dogs at the animal shelters, or volunteering at the synagogue. I believe it is possible to reclaim the ideal of the mitzvah project and move to a new, radical, and revolutionary approach. In this guide, the approach begins with a new name: **Tzedek Project**. As reviewed above in the text from Deuteronomy, “*tzedek*” translates to justice. A Tzedek Project encourages students to explore social justice and find their own self-interest in the work they are doing.

This guide will serve as a resource to let all educators and students know that the Tzedek Project is extremely fluid. It is my hope that each student will have a unique project. The Tzedek Project should be a positive experience that aims to build a lifelong

connection to the social justice topic of their choosing and with social justice at large. This will allow students to know that their voices matter. This is a concept that I have continually intertwined in the work that I have previously done with Tzedek America<sup>3</sup> while running the *Mitzvah Project Central*<sup>4</sup> program in my residency. Lifelong connection to social justice and immersive experiential learning are core tenets of Tzedek America.

According to Hilton (2014), the earliest written history of what can be loosely considered a mitzvah project stems from 1638 in Krakow. One community established a rule that every household whose son begins to learn Torah should donate a sum of money to the community. If they also make a “bar mitzvah meal” for their son, they should donate another sum of money to the community. In the 1970s, it became customary to “twin” the b'nai mitzvah celebration with that of a Jewish child in the Soviet Union. This idea also evolved into the idea that students can “twin” with a Jewish child who died during the Holocaust. Munro (2016) alludes to the idea that the mitzvah project was popularized during the era when women could not become bat mitzvah, and giving back to their community was a way of indirectly interacting with the Torah.

In my conversations working with students participating in the Mitzvah Project Central program, students have expressed a desire to care about something larger than themselves. Sometimes, they need extra support to find those passions and execute their ideas. This curriculum guide will help them do that by elevating the current mitzvah project component of the b'nai mitzvah experience, empowering students to find a meaningful project with a focus on justice. The hope is that they will foster a lifelong

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<sup>3</sup> Tzedek America is the leading Jewish organization that is making a profound impact on the lives of teens and young adults by creating transformative, social justice-oriented experiences. <https://tzedekamerica.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Mitzvah Project Central seeks to elevate the mitzvah project component of the B'nai Mitzvah experience. MPC empowers students to find a meaningful mitzvah project, fostering a lifelong connection to a cause or organization they deeply care about. <https://tzedekamerica.org/mitzvah-project-central/>

connection to a cause or organization they deeply care about. This curriculum guide will not only help educators support b'nai mitzvah students in seeing connections between their individual Torah portions and various social justice issues that are relevant today, but it will also allow the students to find their individual *tikkun olam* passions.

Connecting the Torah portion to this type of project is an excellent way for students to build a relationship with Torah and further their Jewish knowledge. This guide works to “create young stakeholders in the pursuit of social justice” (Limmer, 2019).

Each unit will cover one book of the Torah. Within those units, each Torah portion will include three mini-lessons. The three mini-lessons will build upon the knowledge of the lesson prior. This curriculum is set up for an individualized teacher-student interaction. While the student must complete all three mini-lessons, each Torah portion studied can be a stand-alone lesson. The student will not need prior knowledge of the previous Torah portions and lessons to learn in their chosen lesson successfully. The mini-lessons will be broken down as follows:

- a. Reading the Torah portion in translation for comprehension.
- b. Exploring the social justice topics that appear in the Torah portion with guidance from the educator.
- c. Exploring and developing a Tzedek Project based on what the student has learned from the previous lessons.<sup>5</sup>

After those initial three mini-lessons, students will be encouraged to continue to meet with the educator for guidance and support as they work on their Tzedek Projects. Through these one-on-one interactions, the students can experience in-depth guidance that is personalized to the individual student's needs. This format offers a platform for

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<sup>5</sup> See page 17 for a more detailed layout.



students to ensure their voices and opinions are heard.

The authentic assessment will be completed outside of the learning sessions. Students will be expected to write and deliver a d'var Torah orally at the b'nai mitzvah that connects their Tzedek Project and chosen social justice topic to their Torah portion. The complete guidelines for this assessment can be found at the end of the guide.

**Enduring Understandings** covered in this curriculum guide:

1. Understanding and experiencing social justice is part of the responsibility of becoming a b'nai mitzvah.
2. A Tzedek Project is one way a young person can enter Jewish adulthood, acknowledging the responsibility to care for others, the community, and the world.
3. A Tzedek Project can take any form as long as the student feels connected to what they are doing and that they are filling a need.
4. Striving for a just world as part of the b'nai mitzvah process can be a foundation for a lifelong passion for understanding the world.
5. Torah study can uncover universal themes of social justice and apply them to contemporary issues, fostering a profound sense of responsibility and motivation for action.

## Letter to the Educator

Dear Educator,

This curriculum guide's orientation is a shift from the common understanding of what we once knew as a mitzvah project. Times are changing, and our students are being raised with a heightened awareness of social justice. As our students and the world around them change, we must guide them through the b'nai mitzvah by focusing on justice.

This is where the **Tzedek Project** comes in. Social justice is all around us, and the Tzedek Project will serve as a way for students to make these broader connections to their surrounding community and the world.

*Things to keep in mind when using this curriculum guide:*

- Hebrew text translations used in this curriculum guide are from the Jewish Publication Society's *The Contemporary Torah*, (2006), accessed from Sefaria<sup>6</sup>. When choosing which translation to use for this curriculum guide, it was important that I used something that everyone could easily access and that was widely accepted in the Jewish community.
- Many students are familiar with the books of Genesis and Exodus. This is due to two reasons: Religious Schools' calendars typically align with Genesis and Exodus in the Torah cycle, and these biblical stories are easier to discuss with students. Students who have a Torah portion that falls in these first two books are likely to have already some understanding of what is happening in the portion.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Tanakh>

Students with their Torah portion in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy may need more guidance on comprehending what occurs in the portion.

- Though students may not read or chant the entire portion for the b'nai mitzvah, I have chosen for students to read the entire portion in English translation. I believe that reading the whole Torah portion is essential to comprehending the Torah portion in ways that a b'nai mitzvah student can digest. I have also chosen for the student to create their own interpretation of their Torah portion rather than reviewing Torah commentary or pre-written summaries. English translations and transliterations are used in this guide so that all students, regardless of their prior Hebrew language knowledge, can participate fully.
- Big-word jargon is intentionally not included in this guide. These lessons are deliberately written with language that can be understood by a b'nai mitzvah student who is just now learning about these topics and concepts.
- You should check in on your students continually and their progress as they move through the mini-lessons and beyond.
- Make this guide your own! Every teacher is different, every institution is different, and every student is different. If you can adjust this guide to fit how you want to use it best, go for it!

### *What do I need to know to teach this curriculum?*

The educator using this curriculum guide will need a basic understanding of Torah, social justice issues in the world, and local non-profit organizations that you can direct the student toward. Each lesson provides the educator with a summary of the

Torah portion to familiarize themselves with the key players, terms, and points that will be discussed with the students. This is a discussion-based curriculum guide. Discussion questions are provided throughout the lesson plans. These questions can be used as is, or you can add or remove questions as you see fit.

The examples of prominent social justice topics and examples of organizations a student can get involved in are a timely piece of this curriculum guide. These suggestions help you and the student find a topic and organization that best fits them. I have used examples from all over the country to show the various options available.

### *How is this curriculum organized?*

Each unit covers an entire book of the Torah. Within each unit are three mini-lessons for each Torah portion. The lessons on the Torah parshiot need not be taught in chronological order. One could jump from parshat Noach in Genesis to parshat Balak in Numbers and still produce a learning assessment for each. Each mini-lesson for any given parshiot must be done in order. For example, you could not do Unit 2, Lesson 2b, without doing Unit 2, Lesson 2a prior.

The intended audience for this curriculum is b'nai mitzvah-aged students. This can range from students in the 6th grade to students in the 8th grade. Depending on how your institution handles the timing of b'nai mitzvah lessons will significantly influence when this curriculum is used. I recommend starting these lessons with the student six months before the b'nai mitzvah. This will give the student enough time to complete their mitzvah project, including connecting with an organization and coordinating volunteering times. This curriculum can be used in person or virtually with

the student.

Each mini-lesson is thirty minutes long. Ideally, the three mini-lessons should be scheduled two to three weeks apart to allow the student enough time to think about the material, but not too long that they will forget the material from lesson to lesson.

The specific guidelines of what a Tzedek Project will look like vary from institution to institution. In the third mini-lesson for each portion, there is time built into the lessons to discuss those guidelines that you, as their educator, are putting into place for them. You will need to articulate to the student what specific goals, if any, they need to meet. Concepts for Tzedek Projects are broken into four categories: Philanthropy, Collections, Hands-On Volunteering, and Education/Advocacy. Descriptions of these categories can be found in Framing Document C.

#### *How are the students assessed?*

The assessment is a d'var Torah that will be read from the *bima* at the b'nai mitzvah. The students will be assessed on their comprehension of the Torah portion and their ability to connect their Tzedek Project to a social justice theme from the Torah portion. This assessment will take place after the mini-lessons have been completed and after they have at least begun their Tzedek Project. In most institutions, the writing of the d'var Torah begins about three months before the service under the supervision of a clergy member. The student should be encouraged to reach out for more support as needed.

The notes the student takes throughout the lessons will help complete this assessment. Each student is encouraged to be given a notebook for this process. This

notebook can live within their b'nai mitzvah binder, including their prayers and the Hebrew text of the Torah portion. If a student is not comfortable or able to take written notes, you can use other note-taking methods such as typing or voice recordings. More details about the assessment can be found beginning on page 103.

### *How can this curriculum be used in different settings?*

The curriculum is written to be used in one-on-one settings. It is designed to work with the student in both an in-person and an online setting. However, you can adjust this curriculum to fit other learning environments and audiences.

The framing documents are intended to be used as a printed document for the student. Some students of this age group still do not have cell phones. They are written so you can make each document digital if you are a paper-free institution.

If you want to use this curriculum in a classroom setting, there are a few factors you need to acknowledge. You will need to adjust for the quantity of students and classroom space and choose what content to focus on. The number of parshiot outweighs the number of weeks a traditional religious school or day school program will run. Each lesson begins with a summary of what was covered in the previous lesson. You may omit that review if you choose to do all three lessons in one setting.

### *Additional Resources*

Aside from the resources cited at the end of this curriculum guide, here are some other resources that I found helpful and inspiring while writing this guide.

- Block, R. B. (2021). *The Social Justice Torah Commentary*. CCAR Press.

- Margolis, R., Grishaver, J. L., & Golub, J. (2013). *Parasaha: Experiencing the Weekly Torah Portion*. Torah Aura Productions.
- Oppenheimer, M. (2018). *The Bar Mitzvah Crasher: Road-Tripping Through Jewish America*. Independently Published.
- The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC), [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)

With Radical Empathy,

Elana Beame

Per the guidelines of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education capstone project, the following lessons are not present in this curriculum guide.

**Unit 1: GENESIS (בראשית)**

Lesson 1: Bereshit, Genesis 1:1-6:8  
Lesson 2: Noach, Genesis 6:9-11:32  
Lesson 3: Lech Lecha, Genesis 12:1-17:27  
Lesson 5: Chayei Sarah, Genesis 23:1-25:18  
Lesson 6: Toldot, Genesis 25:19-28:9  
Lesson 7: Vayetze, Genesis 28:10-32:3  
Lesson 8: Vayishlach, Genesis 32:4-36:43  
Lesson 9: Vayeshev, Genesis 37:1-40:23  
Lesson 10: Miketz, Genesis 41:1-44:17  
Lesson 11: Vayigash, Genesis 44:18-47:27  
Lesson 12: Vayechi, Genesis 47:28-50:26

**Unit 2: EXODUS (שמות)**

Lesson 2: Va'era, Exodus 6:2-9:35  
Lesson 3: Bo, Exodus 10:1-13:16  
Lesson 4: Beshalach, Exodus 13:17-17:16  
Lesson 5: Yitro, Exodus 18:1-20:23  
Lesson 6: Mishpatim, Exodus 21:1-24:18  
Lesson 7: Terumah, Exodus 25:1-27:19  
Lesson 8: Tetzaveh, Exodus 27:20-30:10  
Lesson 9: Ki Tisa, Exodus 30:11-34:35  
Lesson 10: Vayakhel, Exodus 35:1-38:20  
Lesson 11: Pekudei, Exodus 38:21-40:38

**Unit 3: LEVITICUS (ויקרא)**

Lesson 1: Vayikra, Leviticus 1:1-5:26  
Lesson 2: Tzav, Leviticus 6:1-8:36  
Lesson 3: Shemini, Leviticus 9:1-11:47  
Lesson 4: Tazria, Leviticus 12:1-13:59  
Lesson 6: Acharei Mot, Leviticus

16:1-18:30

Lesson 7: Kedoshim, Leviticus

19:1-20:27

Lesson 8: Emor, Leviticus

21:1-24:23

Lesson 9: Behar, Leviticus 25:1-26:2

Lesson 10: Bechukotai, Leviticus

26:3-27:34

**Unit 4: NUMBERS (במדבר)**

Lesson 1: Bamidbar, Numbers

1:1-4:20

Lesson 2: Naso, Numbers 4:21-7:89

Lesson 3: Behaalotecha, Numbers

8:1-12:16

Lesson 4: Shelach, Numbers

13:1-15:41

Lesson 5: Korach, Numbers

16:1-18:32

Lesson 7: Balak, Numbers

22:2-25:9

Lesson 8: Pinchas, Numbers

25:10-30:1

Lesson 9: Matot, Numbers

30:2-32:42

Lesson 10: Masei, Numbers

33:1-36:13

**Unit 5: DEUTERONOMY (דברים)**

Lesson 2: Va'etchanan,

Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11

Lesson 3: Eikev, Deuteronomy

7:12-11:25

Lesson 4: Re'eh, Deuteronomy

11:26-16:17

Lesson 5: Shoftim, Deuteronomy

16:18-21:9

Lesson 6: Ki Teitzei, Deuteronomy

21:10-25:19

Lesson 7: Ki Tavo, Deuteronomy

26:1-29:8

Lesson 8: Nitzavim, Deuteronomy

29:9-30:20

Lesson 9: Vayelech, Deuteronomy

31:1-30

Lesson 10: Haazinu, Deuteronomy

32:1-52

Lesson 11: V'Zot HaBerachah,

Deuteronomy 33:1-34:1



## Enduring Understandings and Questions that Guide Each Lesson

### Enduring Understandings:

1. Understanding and experiencing social justice is part of the responsibility of becoming a b'nai mitzvah.
2. A Tzedek Project is one way a young person can enter Jewish adulthood, acknowledging the responsibility to care for others, the community, and the world.
3. A Tzedek Project can take any form as long as the student feels connected to what they are doing and that they are filling a need.
4. Striving for a just world as part of the b'nai mitzvah process can be a foundation for a lifelong passion for understanding the world.
5. Torah study can uncover universal themes of social justice and apply them to contemporary issues, fostering a profound sense of responsibility and motivation for action.

### Essential Questions:

1. How does the Tzedek Project reflect Jewish values of social justice and responsibility towards the broader community?
2. What insights can we gain from reading and discussing biblical texts like the Torah portion?
3. How do social justice themes manifest in biblical narratives, specifically within the Torah portion we study?
4. How do the social justice issues depicted in the Torah portion resonate with contemporary concerns and challenges?
5. How can you discover your own social justice voice in Torah?
6. How do the events and characters in the Torah portion relate to our contemporary understanding of social justice and ethical conduct?
7. Why do Jews do a Tzedek Project as an essential part of the b'nai mitzvah process?
8. Why is it important to take time from your own life to help others?
9. How can you contribute to making an impact in your community through your Tzedek project?

## Mini-Lesson Structure

### Lesson a:

Introductions *	This is your chance to get to know your learner and build a rapport.
Why Are We Here? *	This section is the first introduction to a Tzedek Project and frames why the student is doing this work.
Read the Torah Portion **	In this section, the student reads their entire Torah portion in translation.
Key Points, Terms, and Players in the Torah Portion	This section will engage the student in discussing the important takeaways from the Torah portion. Every lesson will have different key points, terms, players, and discussion questions.
Summary *	Conclude with a chance for the student to summarize their learning.

\* This is the same for every lesson a.

\*\* The educator script is the same for every lesson a, but the link to the Sefaria JPS translation is different.

### Lesson b:

Review *	In this section, the student will recall what their Torah portion is about.
Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion **	This is the time to explore and discuss all of the social justice topics provided in the guide that can be found in the Torah Portion. The majority of the time will be spent on these discussions. Use Framing Document C.
Making a Connection *	Conclude with a chance for the student to self-reflect on their own self-interest in a given social justice topic and ask questions.

\* This is the same for every lesson b.

\*\* The structure is the same for every lesson b, but the content will differ each time.

### Lesson c:

Review *	In this section, the student will decide which social justice topic(s) to focus on for the following discussion.
Tzedek Project Guidelines *	This section will be the formal introduction to your institution's Tzedek Project guidelines.

What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like **	This section allows the student to explore ideas for their Tzedek Project based on the social justice topic of their choosing.
Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps *	Conclude by introducing the student to the d'var Torah (the assessment). Use Framing Documents A and B.

\* This is the same for every lesson c.

\*\* The educator script is the same for every lesson c, but the social justice topics and project ideas addressed will be different each time.

## Framing Document A: Next Steps for the Student

My Torah Portion: \_\_\_\_\_

My Chosen Social Justice Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

My Chosen Best Practice for a Tzedek Project: \_\_\_\_\_

My Next Steps:

ACTION	NOTES	DUE DATE
Email my paragraph to my educator	I have 2 months to complete this task	

## Framing Document C: Best Practices for the Tzedek Project for the Student

<p><b>Philanthropy:</b> Fundraising</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating an online fundraising page should include a brief write-up about why the organization is important to you and the community and why others should donate to this cause. (An adult must set up most online fundraising pages.)</li> <li>• It is also beneficial to video record yourself reading this write-up. People will be more inclined to donate if they can see why it is important to you.</li> <li>• Set a goal that is feasible for you. You can always increase your goal if you reach it. Every amount matters to an organization, no matter how small or large.</li> <li>• Fundraising can take many forms. Examples include running a lemonade stand, a bake sale, creating customized friendship bracelets, offering to walk your neighbors' pets, participating in a walk-a-thon, and so much more.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collections:</b> Collecting needed and necessary items</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm with the organization what specific items are needed.</li> <li>• Find a location to do your collection. You may choose to have a collection bin in front of your home, at synagogue, or even outside of the b'nai mitzvah celebration.</li> <li>• Set a timeframe for when people can drop off items.</li> <li>• Promote your collection drive. You may want to create flyers, poster boards, or special emails to your friends and family.</li> <li>• Coordinate with the organization how you will get the items you have collected to them. Sometimes, it may be bringing items to an office or a warehouse or shipping them to the organization if they are not local.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hands-On Volunteering:</b> Completing tasks and projects as needed by an organization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the organization to determine if you meet the age criteria to volunteer - you may need a parent present to volunteer. Coordinate volunteer times.</li> <li>• Contacting each organization will be different: sometimes it is emailing; sometimes it is calling; sometimes it is signing up for their volunteer portal; and sometimes it is filling out a form and waiting for them to contact you.</li> <li>• Keep track of the number of hours you spend volunteering. Sometimes, your day school will require volunteer hours.</li> <li>• Come prepared to help in any way. Sometimes, an organization's volunteer opportunities may seem small, but every little action makes a huge difference!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education/ Advocacy:</b> Teaching others about the chosen social justice topic while showing public support for that particular cause.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Who is your audience?</li> <li>◦ Where will your education or advocacy take place?</li> <li>◦ What are you teaching about/advocating for? Where will you find this information?</li> <li>◦ How will you share your knowledge with others?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Find an organization that can support your goal of education and advocacy.</li> </ul>

## Unit 1: Genesis

### **Unit Enduring Understandings:**

1. The book of Genesis lays the foundation for understanding the origins of the world, humanity, and key themes that shape the rest of the Torah.
2. Genesis explores the complexities of human relationships, including family dynamics, moral dilemmas, and the consequences of personal choices.
3. Through the narratives in Genesis, we encounter diverse portrayals of faith, resilience, and the unfolding relationship between humanity and God.

### **Unit Essential Questions:**

1. What is the storyline and key characters in the Torah portion?
2. How does the book of Genesis teach us about how the world began, where people fit in, and how we relate to each other and God?
3. In what ways do the characters and stories in Genesis reflect universal themes and human experiences?
4. What lessons can we learn from the characters' successes, failures, and moral struggles in Genesis? How might these lessons be applied to our lives and communities?

## Lesson 4: Vayera, Genesis 18:1-22:24

### Lesson 4a: Get to Know Your Torah Portion

#### Goals:

- Students will engage in introductory activities to build rapport and establish a comfortable learning environment with the educator.
- Students will actively engage with the Torah portion through reading and discussion.
- Students will synthesize their learning by summarizing the Torah portion in their own words.

#### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify why the Tzedek Project is a part of the b'nai mitzvah process.
- Comprehend what happens during the Torah portion.
- Produce a coherent summary of the Torah portion, highlighting key events, characters, and themes of the portion discussed during the lesson.

#### Essential Questions:

- How does the Tzedek Project reflect Jewish values of social justice and responsibility towards the broader community?
- What insights can we gain from reading and discussing biblical texts like the Torah portion?

#### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18?lang=en&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18?lang=en&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Introductions
0:05-0:10	Why Are We Here?
0:10-0:15	Read the Torah Portion
0:15-0:25	Key Points, Terms, and Players in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Summary

**Pework for the Educator:**

Familiarize yourself with the Torah portion before the lesson. You may read the portion in translation using the link above in the materials section or read a summary. A sample summary is provided below.

*Sample Summary:*

*God made contact with Abraham by sending three men to his tent. Abraham sees the men approaching and runs over to them to offer hospitality. Abraham offers water, a place to rest, and food. Abraham asked Sarah to prepare bread. He then asked a worker to help him prepare fresh meat for the men. Abraham tended to the men as they rested in the tree's shade.*

*One of the men tells Abraham that he will return in a year and Sarah will have a baby boy. Sarah overhears and begins to laugh. She and Abraham are older, and she is well past her childbearing years. The man is concerned that Sarah does not believe him. He asks why she laughs at him and his idea. She apologizes, saying that she didn't mean to laugh. Abraham then walked the men from his tent in the direction of Sodom.*

*God speaks to Abraham and the three men about how the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are evil and do not listen to God's words. The three men, assumed now to be agents of God, are sent into Sodom and Gomorrah to take note of how the people are acting.*

*Abraham is deeply concerned for the people. Surely, they all cannot be wrong. Abraham asks God if there are fifty innocent people, will he spare the whole town? God agrees and says if there are fifty good people, no harm would be done. Abraham continues to bargain with God, asking the same question about forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and ten innocent people. God agrees not to cause harm in any of those scenarios. God then departs, and Abraham returns to his tent.*

**Introductions:**

(5 Minutes)

To begin building rapport with the student, ask the student to share about themselves. You can use the following questions to guide the introduction:

- What do you like to do for fun?



- What are your strengths?
- What is your kryptonite?
- What hobbies do you have?
- Do you play any instruments? Do you play any sports?
- What do you do for fun when you aren't in school?

Take note of the student's responses. These will be valuable information later when it is time to help the student feel connected to their Torah portion and chosen social justice topic. Feel free to share some of your responses with the student. (Example: If the student tells you they like to play soccer, ask them who their favorite team is. You can compare favorite teams and discuss games, players, or statistics.)

### **Why Are We Here?:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student if they know why b'nai mitzvah students do a Tzedek Project. To guide the student in creating an answer to this question, consider what *tzedek* means. Discuss the concept of *tikkun olam* - repairing the world.

Explain to the student that a Tzedek Project focuses on social justice and striving for a just world. This project is a way for b'nai mitzvah students to be introduced to the idea that they are beginning the transition to a Jewish adult and accepting the additional responsibility of caring for others, the world, and your community. The project will emerge from ideas in the Torah and focus on social justice topics the student can relate to and be passionate about.

Provide the student with a brief introduction to your institution's Tzedek Project guidelines. Let the student know that they will be writing a d'var Torah for their b'nai mitzvah, where they will connect their Torah portion to their Tzedek Project. You don't need to go into too much detail, as you will discuss these guidelines in depth in the third mini-lesson.

Let the student know that in the third mini-lesson, you will talk in-depth about the four best practices for the Tzedek Project. To allow the student to start thinking ahead, you may briefly share one sentence about each of the four best practices.

- *Philanthropy*: Raising money
- *Collections*: Collecting needed and necessary items
- *Hands-On Volunteering*: Completing tasks and projects as needed by an organization
- *Education/Advocacy*: Promoting awareness of the selected social justice issue, garnering public backing for its advocacy efforts, and strategizing methods to disseminate these concepts widely.

Ask the student if there are any ways in which they already support their community, volunteer, or contribute to *tikkun olam* or a larger social justice concern in

the world. Keep note of these responses in your educator notes. The student should also take notes throughout these conversations that they can reflect on.

### **Read the Torah Portion:**

(5 Minutes)

Using The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006, translation accessed from Sefaria, have the student read their Torah portion aloud. Based on the length of the Torah portion or the student's comfort levels, you may want to read the portion together and alternate at different times. You may want to encourage the student to have come to this first meeting having read the Torah portion at least once on their own to make the reading less daunting to the student the first time.

The translated text can be found at the following link:

<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18?lang=en&aliyot=0>

### **Key Players, Terms, and Points in the Torah Portion:**

(10 Minutes)

After reading the Torah portion, take this time to review some of the key players, terms, and points in the Torah portion. Things you should review with the student are below. There are suggested discussion questions included throughout. Encourage the student to take notes, as this will help them narrate and write their summary of the portion. You should also let the student know that these notes will benefit the writing of the d'var Torah.

The questions provided are examples that can be used to facilitate discussion. You can ask these questions and/or create your own. Questions can be asked in any order. You may choose to start with the key points and then move on to the key players and terms. You may ask questions as they arise or ask them all after reviewing the Torah portion.

#### Key Players:

- Abraham
  - One of the three patriarchs of Judaism, formerly known as Abram, Abraham means "The Father of Many Nations"
    - What does Abraham do when the three strangers approach his tent?
- Sarah
  - One of the four matriarchs of Judaism, Abraham's wife, formerly known as Sarai
    - How does Sarah help Abraham in welcoming the strangers?
- God
  - What role does God play in this portion?

- The Three Messengers
  - Sent by God with messages for Abraham
    - How do you imagine the messengers felt as they approached Abraham and Sarah's tent as strangers?
    - When do you think they might have stopped feeling like strangers?

#### Key Terms:

- Hachnasat Orchim - Welcoming the Stranger
  - What are some ways that Abraham welcomed the strangers?
  - In the modern day, who might be a stranger in your community?
  - What are some ways that you can welcome the stranger?
  - How can you change your attitude to allow a stranger to become a friend or welcomed community member?
  - How might you change an environment to make others feel welcome?
  - How can we extend the principles of hospitality to support individuals experiencing homelessness in our communities?

#### Key Points:

- Abraham is visited by three messengers from God.
- Abraham offers the three men hospitality: food, water, and shelter.
- Sarah cooks and serves the messengers.
- One of the messengers tells Abraham that despite Sarah's old age, she will become pregnant and have a baby boy.
- Abraham tests God when approached with the idea of destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

### **Summarize Your Learning:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to summarize the Torah portion in their own words. As the educator, you should note which parts of the portion the student mentions, as those are typically the parts of the portion that are most memorable to them. Tell the student they will be asked to share this summary at the beginning of the next session. The student can write notes about it to enable them to remember and reflect on it in the following lessons. The summary will help them identify themes or make connections later.

## Lesson 4b: Connecting Your Torah Portion to Social Justice Topics

### Goals:

- Students will summarize their Torah portion in their own words.
- Students will identify social justice themes in the Torah portion and discuss their significance.
- Students will reflect on personal connections to social justice topics and formulate questions for further exploration.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate definitions of social justice terms and concepts such as tikkun olam, tzedek, justice, and injustice.
- Analyze texts from the Torah portion to identify social justice topics and discuss their implications and relevance.
- Identify social justice topics that resonate with them and generate ideas and strategies for how they can address these issues.

### Essential Questions:

- How do social justice themes manifest in biblical narratives, specifically within Vayera?
- How do the social justice issues depicted in the Torah portion resonate with contemporary concerns and challenges?
- How can you discover your own social justice voice in Torah?
- How do the events and characters in the Torah portion relate to our contemporary understanding of social justice and ethical conduct?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18?lang=en&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18?lang=en&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:25	Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Making a Connection

**Review:**

(5 Minutes)

This is a review of the previous lesson. Ask the student to summarize their Torah portion verbally in their own words. Remind the student that they can look at their notes from the previous lesson.

To introduce the next topic of study, ask the following question, “What is social justice?” To answer this, you may first ask the student to define “*tikkun olam*,” *tzedek*, justice, and/or injustice.

- Social Justice: Justice in relation to the balance or distribution of wealth, resources, education, or opportunities.
- Tikkun Olam: The Jewish value of repairing the world.
- Tzedek: Justice; Being treated in ways that are equitable and fair.
- Justice: Being treated in ways that are equitable and fair.
- Injustice: A lack of fairness or equity.

**Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion:**

(20 Minutes)

Let the student know that every Torah portion calls to us differently, and at this moment, it is speaking to them in a way that prompts action. To allow the student to find their own passion/interests, ask them what social justice topics they can identify as appearing in the Torah portion.

This section is primarily discussion-based. Below are some examples of social justice topics provided in the Torah portion and textual examples of where they are found. Each example also provides discussion questions. Ask the student how they could, or would, achieve justice for each social justice topic. These should serve as a guide. You might identify others.

Some topics may be triggering for certain students. As their educator, use your best judgment on omitting questions or social justice topics.

**Food Justice, Environmental Justice, and Homelessness:**

Abraham offers the three messengers hospitality through three basic necessities: food, water, and shelter. (Genesis 18:4-5)

- *Food Justice*: The messengers were given food to fill their stomachs.

- What are some examples of times when people might not have enough food or access to food?
- What might contribute to not having enough food or access to food?
- How can Jewish values and teachings inspire food justice activism and guide our collective responsibility to care for the Earth and its inhabitants?
- How does someone's lack of food due to access or finances worsen the problem? What can we do to help?
- How can people, schools, synagogues, and other groups work together to help everyone have enough food and make sure everyone is treated fairly when it comes to food?
- *Environmental Justice*: The messengers were provided with drinking water.
  - What is clean water?
  - Where do you get clean water?
  - What does it mean to have access to clean water?
  - What is an example of not having access to clean water within the U.S.? In the world?
  - How can Jewish values and teachings inspire environmental activism and guide our collective responsibility to care for the earth and its inhabitants?
  - How can you take care of the earth and make sure it stays healthy for the future?
- *Homelessness*: The messengers are provided a shady space to rest.
  - In biblical times, they did not have homes the way that we are accustomed to today. What might the benefits have been to being provided a shady spot by a tall tree?
  - What is the value of having a safe space to sit and rest?
  - How does Abraham and Sarah's willingness to welcome strangers into their home highlight the importance of compassion towards those experiencing homelessness?
  - What are some ways that you can welcome and support individuals experiencing homelessness while affirming their dignity?

#### Immigration Justice:

Abraham practices the Jewish value of *hachnasat orchim* - welcoming the stranger. The messengers come from a place unfamiliar to Abraham. They are traveling to a new area.

- What are some ways that Abraham welcomes the strangers?
- In the modern day, who might be a stranger in your community?
- How does Abraham and Sarah's hospitality towards outsiders serve as a model for welcoming immigrants and refugees today?
- What are some ways that you can welcome the stranger?
- How can you help a stranger feel like a welcomed community member?

**Making a Connection:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to articulate which social justice topic in this Torah portion they would like to explore more as something you might be able to do something about. The student can think about their answer until the next lesson. The student can also choose a social justice topic they connect to today, but after thinking more about it, their answer could change by the next lesson.

Also, ask the student what questions or thoughts they may still have from the previous discussions. Have them write down those questions and ask them to come up with answers by the next lesson. Anything they have not answered independently can be answered the next time you meet.

**Student Next Steps:**

1. Choose a social justice topic to explore
2. Think about and answer any questions that still remain about the Torah portion
3. Bring any unanswered questions to the next lesson

## Lesson 4c: Putting Your Learning Into Action

### Goals:

- Engage the student in reflective thinking about their chosen social justice topic.
- Familiarize the student with best practices associated with different types of Tzedek Projects.
- Learn how social justice themes from the Torah portion can inform and inspire their Tzedek Project.
- Prepare the student for the assessment and writing process associated with their d'var Torah and Tzedek Project.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate their interest in a specific social justice topic, project ideas from the Torah portion, and find a personal connection.
- Take the next steps in finding non-profit organizations to complete their Tzedek Project.
- Begin to outline their d'var Torah.

### Essential Questions:

- Why do Jews do a Tzedek Project as an essential part of the b'nai mitzvah process?
- Why is it important to take time from your own life to help others?
- How can you contribute to making an impact in your community through your Tzedek project?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18?lang=en&aliyot=0>
- A printed copy of Framing Document A
- A printed copy of Framing Document B
- A printed copy of Framing Document C

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil



- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.18?lang=en&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:10	Tzedek Project Guidelines
0:10-0:25	What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like
0:25-0:30	Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps

**Review:**

(5 Minutes)

Which social justice topic in the Torah portion would you like to address? Their answer could have changed since the last lesson. This answer will guide the following session.

Revisit the student's questions they wrote down from the last lesson. Ask the student to share their questions and any responses they have come up with. If there is a question still unanswered, you can answer it together.

**Tzedek Project Guidelines:**

(5 Minutes)

What guidelines for the Tzedek Project are in place for your institution? Those using this curriculum will fill in this section based on their institution's requirements and guidelines for the Tzedek Project.

Examples of Guidelines:

- Volunteer for a certain number of hours; Provide a deadline for the hours to be completed.
- Create a presentation that will be shared with the next year's cohort of b'nai mitzvah students.
- Write a paragraph about your Tzedek Project that can be shared in a synagogue newsletter, email blast, or synagogue website.
- Create a poster that will be shared in the synagogue lobby the week before the b'nai mitzvah.
- Share a photo or other documentation of you during the Tzedek Project process.

## What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like:

(15 Minutes)

This next discussion will be based on the student's answer to the review question at the beginning of this lesson: What social justice topic do they want to explore for the Tzedek Project? If the student has a clear answer about which topic they want to explore, then as the educator, you can focus on just one subsection to guide the discussion and decision. I would recommend exploring at most two social justice topics for timing purposes.

These subsections are based on the social justice topics from the previous lesson. Students may find a connection to a different social justice topic not outlined in this or the previous lesson. That is okay. Each subsection will have ideas and examples of organizations that can accomplish a Tzedek Project based on four best practices: philanthropy, collections, hands-on volunteering, and education/advocacy. Remind the student that they should have a parent or guardian's permission before committing to anything or making any online posts. Together, review Framing Document C on page 20 of this curriculum guide.

### 1. Food Justice

#### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for a food justice organization. You might want to theme your fundraiser around the idea of food justice. For example, you could hold a bake sale.
  - [Every Day Action](#) in Los Angeles, California, is an example of a food justice organization that relies on monetary support to help reallocate leftover food from television and film sets.

#### b. Collections

- Run a collection drive to collect non-perishable items. Those items can be donated to a local food bank or emergency shelter. You can also collect Kosher non-perishable items and find a local Kosher food bank to donate to.
  - [Kehilat Pantry](#) in Queens, New York, is an example of a Kosher food bank.

#### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Get your hands dirty and spend time at a local community garden. Community gardens are gardens where multiple people plant and grow items in a shared space. Often, these gardens grow fruits and vegetables that help sustain those who garden in that space. It is also common for community gardens to donate items grown in excess to local food banks or emergency shelters.

- [Wattle's Farm Community Garden](#) in Hollywood, California, is an example of a community garden.
- d. Education/Advocacy
  - Explore the different reasons why people experience injustice when it comes to food. How do access, location, and cost affect one who may be food insecure? Advocate for the protection of funding to the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#).
    - Feeding America is a national organization that identifies and advances policy solutions that help struggling families create a path to healthy, hunger-free lives.
- 2. Environmental Justice
  - a. Philanthropy
    - You can raise money for an environmental justice organization focusing on water.
      - [Charity: Water](#) is an international organization headquartered in New York. They rely on monetary donations to help fund their global efforts to create clean water access.
  - b. Collections
    - You can collect empty water bottles and cans and hand-deliver them to a recycling plant.
      - [Recycle Nation](#) is an online platform to help you find your nearest recycling plant nationwide.
  - c. Hands-On Volunteering
    - Organize or attend a beach clean-up. Help keep trash off our beaches so it doesn't end up in our oceans.
      - [Amigas De Bolsa Chica](#) in Huntington Beach, California, is an environmental justice organization that organizes monthly beach clean-ups.
  - d. Education/Advocacy
    - Leverage your voice to increase awareness of environmental concerns and push for policies to resolve them. This involves engaging with elected representatives, participating in public hearings and local council sessions, and joining demonstrations that shed light on environmental inequities.
      - [Global Citizen](#) is an international organization that focuses on worldwide poverty which is being made worse by the growing climate concerns.

### 3. Homelessness

#### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for an organization that assists those experiencing homelessness.
  - [The Peoples Concern](#) in Los Angeles, California, in addition to providing shelter to those in need, provides life skills and wellness programs for those experiencing homelessness.

#### b. Collections

- Many organizations seeking to support the unhoused populations provide them with basic necessities while they experience homelessness. You can collect items such as toiletries, blankets, snacks, and clothing to donate to a local shelter.
  - [Seattle Homeless Outreach](#) in Seattle, Washington, provides basic survival supplies without expectation or judgment.

#### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Organizations that offer services to those experiencing homelessness have many tasks that you can do in person, such as handing out hot meals, entertaining young children, or sorting essential goods to be handed out.
  - [The Karsh Center](#) in Los Angeles, California, provides essential goods, healthcare, and food to those in need.

#### d. Education/Advocacy

- Take the time to learn firsthand about what being unhoused entails. Through raising awareness, you can teach others about homelessness.
  - [Covenant House](#) is an international organization that empowers young people to overcome homelessness. They organize events called “Sleep Out.” Participants experience what it is like to live without shelter.

### 4. Immigration Justice

#### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for an organization focusing on immigration justice.
  - [HIAS](#), a national organization that relies on monetary donations, stands for a world where refugees find welcome, safety, and opportunity.

#### b. Collections

- You can collect needed items for those who come to America seeking refuge and asylum. Often, families come with only the items they can carry independently.

- [Miry's List](#) in Los Angeles, California, works to provide these families with the necessary items to begin building a home.
- c. Hands-On Volunteering
  - Volunteer at a local organization focusing on immigration justice.
    - [Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay](#) in Berkeley, California, offers a resettlement program for refugees. Families can volunteer as a “welcome committee” for an incoming family.
- d. Education/Advocacy
  - Take the time to learn about those who have immigrated to other countries. Learn their stories and share them with the world.
    - [The University of Minnesota](#) has an online database in its UMedia system of recordings of immigrants sharing their stories.

### **Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps:**

(5 Minutes)

Using Framing Document A, found on page 19 of this curriculum guide, create a concrete list of the next steps with the student. The next steps may include creating a list of possible non-profit organizations, setting deadlines for connecting with an organization, and sharing an update on their progress to the educator via email after 4 weeks. This worksheet should go home with the student after this lesson.

Using Framing Document B on page 105 of this curriculum guide, the student will be provided information about the Assessment. As the educator, you may print a copy of the two framing documents for the student on a double-sided sheet of paper.

To review the assessment, begin with reviewing what a d'var Torah is. D'var Torah literally means “word of Torah.” A d'var Torah is a speech that each b'nai mitzvah student will share from the bima on the day of their service that provides insights, interpretations, reflections, or teachings about their Torah portion. The goal of the d'var Torah is to take the biblical text from the Torah portion and share its relevance and application to modern life. One of the ways that the student will do that is by writing about how their Tzedek Project connects to their Torah portion.

The student will be assessed on their comprehension of the Torah portion and their ability to connect their Tzedek Project to the social justice themes of the Torah portion. This assessment will take place after the mini-lessons have been completed and after they have at least begun their Tzedek Project. In most institutions, the writing of the d'var Torah begins about three months before the service under the supervision of a clergy member. The student should be encouraged to reach out for more support as needed.

The student should write at least one paragraph for their d'var Torah that answers the following prompts:

- What happens in the Torah portion?
- What social justice topic appears in the Torah portion?
- What did you do for your Tzedek Project?
- How is your Tzedek Project related to the Torah portion?
- Why should others care about your chosen social justice topic?
- What do you believe was the impact of your Tzedek Project?
- What did you learn from doing this project?"

This paragraph should be written within two months of this final meeting. Doing this will allow the student to get a head start on their D'var Torah, and it will be done when it is fresh in their mind. The paragraph should be emailed to the educator within those two months as a method of accountability.

## Unit 2: Exodus

### **Unit Enduring Understandings:**

1. The book of Exodus recounts the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the formation of their covenant with God at Mount Sinai.
2. Exodus explores themes of liberation, justice, and divine intervention, shaping the identity of the Jewish people and their relationship with God.
3. Through the narrative of Exodus, we encounter the challenges of leadership, transition, and communal responsibility as the Israelites become free.

### **Unit Essential Questions:**

1. How does the book of Exodus depict the journey from slavery to freedom? What lessons for today does Exodus offer about freedom and justice?
2. What role do faith, courage, and resilience play in the experiences of the Israelites as they navigate their journey out of Egypt?
3. In what ways does the covenant between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai establish the foundation for Jewish identity, law, and ethical principles?
4. How do the stories of Moses, Aaron, and other key figures in Exodus illustrate the complexities of leadership in times of crisis?

# Lesson 1: Shemot, Exodus 1:1 - 6:1

## Lesson 1a: Get to Know Your Torah Portion

### Goals:

- Students will engage in introductory activities to build rapport and establish a comfortable learning environment with the educator.
- Students will actively engage with the Torah portion through reading and discussion.
- Students will synthesize their learning by summarizing the Torah portion in their own words.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify why the Tzedek Project is a part of the b'nai mitzvah process.
- Comprehend what happens during the Torah portion.
- Produce a coherent summary of the Torah portion, highlighting key events, characters, and themes of the portion discussed during the lesson.

### Essential Questions:

- How does the Tzedek Project reflect Jewish values of social justice and responsibility towards the broader community?
- What insights can we gain from reading and discussing biblical texts like the Torah portion?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>



**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Introductions
0:05-0:10	Why Are We Here?
0:10-0:15	Read the Torah Portion
0:15-0:25	Key Points, Terms, and Players in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Summary

**Pre-work for the Educator:**

Familiarize yourself with the Torah portion before the lesson. You may read the portion in translation using the link above in the materials section or read a summary. A sample summary is provided below.

*Sample Summary:*

*The Torah portion begins with naming 11 sons of Jacob. 11 of Jacob's sons and their families traveled to Egypt. His 12th son, Joseph, was already in Egypt. Joseph and his brothers have since died, and a new generation of Israelites is living in Egypt.*

*A new king arose over Egypt. We will refer to this king as Pharaoh. Pharaoh and Joseph's lifespans did not overlap, so Pharaoh had not heard about all the good things that Joseph, an Israelite man, had previously done to support a king of Egypt.*

*Pharaoh was concerned about the growing population of the Israelite people and saw them as a threat. Pharaoh was concerned that the Israelites could grow too numerous and potentially rebel and overtake the Egyptians.*

*Taskmasters were sent to oppress the Israelites into forced labor, but still, the number of the Israelites grew. The Egyptians continued to impose bitter and ruthless tasks on the Israelites.*

*Pharaoh asked two of the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill all of the baby boys that were born to Hebrew women. The midwives feared God and did not follow the decree of Pharaoh. God rewarded the midwives. Seeing that Pharaoh could not make the midwives do his bidding, he told the Egyptians to throw every male Hebrew baby into the Nile.*

*A woman in the house of Levi became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. She wanted to protect him and hid him for three months. When she could no longer hide the baby boy, she placed him in a wicker basket and placed it along the bank of the Nile. The sister of the baby boy hid from a distance to watch what would become of her baby brother.*

*Pharaoh's daughter came to the Nile to bathe. She brought two of her maidens with her. She noticed the basket and had one of her maidens fetch it. She then opened the basket and saw the baby boy. She pitied the child, knowing that it must be a Hebrew child.*

*The baby boy's sister approached Pharaoh's daughter and offered to help her find a way to take care of the baby by finding a woman to care for him until he was older. When he grew older, Pharaoh's daughter made the baby her son. She named him Moses, meaning "to draw out" of the water.*

*After Moses had grown up, he saw that his Hebrew kinfolk were being mistreated and witnessed one being beaten by an Egyptian. He stepped in and fought back against the Egyptian, killing him.*

*Pharaoh learned about what Moses had done to the Egyptian man and wanted to kill Moses. Moses fled and went to a new land called Midian.*

*Moses rested by a well in Midian. While sitting at the well, he saw the seven daughters of the priest of Midian, named Jethro, coming to draw water to give to their father's flocks. Shepherds attempted to drive off the seven daughters, but Moses rose to the defense of the women and helped them water their flock.*

*Jethro was impressed that the daughters returned so quickly. They told their father that an Egyptian man helped them. Jethro asked the daughters to bring this man back so he could properly thank him. Moses stayed with Jethro and took one of the daughters, Zipporah, as a wife. She gave birth to a son named Gershom.*

*A long time after that, the king of Egypt died, but the Israelites were still being oppressed. God heard their cries for help.*

*Moses was tending a flock of Jethro's and took them to Horeb, the mountain of God. A messenger of God appeared to Moses as a burning bush. God called to Moses from the burning bush and told him not to come any closer and to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. Moses hid his face as God spoke.*

*God tells Moses that God has heard the cries of the Israelites in Egypt and will take them out of that land and bring them into a new land flowing with milk and honey. God wants Moses to go back to Egypt and free the Israelites. Moses is shocked and believes he is not the leader for this job. God confirms that they will have Moses' back. Moses wants to know God's name to tell the Israelites who sent him to free them. God gives the name Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh, meaning "I am who I am."*

*First, Moses must speak to the Israelite elders to get them on board. Then, with the elders, he can go to the king of Egypt and tell him to free the Israelites. God knows this will not be an easy battle and tells Moses that God is prepared to share wonders that will entice Pharaoh to free the Israelites.*

*Moses, still skeptical, asks God what shall happen if the people don't believe him. God told Moses to put his rod on the ground, and it turned into a snake. When he picked the snake up, it turned back into a rod. God said this is proof enough, but if you're not convinced, Moses should place his hand on his shirt over his chest. When he removed his hand, it was covered in scales. When he put his hand back into his shirt and removed it again, it was back to normal. But, even still, if the people don't believe,*

*God tells Moses that he can take water from the Nile and pour it onto dry ground, and it will turn into blood.*

*Moses tells God that he does not consider himself a man of words and is slow of speech and tongue. God reminds Moses that God is the one who gives humans their speech and sight. Moses still begs God to choose someone else to be God's Agent.*

*God is getting angry while trying to convince Moses that he is the right man for the job. God tells Moses that his brother Aaron will speak for him. God will give Moses words, and then Moses will give those words to Aaron to speak out loud. God also lets Moses know that all of those who sought to kill him are now dead themselves, so Moses will be safe returning.*

*Moses returns to Jethro and tells him that he must return to Egypt to help his kinfolk. Jethro tells Moses to go in peace. Moses, Zipporah, and his sons traveled back to Egypt. God let Moses know that he should perform all three of the marvels God gave Moses the power to perform. God chooses to make Pharaoh stubborn.*

*At a night encampment, Zipporah circumcised her son because God threatened murder. God told Aaron to meet Moses in the wilderness. The two reunite, and Moses tells Aaron all of the instructions that God has given him.*

*With Aaron's help, Moses convinced the Hebrew elders of God's words and showed them the marvels. They then go to Pharaoh for the first time to ask for the Israelites to be freed. Pharaoh, in return, makes the ruthless tasks given to the Israelites even more difficult to complete. Despite these added tasks, they are still expected to complete the same work. The Israelites blame Moses and Aaron for making Pharaoh angry and for the added work.*

*Moses speaks to God and complains that he is now being pinned as the bad guy. God assures Moses that this is all part of a bigger plan.*

## **Introductions:**

(5 Minutes)

To begin building rapport with the student, ask the student to share about themselves. You can use the following questions to guide the introduction:

- What do you like to do for fun?
- What are your strengths?
- What is your kryptonite?
- What hobbies do you have?
- Do you play any instruments? Do you play any sports?
- What do you do for fun when you aren't in school?

Take note of the student's responses. These will be valuable information later when it is time to help the student feel connected to their Torah portion and chosen social justice topic. Feel free to share some of your responses with the student.

(Example: If the student tells you they like to play soccer, ask them who their favorite team is. You can compare favorite teams and discuss games, players, or statistics.)

### **Why Are We Here?:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student if they know why b'nai mitzvah students do a Tzedek Project. To guide the student in creating an answer to this question, consider what tzedek means. Discuss the concept of *tikkun olam* - repairing the world.

Explain to the student that a Tzedek Project focuses on social justice and striving for a just world. This project is a way for b'nai mitzvah students to be introduced to the idea that they are beginning the transition to a Jewish adult and accepting the additional responsibility of caring for others, the world, and your community. The project will emerge from ideas in the Torah and focus on social justice topics the student can relate to and be passionate about.

Provide the student with a brief introduction to your institution's Tzedek Project guidelines. Let the student know that they will be writing a D'var Torah for their b'nai mitzvah, where they will connect their Torah portion to their Tzedek Project. You don't need to go into too much detail, as you will discuss these guidelines in depth in the third mini-lesson.

Let the student know that in the third mini-lesson, you will talk in-depth about the four best practices for the Tzedek Project. To allow the student to start thinking ahead, you may briefly share one sentence about each of the four best practices.

- *Philanthropy*: Monetary fundraising
- *Collections*: Collecting needed and necessary items
- *Hands-On Volunteering*: Completing tasks and projects as needed by an organization
- *Education/Advocacy*: Promoting awareness of the selected social justice issue, garnering public backing for its advocacy efforts, and strategizing methods to disseminate these concepts widely.

Ask the student if there are any ways in which they already support their community, volunteer, or contribute to *tikkun olam* or a larger social justice concern in the world. Keep note of these responses in your educator notes. The student should also take notes throughout these conversations that they can reflect on.

### **Read the Torah Portion:**

(5 Minutes)

Using The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006, translation accessed from Sefaria, have the student read their Torah portion aloud. Based on the length of the Torah portion or the student's comfort levels, you may want to read the portion together and alternate at different times. You may want to encourage the student to have come to this

first meeting having read the Torah portion at least once on their own to make the reading less daunting to the student the first time.

The translated text can be found at the following link:

<https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

### **Key Players, Terms, and Points in the Torah Portion:**

(10 Minutes)

After reading the Torah portion, take this time to review some of the key players, terms, and points in the Torah portion. Things you should review with the student are below. There are suggested discussion questions included throughout. Encourage the student to take notes, as this will help them narrate and write their summary of the portion. You should also let the student know that these notes will benefit the writing of the d'var Torah.

The questions provided are examples that can be used to facilitate discussion. You can ask these questions and/or create your own. Questions can be asked in any order. You may choose to start with the key points and then move onto the key players and terms. You may ask questions as they arise or ask them all at the end of reviewing the Torah portion.

#### Key Players:

- Jacob and the 12 Tribes
  - One of the three patriarchs of Judaism, had 12 sons, also known as the 12 Tribes of Israel, Joseph was the favorite son, Joseph was sold to slavery by his 11 brothers, thus bringing him to Egypt before the rest of the clan settled.
    - Even though the stories of Jacob and his 12 sons occur in Genesis, why do you think the book of Exodus begins with this family update?
- Pharaoh (king of Egypt)
  - Why do you think Pharaoh was fearful of the Israelites?
  - How do you think Pharaoh's actions affected the Israelites?
- God
  - What role does God play in this portion?
  - What is God's relationship to Moses?
- Shiphrah and Puah
  - Hebrew midwives
    - How do you imagine Shiphrah and Puah felt as Pharaoh gave them the task of killing the baby boys being born?
    - Why do you think Shiphrah and Puah chose not to listen to Pharaoh?

- Moses
  - Moses translated, “delivered from water,” was chosen by God to free the Israelites from Egypt, married Zipporah, brother of Aaron
    - What is Moses’ relationship to God?
    - Moses shows extreme hesitation about being a leader for the Israelites. In what ways does God assure Moses that he is the right person for this task?
    - What do you think Moses thought and felt during this conversation with God?
    - What might Moses mean when he tells God that he is not a man of words and is slow of speech and tongue?
    - What would you say if you were asked to lead the way Moses was?
- Pharaoh’s Daughter
  - Saves Moses from the basket along the Nile, later becoming Moses’ mother
    - How does Pharaoh’s daughter show compassion for the Israelites?
    - Why do you think Pharaoh’s daughter is never given a name?
- Moses’ Sister
  - Watches Moses in the basket, offers to bring the baby’s mother to Pharaoh’s daughter
    - Do you think Moses’ sister made the right decision? Why or why not?
    - Why do you think Moses’ sister is never given a name in this section of Torah, even though we assume it to be Miriam?
- Jethro
  - The priest of Midian, has seven daughters, and becomes Moses’ father-in-law after Moses marries Zipporah
    - How does Jethro show kindness and compassion to Moses?
- Zipporah
  - One of the seven daughters of the priest of Midian, marries Moses
    - What do you think it would have been like for Zipporah to marry someone who showed up from outside the community?
    - What is an example of a way that Zipporah protects her family?
- Gershom
  - The firstborn son of Moses and Zipporah, name means “stranger”
    - Possibly foreshadowing the remainder of the book of Exodus, why do you think Moses and Zipporah chose the name Gershom?
- Aaron
  - Moses’ brother

- Other than being a brother to Moses, what role did Aaron play in Moses' success?
- Discuss the role of Aaron, Moses' brother, who served as his spokesperson due to Moses' speech impediment. How does Aaron's support exemplify the importance of allyship and accommodation for individuals with diverse abilities?

#### Key Terms:

- Midwife (Plural- Midwives) - One who delivers babies
- B'Tzelem Elohim - In the Image of God
  - What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
  - How do you think Moses would react, given his speech impediment, that he is made in the image of God? Would it make him feel better? Why or why not?
  - How does the idea of "b'tzelem Elohim" challenge stereotypes or prejudices we might hold about certain groups of people?
  - How can we apply the principle of treating others as if they are made in the image of God in our relationships with friends, family, and strangers?

#### Key Points:

- Pharaoh was concerned about the ever-growing population of the Israelite people and saw them as a threat.
- Pharaoh asked two of the Hebrew Midwives, Shiprah and Puah, to kill all of the baby boys that were born to Hebrew women. The midwives feared God and did not follow the decree of Pharaoh.
- Moses was born to an Israelite woman and was placed in a basket along the Nile until Pharaoh's daughter found him.
- Moses flees to Midian after Pharaoh becomes upset with his actions.
- Moses shows kindness to others and is taken in by Jethro.
- Moses marries Zipporah and has a son named Gershom.
- God speaks to Moses through the burning bush and lets him know he is the chosen one to help free the Israelites from Egypt.
- God brings Moses and Aaron together so Aaron can help Moses lead the Israelites to freedom.

#### **Summarize Your Learning:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to summarize the Torah portion in their own words. As the educator, you should note which parts of the portion the student mentions, as those are typically the parts of the portion that are most memorable to them. Tell the student they will be asked to share this summary at the beginning of the next session. The student

can write notes about it to enable them to remember and reflect on it in the following lessons. The summary will help them identify themes or make connections later.



## Lesson 1b: Connecting Your Torah Portion to Social Justice Topics

### Goals:

- Students will summarize their Torah portion in their own words.
- Students will identify social justice themes in the Torah portion and discuss their significance.
- Students will reflect on personal connections to social justice topics and formulate questions for further exploration.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate definitions of social justice terms and concepts such as tikkun olam, tzedek, justice, and injustice.
- Analyze texts from the Torah portion to identify social justice topics and discuss their implications and relevance.
- Identify social justice topics that resonate with them and generate ideas and strategies for how they can address these issues.

### Essential Questions:

- How do social justice themes manifest in biblical narratives, specifically within Shemot?
- How do the social justice issues depicted in the Torah portion resonate with contemporary concerns and challenges?
- How can you discover your own social justice voice in Torah?
- How do the events and characters in the Torah portion relate to our contemporary understanding of social justice and ethical conduct?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:25	Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Making a Connection

**Review:**

(5 Minutes)

This is a review of the previous lesson. Ask the student to summarize their Torah portion verbally in their own words. Remind the student that they can look at their notes from the previous lesson.

To introduce the next topic of study, ask the following question, “What is social justice?” To answer this, you may first ask the student to define “tikkun olam,” tzedek, justice, and/or injustice.

- Social Justice: Justice in relation to the balance or distribution of wealth, resources, education, or opportunities.
- Tikkun Olam: The Jewish value of repairing the world.
- Justice: Being treated in ways that are equitable and fair.
- Injustice: A lack of fairness or equity.

**Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion:**

(20 Minutes)

Let the student know that every Torah portion calls to us differently, and at this moment, it is speaking to them in a way that prompts action. To allow the student to find their own passion/interests, ask them what social justice topics they can identify as appearing in the Torah portion.

This section is primarily discussion-based. Below are some examples of social justice topics provided in the Torah portion and textual examples of where they are found. Each example also provides discussion questions. Ask the student how they could, or would, achieve justice for each social justice topic. These should serve as a guide. You might identify others.

Some topics may be triggering for certain students. As their educator, use your best judgment on omitting questions or social justice topics.

**Foster Youth and Adoption:**

Given her situation and environment, Moses’s mother cannot care for him. Moses is taken in by Pharaoh’s daughter and is given a good life with opportunities that would not have been available to him otherwise.

- What are some of the reasons that children end up in the foster system?
- How can we show care and compassion for youth in the foster system?

- Reflecting on Moses' struggles with identity and belonging, how have you grappled with questions of who you are and where you fit in?

#### Antisemitism, Xenophobia, and Racial Justice:

Pharaoh fears the Israelites and sees them as a threat due to the growing population. Pharaoh decides to make the Israelites as “less than” the Egyptians. Through continual forced labor, Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites. With prejudice, Pharaoh singled out the Israelites as bad people.

- What is antisemitism?
- What is xenophobia?
- What does it mean to be afraid of someone who is different than you?
- Who stands up to the hate that Pharaoh shows toward the Israelites?
- Explore the role of propaganda and misinformation in spreading hate and antisemitism, such as Pharaoh's false portrayal of the Israelites as a threat to Egyptian society. Where do you see hate speech and stereotyping against Jewish people happening today?
- Reflect on the resilience and resistance that Moses and the Israelites displayed in the face of oppression. How can stories of Jewish resistance in the Torah inspire resilience in the face of antisemitism today?
- The Jewish people are a minority in the world. Many other minorities have and are experiencing oppression in today's world. What are some of the ways that our Jewish story of oppression is similar or different from the history of oppression of other minority groups?
- How can individuals and communities stand up against antisemitism and support Jewish people in their fight for equality and justice?
- How can we help others who are different from us fight against unfair treatment and inequality?

#### Diverse Abilities:

Moses worries that he cannot be the leader that God thinks he is. Moses tells God he is not a man of words and is slow to speech and tongue.

- What are diverse abilities?
- What does it mean to be a leader, and how might a different ability help someone's leadership?
- How do we create inclusive spaces for those with diverse abilities?
- Given what we know about the story of the Exodus, what can we learn about perseverance and self-acceptance from Moses?
- How can we ensure that environments such as schools, public transportation, stores, and other opportunities are accessible and inclusive for individuals with diverse abilities?
- How can we challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about people with diverse abilities?

### Environmental Justice:

God appears to Moses as a burning bush.

- Moses' encounter with the burning bush symbolizes a moment of revelation and calling. Have you ever experienced a moment of clarity or purpose that guided your path forward?
- What might the burning bush be a metaphor for in today's world?
- How can we help eliminate those metaphorical (sometimes physical) fires?
- How can Jewish values and teachings inspire environmental activism and guide our collective responsibility to care for the earth and its inhabitants?
- How can we cultivate a sense of environmental stewardship and pass on a healthy and sustainable planet to future generations?

### **Making a Connection:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to articulate which social justice topic in this Torah portion they would like to explore more as something you might be able to do something about. The student can think about their answer until the next lesson. The student can also choose a social justice topic they connect to today, but after thinking more about it, their answer could change by the next lesson.

Also, ask the student what questions or thoughts they may still have from the previous discussions. Have them write down those questions and ask them to come up with answers by the next lesson. Anything they have not answered independently can be answered the next time you meet.

Student Next Steps:

1. Choose a social justice topic to explore
2. Think about and answer any questions that still remain about the Torah portion
3. Bring any unanswered questions to the next lesson

## Lesson 1c: Putting Your Learning Into Action

### Goals:

- Engage the student in reflective thinking about their chosen social justice topic.
- Familiarize the student with best practices associated with different types of Tzedek Projects.
- Learn how social justice themes from the Torah portion can inform and inspire their Tzedek Project.
- Prepare the student for the assessment and writing process associated with their d'var Torah and Tzedek Project.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate their interest in a specific social justice topic, project ideas from the Torah portion, and find a personal connection.
- Take the next steps in finding non-profit organizations to complete their Tzedek Project.
- Begin to outline their d'var Torah.

### Essential Questions:

- Why do Jews do a Tzedek Project as an essential part of the b'nai mitzvah process?
- Why is it important to take time from your own life to help others?
- How can you contribute to making an impact in your community through your Tzedek project?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>
- A printed copy of Framing Document A
- A printed copy of Framing Document B
- A printed copy of Framing Document C

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil

- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

#### **Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:10	Tzedek Project Guidelines
0:10-0:25	What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like
0:25-0:30	Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps

#### **Review:**

(5 Minutes)

Which social justice topic in the Torah portion would you like to address? Their answer could have changed since the last lesson. This answer will guide the following session.

Revisit the student's questions they wrote down from the last lesson. Ask the student to share their questions and any responses they have come up with. If there is a question still unanswered, you can answer it together.

#### **Tzedek Project Guidelines:**

(5 Minutes)

What guidelines for the Tzedek Project are in place for your institution? Those using this curriculum will fill in this section based on their institution's requirements and guidelines for the Tzedek Project.

##### Examples of Guidelines:

- Volunteer for a certain number of hours; Provide a deadline for the hours to be completed.
- Create a presentation that will be shared with the next year's cohort of b'nai mitzvah students.
- Write a paragraph about your Tzedek Project that can be shared in a synagogue newsletter, email blast, or synagogue website.
- Create a poster that will be shared in the synagogue lobby the week before the b'nai mitzvah.
- Share a photo or other documentation of you during the Tzedek Project process.

## What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like:

(15 Minutes)

This next discussion will be based on the student's answer to the review question at the beginning of this lesson: What social justice topic do they want to explore for the Tzedek Project? If the student has a clear answer about which topic they want to explore, then as the educator, you can focus on just one subsection to guide the discussion and decision. I would recommend exploring at most two social justice topics for timing purposes.

These subsections are based on the social justice topics from the previous lesson. Students may find a connection to a different social justice topic not outlined in this or the previous lesson. That is okay. Each subsection will have ideas and examples of organizations that can accomplish a Tzedek Project based on four best practices: philanthropy, collections, hands-on volunteering, and education/advocacy. Remind the student that they should have a parent or guardian's permission before committing to anything or making any online posts. Together, review Framing Document C on page 20 of this curriculum guide.

### 1. Foster Youth/Adoption

#### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for an organization that supports the growth of professionals in the child welfare sector.
  - [Foster America](#) is a national organization that addresses staff shortages in the child welfare sector. Monetary support allows the organization to train more staff to fill these staffing shortages.

#### b. Collections

- Run a collection drive to collect household items that can help a child aging out of the foster system start their own home.
  - [A Sense of Home](#) is an organization based in Hawthorne, California that provides children aging out of the foster care system with the necessary items to begin starting their own home.

#### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Assist in creating and distributing resources and materials to children in foster care.
  - [Foster Love](#) (formerly known as Together We Rise) is a national organization whose main hub is located in Brea, California. They support children in foster care by providing decorated duffle bags, birthday supplies, and comforting teddy bears.

- d. Education/Advocacy
  - Support outreach campaigns that advocate for state funding to ensure all children in foster care have the resources they need.
    - [Think of Us](#) is a national organization working to transform the nation's child welfare system and improve outcomes for the millions of children and families it impacts annually.
- 2. Antisemitism, Xenophobia, and Racial Justice
  - a. Philanthropy
    - You can raise money for an organization that fights all types of antisemitism.
      - [The Anti-Defamation League \(ADL\)](#) is a national organization based out of New York, New York. Through their work, they strive for a world free from defamation of the Jewish people and secure just treatment for all.
  - b. Collections
    - Provide access to books that discuss racial justice and people who may look different than you that may be banned in some communities.
      - [Little Free Library](#) is a national initiative to provide access to books in every area. You can contribute to a library already established in your area or build your own.
  - c. Hands-On Volunteering
    - Volunteer at a rally in support of racial injustice.
      - Many rallies take place outdoors in the heat. Help pass out water to friends at a rally led by the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement.
  - d. Education/Advocacy
    - Take the time to learn about Jewish history. Visit local, national, and international museums that preserve Jewish history.
      - [Yad Vashem](#) is Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. Aside from the in-person museum experience, they offer online archives that can be accessed globally. You can also find these experiences at the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) in Washington D.C. and the [Museum of Tolerance](#) in Los Angeles, California.
- 3. Diverse Abilities
  - a. Philanthropy
    - You can raise money for an organization that supports those with diverse abilities to succeed.



- [The Israel Parasport Center](#), with its main space in Israel and an office in Northfield, Illinois, provides people with disabilities a space to engage in sports activities and provide them the resources they need.
- b. Collections
  - You can collect adaptive equipment and assistive technologies for those who cannot access or afford them independently.
    - [Ability Tools](#) is a program of the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers. This program helps collect and redistribute ability tools to those in need.
- c. Hands-On Volunteering
  - Volunteer with an organization and make a new best friend.
    - [Best Buddies International](#) is an organization dedicated to establishing opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- d. Education/Advocacy
  - Use various resources to educate others and break the stigma surrounding diverse abilities.
    - [Stigma Free Society](#) provides free resources about diverse abilities and inclusion.
- 4. Environmental Justice
  - a. Philanthropy
    - You can raise money for an environmental justice organization focusing on water.
      - [Charity: Water](#) is an international organization headquartered in New York. They rely on monetary donations to help fund their global efforts to create clean water access.
  - b. Collections
    - You can collect empty water bottles and cans and hand-deliver them to a recycling plant.
      - [Recycle Nation](#) is an online platform to help you find your nearest recycling plant nationwide.
  - c. Hands-On Volunteering
    - Organize or attend a beach clean-up. Help keep trash off our beaches so it doesn't end up in our oceans.
      - [Amigas De Bolsa Chica](#) in Huntington Beach, California, is an environmental justice organization that organizes monthly beach clean-ups.

d. Education/Advocacy

- Leverage your voice to increase awareness of environmental concerns and push for policies to resolve them. This involves engaging with elected representatives, participating in public hearings and local council sessions, and joining demonstrations that shed light on environmental inequities.
  - [Global Citizen](#) is an international organization that focuses on worldwide poverty, which is being made worse by growing climate concerns.

**Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps:**

(5 Minutes)

Using Framing Document A, found on page 19 of this curriculum guide, create a concrete list of the next steps with the student. The next steps may include creating a list of possible non-profit organizations, setting deadlines for connecting with an organization, and sharing an update on their progress to the educator via email after 4 weeks. This worksheet should go home with the student after this lesson.

Using Framing Document B on page 105 of this curriculum guide, the student will be provided information about the Assessment. As the educator, you may choose to print a copy of the two framing documents for the student on a double-sided sheet of paper.

To review the assessment, begin with reviewing what a d'var Torah is. D'var Torah literally means "word of Torah." A d'var Torah is a speech that each b'nai mitzvah student will share from the bima on the day of their service that provides insights, interpretations, reflections, or teachings about their Torah portion. The goal of the d'var Torah is to take the biblical text from the Torah portion and share its relevance and application to modern life. One of the ways that the student will do that is by writing about how their Tzedek Project connects to their Torah portion.

The student will be assessed on their comprehension of the Torah portion and their ability to connect their Tzedek Project to the social justice themes of the Torah portion. This assessment will take place after the mini-lessons have been completed and after they have at least begun their Tzedek Project. In most institutions, the writing of the d'var Torah begins about three months before the service under the supervision of a clergy member. The student should be encouraged to reach out for more support as needed.

The student should write at least one paragraph for their d'var Torah that answers the following prompts:

- What happens in the Torah portion?
- What social justice topic appears in the Torah portion?
- What did you do for your Tzedek Project?

- How is your Tzedek Project related to the Torah portion?
- Why should others care about your chosen social justice topic?
- What do you believe was the impact of your Tzedek Project?
- What did you learn from doing this project?"

This paragraph should be written within two months of this final meeting. Doing this will allow the student to get a head start on their D'var Torah, and it will be done when it is fresh in their mind. The paragraph should be emailed to the educator within those two months as a method of accountability.

## Unit 3: Leviticus

### **Unit Enduring Understandings:**

1. The book of Leviticus describes the laws and rituals that govern the Israelites' relationship with God, emphasizing holiness, purity, and ethical conduct.
2. Leviticus addresses themes of atonement, sacrifice, and the sacredness of life, providing guidelines for communal and individual spiritual practices and purity practices.
3. Through its focus on ethical behavior, social justice, and communal well-being, Leviticus suggests rules and rituals to create a society characterized by righteousness, compassion, and reverence for God.

### **Unit Essential Questions:**

1. How do the laws and rituals outlined in Leviticus reflect the Israelites' understanding of their relationship with God? How do they show their commitment to holiness and ethical conduct?
2. What is the sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus? How does it help the Israelites atone? Why is it desirable to become pure?
3. In what ways do the laws and commandments of Leviticus address issues of social justice, ethical behavior, and communal responsibility for ancient Israel?
4. How do the ideas of purity, impurity, and cleanliness in Leviticus affect the community?
5. To what extent do the teachings of Leviticus inform modern Jewish ethical and religious practices?

## Lesson 5: Metzora, Leviticus 14:1–15:33

### Lesson 5a: Get to Know Your Torah Portion

#### Goals:

- Students will engage in introductory activities to build rapport and establish a comfortable learning environment with the educator.
- Students will actively engage with the Torah portion through reading and discussion.
- Students will synthesize their learning by summarizing the Torah portion in their own words.

#### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify why the Tzedek Project is a part of the b'nai mitzvah process.
- Comprehend what happens during the Torah portion.
- Produce a coherent summary of the Torah portion, highlighting key events, characters, and themes of the portion discussed during the lesson.

#### Essential Questions:

- How does the Tzedek Project reflect Jewish values of social justice and responsibility towards the broader community?
- What insights can we gain from reading and discussing biblical texts like the Torah portion?

#### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.14?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.14?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Introductions
0:05-0:10	Why Are We Here?
0:10-0:15	Read the Torah Portion
0:15-0:25	Key Points, Terms, and Players in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Summary

**Pework for the Educator:**

Familiarize yourself with the Torah portion before the lesson. You may read the portion in translation using the link above in the materials section or read a summary. A sample summary is provided below.

\*Note to the Educator: This parashah talks about mature topics such as sexually transmitted infections, ejaculation, and menstruation.

*Sample Summary:*

*God spoke to Moses and shared information about the purification ritual for one with leprosy. It must start with being reported to the priest. If the priest sees that the leper has been healed, the priest will order specific items to be given to the one being purified and used in the ritual. The person being purified must wash their clothes, shave off their hair, and bathe in water. After that, they must wait outside their tent for seven days before reentering. On that seventh day, they must repeat the cleansing steps of washing their clothes, shaving off their hair, and bathing in water. They are then considered pure, but there are still more hoops to jump through.*

*On the eighth day, the person shall make a meal offering and provide oil and lambs to be presented before God at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. A lamb shall be slaughtered, and its blood shall be placed on the person being purified's right ear, right thumb, and right big toe.*

*The oil is then placed in the priest's left hand and, with the right finger, sprinkled seven times toward the offering to God. Some of that oil is also placed on the right ear, right thumb, and right big toe of the one being purified to cover the blood of the guilt offering. The remaining oil is put on the head of the one being purified. A second lamb is slaughtered and is offered as a burnt offering. There are altered rules if someone does not have enough means to perform the sacrifices as written.*

*God speaks to Moses and Aaron about a plague that will be inflicted upon a house in Canaan. The priest will examine that person's house and if he finds green or red streaks in the walls. He will close the house for seven days. If the priest returns after seven days and the plague remains, the afflicted stones will be ordered to be removed from the home. All materials removed from the impure home will be dumped outside the city in an impure place. The homeowner should then replace the stones and materials in*

*their home. If the plague returns after the inflicted stones have been removed, the whole house should be torn down, and the materials moved outside the city. If someone enters the house while it is closed, it will be impure until evening. If anyone sleeps or eats in the house, they must wash the clothes they are wearing.*

*If the house is pure, then the plague has healed. The purification ritual resembles leprosy but does not include the lambs, oil, and meal offerings.*

*God speaks to Moses and Aaron and tells them about the purification ritual for men who experience discharge brought on by infection. Bedding and any object on which the person lies or sits is impure. Anyone touching the bedding has to wash their clothes, bathe in water, and remain pure until the evening. The same ritual goes for anyone who sits on the same object as the man or touches the man. If the impure man touches an earthen vessel, it must be broken.*

*When the man with discharge becomes purified, he counts seven days for his purification, washes his clothes, bathes in fresh water, and then is considered pure. On the eighth day, he shall bring two birds to the Tent of Meeting, and the priest will offer one as a sin offering and one as a burnt offering.*

*When a man and woman have sexual relations, they shall both bathe in water and remain impure until the evening. Anything the man's secretions touch shall be washed and remain impure until evening.*

*When a woman begins menstruation, she is impure for seven days. If anyone touches the woman within these seven days, they will be impure until evening. Anything that she lies on or sits on is impure. Anyone touching her bedding or an object she has sat on must wash their clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening.*

*If a man and woman have sexual relations while she is menstruating, the man will also be impure for seven days.*

*On the eighth day after impurity, the woman must take two birds to the priest; one will be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering.*

## **Introductions:**

(5 Minutes)

To begin building rapport with the student, ask the student to share about themselves. You can use the following questions to guide the introduction:

- What do you like to do for fun?
- What are your strengths?
- What is your kryptonite?
- What hobbies do you have?
- Do you play any instruments? Do you play any sports?
- What do you do for fun when you aren't in school?

Take note of the student's responses. These will be valuable information later when it is time to help the student feel connected to their Torah portion and chosen

social justice topic. Feel free to share some of your responses with the student. (Example: If the student tells you they like to play soccer, ask them who their favorite team is. You can compare favorite teams and discuss games, players, or statistics.)

### **Why Are We Here?:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student if they know why b'nai mitzvah students do a Tzedek Project. To guide the student in creating an answer to this question, consider what *tzedek* means. Discuss the concept of *tikkun olam* - repairing the world.

Explain to the student that a Tzedek Project focuses on social justice and striving for a just world. This project is a way for b'nai mitzvah students to be introduced to the idea that they are beginning the transition to a Jewish adult and accepting the additional responsibility of caring for others, the world, and your community. The project will emerge from ideas in the Torah and focus on social justice topics the student can relate to and be passionate about.

Provide the student with a brief introduction to your institution's Tzedek Project guidelines. Let the student know that they will be writing a d'var Torah for their b'nai mitzvah, where they will connect their Torah portion to their Tzedek Project. You don't need to go into too much detail, as you will discuss these guidelines in depth in the third mini-lesson.

Let the student know that in the third mini-lesson, you will talk in-depth about the four best practices for the Tzedek Project. To allow the student to start thinking ahead, briefly share one sentence about each of the four best practices.

- *Philanthropy*: Monetary fundraising
- *Collections*: Collecting needed and necessary items
- *Hands-On Volunteering*: Completing tasks and projects as needed by an organization
- *Education/Advocacy*: Promoting awareness of the selected social justice issue, garnering public backing for its advocacy efforts, and strategizing methods to disseminate these concepts widely.

Ask the student if there are any ways in which they already support their community, volunteer, or contribute to *tikkun olam* or a larger social justice concern in the world. Keep note of these responses in your educator notes. The student should also take notes throughout these conversations that they can reflect on.

### **Read the Torah Portion:**

(5 Minutes)

Using The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006, translation accessed from Sefaria, have the student read their Torah portion aloud. Based on the length of the Torah portion or the student's comfort levels, you may want to read the portion together and



alternate at different times. You may want to encourage the student to have come to this first meeting having read the Torah portion at least once on their own to make the reading less daunting to the student the first time.

The translated text can be found at the following link:

<https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.14?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

### **Key Players, Terms, and Points in the Torah Portion:**

(10 Minutes)

After reading the Torah portion, take this time to review some of the key players, terms, and points in the Torah portion. Things you should review with the student are below. There are suggested discussion questions included throughout. Encourage the student to take notes, as this will help them narrate and write their summary of the portion. You should also let the student know that these notes will benefit the writing of the d'var Torah.

The questions provided are examples that can be used to facilitate discussion. You can ask these questions and/or create your own. Questions can be asked in any order. You may choose to start with the key points and then move on to the key players and terms. You may ask questions as they arise or ask them all after reviewing the Torah portion.

#### Key Players:

- Moses
  - Name means “delivered from water,” chosen by God to free the Israelites from Egypt, brother of Aaron, holds the role of a high priest
    - How do you think Moses's relationship with God impacted how he felt about the laws of purity?
- Aaron
  - Brother of Moses, holds the role of a high priest
    - Why do you think Aaron, as the High Priest, had a special role in helping those who were sick or unclean?
    - What do you think it was like to decide if someone was ready to rejoin the community after being sick?
- God
  - What role does God play in this portion?

#### Key Terms:

- Leprosy - a contagious disease that primarily affects the skin and causes a scaly rash
  - How were individuals with leprosy treated in ancient times?
  - Why might it be considered an unclean disease in ancient times?

- Mikvah -A mikvah is a body of fresh water used in both ancient and modern times for ritual cleansing.
- Taharah - Ritual Purity
  - What do laws about purity in Metzora teach us about holiness?
  - In what ways do the purification rituals outlined in Metzora emphasize the importance of communal support and compassion within the Jewish community?
  - What ideas from these purification rituals can help us be better people and improve our communities?

**Key Points:**

- Moses learns about the purification of one with leprosy.
- Moses and Aaron learn about the purification of a home with a colorful “mold-like” substance.
- Moses and Aaron learn about the purification of a man with a discharge due to disease.
- Moses and Aaron learn about the purification of a man who ejaculates.
- Moses and Aaron learn about the purification of a woman who menstruates.

**Summarize Your Learning:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to summarize the Torah portion in their own words. As the educator, you should note which parts of the portion the student mentions, as those are typically the parts of the portion that are most memorable to them. Tell the student they will be asked to share this summary at the beginning of the next session. The student can write notes about it to enable them to remember and reflect on it in the following lessons. The summary will help them identify themes or make connections later.

## Lesson 5b: Connecting Your Torah Portion to Social Justice Topics

### Goals:

- Students will summarize their Torah portion in their own words.
- Students will identify social justice themes in the Torah portion and discuss their significance.
- Students will reflect on personal connections to social justice topics and formulate questions for further exploration.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate definitions of social justice terms and concepts such as tikkun olam, tzedek, justice, and injustice.
- Analyze texts from the Torah portion to identify social justice topics and discuss their implications and relevance.
- Identify social justice topics that resonate with them and generate ideas and strategies for how they can address these issues.

### Essential Questions:

- How do social justice themes manifest in biblical narratives, specifically within Metzora?
- How do the social justice issues depicted in the Torah portion resonate with contemporary concerns and challenges?
- How can you discover your own social justice voice in Torah?
- How do the events and characters in the Torah portion relate to our contemporary understanding of social justice and ethical conduct?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.14?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.14?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:25	Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Making a Connection

**Review:**

(5 Minutes)

This is a review of the previous lesson. Ask the student to summarize their Torah portion verbally in their own words. Remind the student that they can look at their notes from the previous lesson.

To introduce the next topic of study, ask the following question, “What is social justice?” To answer this, you may first ask the student to define “*tikkun olam*,” tzedek, justice, and/or injustice.

- Social Justice: Justice in relation to the balance or distribution of wealth, resources, education, or opportunities.
- Tikkun Olam: The Jewish value of repairing the world.
- Justice: Being treated in ways that are equitable and fair.
- Injustice: A lack of fairness or equity.

**Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion:**

(20 Minutes)

Let the student know that every Torah portion calls to us differently, and at this moment, it is speaking to them in a way that prompts action. To allow the student to find their own passion/interests, ask them what social justice topics they can identify as appearing in the Torah portion.

This section is primarily discussion-based. Below are some examples of social justice topics provided in the Torah portion and textual examples of where they are found. Each example also provides discussion questions. Ask the student how they could, or would, achieve justice for each social justice topic. These should serve as a guide. You might identify others.

Some topics may be triggering for certain students. As their educator, use your best judgment on omitting questions or social justice topics.

**Women's Rights:**

We learn about the impurities of a woman who menstruates and the steps that it takes to become pure again. Despite this being a natural occurrence, it comes with an excess of steps to purity that the woman must follow.

- Are there any gender-specific aspects to the purification process for individuals or houses?

- Considering the social and religious context of the time, what rights or freedoms might women have lacked compared to men, and how did the laws of purity make it worse?
- How do the purification rituals reflect or challenge traditional gender roles and expectations?
- How can we interpret and apply the teachings of "Metzora" to promote gender equality and empower women in modern society?

#### Health and Wellness:

We learn about the impurity of one with leprosy and the process of becoming pure again. This involves a more sin-and-burnt offering process than the other impurities learned about. Those with leprosy are cast out from their community until they are healed. We also learn that alternative ways exist to “pay for” their offerings, similar to health care access and insurance.

- How do the purification rituals outlined in the portion contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and the community?
- What importance does the Torah place on physical health and cleanliness based on these rituals?
- How do the concepts of cleanliness and purification in "Metzora" relate to broader ideas of hygiene and public health?
- In what ways might the rituals for skin diseases serve as early forms of public health measures?
- Can you draw parallels between the purification rituals in "Metzora" and modern practices or approaches to maintaining health and wellness?

#### **Making a Connection:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to articulate which social justice topic in this Torah portion they would like to explore more as something you might be able to do something about. The student can think about their answer until the next lesson. The student can also choose a social justice topic they connect to today, but after thinking more about it, their answer could change by the next lesson.

Also, ask the student what questions or thoughts they may still have from the previous discussions. Have them write down those questions and ask them to come up with answers by the next lesson. Anything they have not answered independently can be answered the next time you meet.

Student Next Steps:

1. Choose a social justice topic to explore
2. Think about and answer any questions that still remain about the Torah portion
3. Bring any unanswered questions to the next lesson

## Lesson 5c: Putting Your Learning Into Action

### Goals:

- Engage the student in reflective thinking about their chosen social justice topic.
- Familiarize the student with best practices associated with different types of Tzedek Projects.
- Learn how social justice themes from the Torah portion can inform and inspire their Tzedek Project.
- Prepare the student for the assessment and writing process associated with their d'var Torah and Tzedek Project.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate their interest in a specific social justice topic, project ideas from the Torah portion, and find a personal connection.
- Take the next steps in finding non-profit organizations to complete their Tzedek Project.
- Begin to outline their d'var Torah.

### Essential Questions:

- Why do Jews do a Tzedek Project as an essential part of the b'nai mitzvah process?
- Why is it important to take time from your own life to help others?
- How can you contribute to making an impact in your community through your Tzedek project?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.14?lang=bi&aliyot=0>
- A printed copy of Framing Document A
- A printed copy of Framing Document B
- A printed copy of Framing Document C

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil

- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.14?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

#### **Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:10	Tzedek Project Guidelines
0:10-0:25	What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like
0:25-0:30	Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps

#### **Review:**

(5 Minutes)

Which social justice topic in the Torah portion would you like to address? Their answer could have changed since the last lesson. This answer will guide the following session.

Revisit the student's questions they wrote down from the last lesson. Ask the student to share their questions and any responses they have come up with. If there is a question still unanswered, you can answer it together.

#### **Tzedek Project Guidelines:**

(5 Minutes)

What guidelines for the Tzedek Project are in place for your institution? Those using this curriculum will fill in this section based on their institution's requirements and guidelines for the Tzedek Project.

##### Examples of Guidelines:

- Volunteer for a certain number of hours; Provide a deadline for the hours to be completed.
- Create a presentation that will be shared with the next year's cohort of b'nai mitzvah students.
- Write a paragraph about your Tzedek Project that can be shared in a synagogue newsletter, email blast, or synagogue website.
- Create a poster that will be shared in the synagogue lobby the week before the b'nai mitzvah.
- Share a photo or other documentation of you during the Tzedek Project process.

## What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like:

(15 Minutes)

This next discussion will be based on the student's answer to the review question at the beginning of this lesson: What social justice topic do they want to explore for the Tzedek Project? If the student has a clear answer about which topic they want to explore, then as the educator, you can focus on just one subsection to guide the discussion and decision. I would recommend exploring at most two social justice topics for timing purposes.

These subsections are based on the social justice topics from the previous lesson. Students may find a connection to a different social justice topic not outlined in this or the previous lesson. That is okay. Each subsection will have ideas and examples of organizations that can accomplish a Tzedek Project based on four best practices: philanthropy, collections, hands-on volunteering, and education/advocacy. Remind the student that they should have a parent or guardian's permission before committing to anything or making any online posts. Together, review Framing Document C on page 20 of this curriculum guide.

### 1. Women's Rights

#### a. Philanthropy

- Support organizations that educate women on politics and encourage them to enter a political work field.
  - Invest in a future representing this country's full diversity and life experience by donating to [She Should Run](#).

#### b. Collections

- Run a collection drive to collect period products. These items can be donated to a women's shelter.
  - [Days for Girls International](#) is an example of an organization that is ensuring girls all over the world have equal access to period products.

#### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Spend your time helping out at a local women's shelter.
  - [The Women's Resource Center](#) in Oceanside, California, provides multiple ways to volunteer, including working at the thrift shop, organizing paperwork, and spending time with women in the shelter.

#### d. Education/Advocacy

- Learn how to advocate for change regarding women's rights, health, and equity. Take what you've learned and put it into action!



- Through legal advocacy and public campaigns, [Equality Now](#) works to end violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world.

## 2. Health and Wellness

### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for health organizations by participating in a walk, run, or race.
  - Raise money for the American Lung Cancer Association by participating in your city's annual [Lung Force](#) event.

### b. Collections

- You can collect medical supplies that a health and wellness organization will redistribute.
  - [AFYA](#) is an international organization headquartered in New York, New York. They work to achieve access to medical supplies globally.

### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Create gift boxes for children in the hospital with the gift of play.
  - [The Jared Box Project](#) is a national organization that provides children in the hospital with treats and toys to put a smile on their faces.

### d. Education/Advocacy

- Advocate for mental health resources and access for youth.
  - [With Grace](#), based in Brooklyn, New York, aims to raise awareness about the importance of mental health as part of overall wellness and to democratize access to quality mental health care.

## Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps:

(5 Minutes)

Using Framing Document A, found on page 19 of this curriculum guide, create a concrete list of the next steps with the student. The next steps may include creating a list of possible non-profit organizations, setting deadlines for connecting with an organization, and sharing an update on their progress to the educator via email after 4 weeks. This worksheet should go home with the student after this lesson.

Using Framing Document B on page 105 of this curriculum guide, the student will be provided information about the Assessment. As the educator, you may choose to print a copy of the two framing documents for the student on a double-sided sheet of paper.

To review the assessment, begin with reviewing what a d'var Torah is. D'var Torah literally means "word of Torah." A d'var Torah is a speech that each b'nai mitzvah student will share from the bima on the day of their service that provides insights, interpretations, reflections, or teachings about their Torah portion. The goal of the d'var Torah is to take the biblical text from the Torah portion and share its relevance and application to modern life. One of the ways that the student will do that is by writing about how their Tzedek Project connects to their Torah portion.

The student will be assessed on their comprehension of the Torah portion and their ability to connect their Tzedek Project to the social justice themes of the Torah portion. This assessment will take place after the mini-lessons have been completed and after they have at least begun their Tzedek Project. In most institutions, the writing of the d'var Torah begins about three months before the service under the supervision of a clergy member. The student should be encouraged to reach out for more support as needed.

The student should write at least one paragraph for their d'var Torah that answers the following prompts:

- What happens in the Torah portion?
- What social justice topic appears in the Torah portion?
- What did you do for your Tzedek Project?
- How is your Tzedek Project related to the Torah portion?
- Why should others care about your chosen social justice topic?
- What do you believe was the impact of your Tzedek Project?
- What did you learn from doing this project?"

This paragraph should be written within two months of this final meeting. Doing this will allow the student to get a head start on their D'var Torah, and it will be done when it is fresh in their mind. The paragraph should be emailed to the educator within those two months as a method of accountability.

## Unit 4: Numbers

### **Unit Enduring Understandings:**

1. The book of Numbers chronicles the Israelites' journey through the wilderness, highlighting themes of faith, obedience, and trust in God.
2. Numbers names the challenges of leadership and community cohesion the Israelites faced as they transitioned from slavery in Egypt to nationhood in the Promised Land.
3. Through narratives, laws, and rituals, Numbers emphasizes the importance of faithfulness to God's covenant, adherence to moral principles, and the pursuit of justice and righteousness in all aspects of communal and individual life.

### **Unit Essential Questions:**

1. What stories in Numbers demonstrate the challenges of leadership?
2. How can these lessons help us think about contemporary leadership and community-building efforts?
3. How did the rules and ceremonies in Numbers show the Israelites that they have a special relationship with God?
4. How did faith, trust, and God's care help the Israelites during their journey in the desert? How do these ideas help us understand how to deal with tough times today?
5. To what extent do Numbers's ideas inform Jewish identity, religious practice, and ethical thought today?

## Lesson 6: Chukat, Numbers 19:1–22:1

### Lesson 6a: Get to Know Your Torah Portion

#### Goals:

- Students will engage in introductory activities to build rapport and establish a comfortable learning environment with the educator.
- Students will actively engage with the Torah portion through reading and discussion.
- Students will synthesize their learning by summarizing the Torah portion in their own words.

#### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify why the Tzedek Project is a part of the b'nai mitzvah process.
- Comprehend what happens during the Torah portion.
- Produce a coherent summary of the Torah portion, highlighting key events, characters, and themes of the portion discussed during the lesson.

#### Essential Questions:

- How does the Tzedek Project reflect Jewish values of social justice and responsibility towards the broader community?
- What insights can we gain from reading and discussing biblical texts like the Torah portion?

#### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Introductions
0:05-0:10	Why Are We Here?
0:10-0:15	Read the Torah Portion
0:15-0:25	Key Points, Terms, and Players in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Summary

**Pework for the Educator:**

Familiarize yourself with the Torah portion before the lesson. You may read the portion in translation using the link above in the materials section or read a summary. A sample summary is provided below.

*Sample Summary:*

*God spoke to Moses and Aaron, telling them about more purification rituals:*

*Anyone who touches the corpse of any human will be impure for seven days. They must purify themselves on the third and seventh day of the impurity cycle. If one does not follow these rules, they will be considered impure and banished from the group.*

*When a person dies inside of a tent, whoever was in the tent when the person died and anyone who enters the tent is impure for seven days. Every open vessel with no lid is impure. A pure person will sprinkle fresh water on the tent, vessels, people present in front of the corpse, and the corpse itself. This will take place on the third and seventh days. On the seventh day, the impure one must wash their clothes and bathe in water to be pure. You will be exiled from the community if you don't go through the purity process.*

*The Israelites arrive in a new land called Zin. Miriam dies and is buried here.*

*The community is extremely thirsty, and they are without water in the middle of the desert. The people complain to Moses about why they are being brought to a place where there is no food or water to drink.*

*God hears the cries of the people and appears to Moses and Aaron. God instructs Moses and Aaron to bring the community before a large rock. Moses must strike the rock with his staff (rod), and water will be produced from the rock to provide drink for the people and their animals. So, they did exactly what God instructed them to do. Moses struck the rock twice, and the community and their animals drank.*

*God decided they should be punished because Moses and Aaron still doubted God's abilities. God tells them they will not be allowed to enter with their community when they get to the land they seek. Moses and Aaron try to plead with God but to no avail.*

*At Mount Hor, God instructs Moses and Aaron to bring Aaron's son, Eleazar, to the top of the mountain. God requires them to strip Aaron of his vestments and give them to Eleazar. This makes Eleazar the new high priest. God also lets them know that this is where Aaron will die. After Aaron died, the Israelites mourned for thirty days.*

*The king of Arad, a Canaanite, learned that the Israelites were approaching his land. He engaged the Israelites in battle and took captives. The Israelites pleaded with God to deliver the captives back into their community, and in return, they would destroy the city. God listened to their cries and made it so.*

*Continuing their journey, the people cried against God and Moses, still complaining that they were traveling to a place without food or water. God sent serpents to the people as a punishment. Some people died from snake bites. The people went to Moses apologizing and asked Moses to tell God they apologized for their complaints. God instructed Moses to make a serpent figure out of copper and display it. Anyone who was bitten who looks at it recovers.*

*The Israelites continue their journey, camping in various lands and cities.*

*God gives the people more water, and the Israelites sing joyfully.*

*The Israelites now make it to the land of the Amorites. Messengers go to Sihon, king of the Amorites, asking to pass through the country. They tell the king they will not take any food or water from the land to pass through safely. Sihon disagreed and would not let them pass through the territory. Sihon engaged the Israelites in battle. The Israelites were victorious and took possession of the land of the Amorites. The Israelites continued to Bashan, where they were also engaged in combat. The Israelites were victorious and took possession of this land as well.*

## **Introductions:**

(5 Minutes)

To begin building rapport with the student, ask the student to share about themselves. You can use the following questions to guide the introduction:

- What do you like to do for fun?
- What are your strengths?
- What is your kryptonite?
- What hobbies do you have?
- Do you play any instruments? Do you play any sports?
- What do you do for fun when you aren't in school?

Take note of the student's responses. These will be valuable information later when it is time to help the student feel connected to their Torah portion and chosen social justice topic. Feel free to share some of your responses with the student.

(Example: If the student tells you they like to play soccer, ask them who their favorite team is. You can compare favorite teams and discuss games, players, or statistics.)

## **Why Are We Here?:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student if they know why b'nai mitzvah students do a Tzedek Project. To guide the student in creating an answer to this question, consider what *tzedek* means. Discuss the concept of *tikkun olam* - repairing the world.

Explain to the student that a Tzedek Project focuses on social justice and striving for a just world. This project is a way for b'nai mitzvah students to be introduced to the idea that they are beginning the transition to a Jewish adult and accepting the additional responsibility of caring for others, the world, and your community. The project will emerge from ideas in the Torah and focus on social justice topics the student can relate to and be passionate about.

Provide the student with a brief introduction to your institution's Tzedek Project guidelines. Let the student know that they will be writing a D'var Torah for their b'nai mitzvah, where they will connect their Torah portion to their Tzedek Project. You don't need to go into too much detail, as you will discuss these guidelines in depth in the third mini-lesson.

Let the student know that in the third mini-lesson, you will talk in-depth about the four best practices for the Tzedek Project. To allow the student to start thinking ahead, briefly share one sentence about each of the four best practices.

- *Philanthropy*: Monetary fundraising
- *Collections*: Collecting needed and necessary items
- *Hands-On Volunteering*: Completing tasks and projects as needed by an organization
- *Education/Advocacy*: Promoting awareness of the selected social justice issue, garnering public backing for its advocacy efforts, and strategizing methods to disseminate these concepts widely.

Ask the student if there are any ways in which they already support their community, volunteer, or contribute to *tikkun olam* or a larger social justice concern in the world. Keep note of these responses in your educator notes. The student should also take notes throughout these conversations that they can reflect on.

## **Read the Torah Portion:**

(5 Minutes)

Using The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006, translation accessed from Sefaria, have the student read their Torah portion aloud. Based on the length of the Torah portion or the student's comfort levels, you may want to read the portion together and alternate at different times. You may want to encourage the student to have come to this first meeting having read the Torah portion at least once on their own to make the reading less daunting to the student the first time.

The translated text can be found at the following link:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

### **Key Players, Terms, and Points in the Torah Portion:**

(10 Minutes)

After reading the Torah portion, take this time to review some of the key players, terms, and points in the Torah portion. Things you should review with the student are below. There are suggested discussion questions included throughout. Encourage the student to take notes, as this will help them narrate and write their summary of the portion. You should also let the student know that these notes will benefit the writing of the d'var Torah.

The questions provided are examples that can be used to facilitate discussion. You can ask these questions and/or create your own. Questions can be asked in any order. You may choose to start with the key points and then move on to the key players and terms. You may ask questions as they arise or ask them all after reviewing the Torah portion.

#### Key Players:

- Moses
  - Name means “delivered from water,” chosen by God to free the Israelites from Egypt, brother of Aaron, brought the 10 Commandments down from Mount Sinai
    - How do you think Moses helped the people with God's rules of cleanliness?
    - Moses relied heavily on his brother, Aaron, to help him speak to the Israelites. How do you think Moses felt having to rely on his brother this way? Have you ever had to rely on someone so much? What was that like?
    - Aaron died first: how do you think Moses might have felt surviving his brother?
- Aaron
  - Brother of Moses, holds the role of a high priest, dies at Mount Hor
    - Why did God decide that Aaron couldn't go with everyone to the new land they were going to?
- God
  - What role does God play in this portion?
- Eleazar
  - Aaron's son who takes over his priestly duties after his death
- Sihon
  - King of the Amorites, would not let the Israelites pass through the land peacefully



### Key Terms:

- Mikvah -A mikvah is a body of freshwater used in both ancient and modern times for ritual cleansing.
- *Taharah* - Ritual Purity
  - What does it mean to be pure or impure according to the Torah?
  - How do the laws of ritual purity and impurity in *Chukat* help us understand spiritual cleanliness?
  - In what ways do the purification rituals outlined in *Chukat* emphasize the importance of communal support and compassion within the Jewish community?
  - What ideas from these purification rules can be used today?

### Key Points:

- Miriam dies.
- Aaron and Moses learn about the laws of impurity with a corpse.
- The Israelites complain about thirst, and God instructs Moses to strike a rock to make water.
- God punishes the Israelites with serpents.
- God decides that Aaron and Moses will not enter the promised land.
- Aaron dies and passes his priestly duties on to his son, Eleazar.
- As the Israelites continued their journey, many nations failed to overtake them.

### **Summarize Your Learning:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to summarize the Torah portion in their own words. As the educator, you should note which parts of the portion the student mentions, as those are typically the parts of the portion that are most memorable to them. Tell the student they will be asked to share this summary at the beginning of the next session. The student can write notes about it to enable them to remember and reflect on it in the following lessons. The summary will help them identify themes or make connections later.

## Lesson 6b: Connecting Your Torah Portion to Social Justice Topics

### Goals:

- Students will summarize their Torah portion in their own words.
- Students will identify social justice themes in the Torah portion and discuss their significance.
- Students will reflect on personal connections to social justice topics and formulate questions for further exploration.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate definitions of social justice terms and concepts such as tikkun olam, tzedek, justice, and injustice.
- Analyze texts from the Torah portion to identify social justice topics and discuss their implications and relevance.
- Identify social justice topics that resonate with them and generate ideas and strategies for how they can address these issues.

### Essential Questions:

- How do social justice themes manifest in biblical narratives, specifically within Chukat?
- How do the social justice issues depicted in the Torah portion resonate with contemporary concerns and challenges?
- How can you discover your own social justice voice in Torah?
- How do the events and characters in the Torah portion relate to our contemporary understanding of social justice and ethical conduct?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:25	Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Making a Connection

**Review:**

(5 Minutes)

This is a review of the previous lesson. Ask the student to summarize their Torah portion verbally in their own words. Remind the student that they can look at their notes from the previous lesson.

To introduce the next topic of study, ask the following question, “What is social justice?” To answer this, you may first ask the student to define “*tikkun olam*,” tzedek, justice, and/or injustice.

- Social Justice: Justice in relation to the balance or distribution of wealth, resources, education, or opportunities.
- Tikkun Olam: The Jewish value of repairing the world.
- Justice: Being treated in ways that are equitable and fair.
- Injustice: A lack of fairness or equity.

**Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion:**

(20 Minutes)

Let the student know that every Torah portion calls to us differently, and at this moment, it is speaking to them in a way that prompts action. To allow the student to find their own passion/interests, ask them what social justice topics they can identify as appearing in the Torah portion.

This section is primarily discussion-based. Below are some examples of social justice topics provided in the Torah portion and textual examples of where they are found. Each example also provides discussion questions. Ask the student how they could, or would, achieve justice for each social justice topic. These should serve as a guide. You might identify others.

Some topics may be triggering for certain students. As their educator, use your best judgment on omitting questions or social justice topics.

**Environmental Justice:**

The Israelites have no access to food and water in the desert. Moses strikes the rock to make water appear.

- What is clean water?
- Where do you get clean water?
- What does it mean to have access to clean water?

- What is an example of not having access to clean water within the U.S.? In the world?
- How can Jewish values and teachings inspire environmental activism and guide our collective responsibility to care for the earth and its inhabitants?
- How can you take care of the earth and make sure it stays healthy for the future?

#### Animal Rights:

When the Israelites complain of thirst, they complain about their own thirst and the thirst of their animals. The portion explicitly mentions that both the humans and the animals quenched their thirst when the water came from the rock.

- How do we show respect for our pets?
- How do we show respect for non-domestic animals?
- Reflecting on the animals' need for water in the desert, how does the story of Moses striking the rock for water highlight the interconnectedness between humans, animals, and the natural environment in Jewish teachings?
- Considering the miracle of water provided to both humans and animals from the rock, how does this event prompt discussions about the ethical treatment and welfare of animals, particularly in contexts where access to resources like water is limited?

#### **Making a Connection:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to articulate which social justice topic in this Torah portion they would like to explore more as something you might be able to do something about. The student can think about their answer until the next lesson. The student can also choose a social justice topic they connect to today, but after thinking more about it, their answer could change by the next lesson.

Also, ask the student what questions or thoughts they may still have from the previous discussions. Have them write down those questions and ask them to come up with answers by the next lesson. Anything they have not answered independently can be answered the next time you meet.

#### **Student Next Steps:**

1. Choose a social justice topic to explore
2. Think about and answer any questions that still remain about the Torah portion
3. Bring any unanswered questions to the next lesson

## Lesson 6c: Putting Your Learning Into Action

### Goals:

- Engage the student in reflective thinking about their chosen social justice topic.
- Familiarize the student with best practices associated with different types of Tzedek Projects.
- Learn how social justice themes from the Torah portion can inform and inspire their Tzedek Project.
- Prepare the student for the assessment and writing process associated with their d'var Torah and Tzedek Project.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate their interest in a specific social justice topic and project ideas from the Torah portion, and find a personal connection.
- Take the next steps in finding non-profit organizations to complete their Tzedek Project.
- Begin to outline their d'var Torah.

### Essential Questions:

- Why do Jews do a Tzedek Project as an essential part of the b'nai mitzvah process?
- Why is it important to take time from your own life to help others?
- How can you contribute to making an impact in your community through your Tzedek project?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0>
- A printed copy of Framing Document A
- A printed copy of Framing Document B
- A printed copy of Framing Document C

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil

- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

#### **Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:10	Tzedek Project Guidelines
0:10-0:25	What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like
0:25-0:30	Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps

#### **Review:**

(5 Minutes)

Which social justice topic in the Torah portion would you like to address? Their answer could have changed since the last lesson. This answer will guide the following session.

Revisit the student's questions they wrote down from the last lesson. Ask the student to share their questions and any responses they have come up with. If there is a question still unanswered, you can answer it together.

#### **Tzedek Project Guidelines:**

(5 Minutes)

What guidelines for the Tzedek Project are in place for your institution? Those using this curriculum will fill in this section based on their institution's requirements and guidelines for the Tzedek Project.

##### Examples of Guidelines:

- Volunteer for a certain number of hours; Provide a deadline for the hours to be completed.
- Create a presentation that will be shared with the next year's cohort of b'nai mitzvah students.
- Write a paragraph about your Tzedek Project that can be shared in a synagogue newsletter, email blast, or synagogue website.
- Create a poster that will be shared in the synagogue lobby the week before the b'nai mitzvah.
- Share a photo or other documentation of you during the Tzedek Project process.

## What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like:

(15 Minutes)

This next discussion will be based on the student's answer to the review question at the beginning of this lesson: What social justice topic do they want to explore for the Tzedek Project? If the student has a clear answer about which topic they want to explore, then as the educator, you can focus on just one subsection to guide the discussion and decision. I would recommend exploring at most two social justice topics for timing purposes.

These subsections are based on the social justice topics from the previous lesson. Students may find a connection to a different social justice topic not outlined in this or the previous lesson. That is okay. Each subsection will have ideas and examples of organizations that can accomplish a Tzedek Project based on four best practices: philanthropy, collections, hands-on volunteering, and education/advocacy. Remind the student that they should have a parent or guardian's permission before committing to anything or making any online posts. Together, review Framing Document C on page 20 of this curriculum guide.

### 1. Environmental Justice

#### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for an environmental justice organization focusing on water.
  - [Charity: Water](#) is an international organization headquartered in New York. They rely on monetary donations to help fund their global efforts to create clean water access.

#### b. Collections

- You can collect empty water bottles and cans and hand-deliver them to a recycling plant.
  - [Recycle Nation](#) is an online platform to help you find your nearest recycling plant nationwide.

#### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Organize or attend a beach clean-up. Help keep trash off our beaches so it doesn't end up in our oceans.
  - [Amigas De Bolsa Chica](#) in Huntington Beach, California, is an environmental justice organization that organizes monthly beach clean-ups.

#### d. Education/Advocacy

- Leverage your voice to increase awareness of environmental concerns and push for policies to resolve them. This involves engaging with elected representatives, participating in public

hearings and local council sessions, and joining demonstrations that shed light on environmental inequities.

- [Global Citizen](#) is an international organization that focuses on worldwide poverty, which is being made worse by growing climate concerns.

## 2. Animal Rights

### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for an organization that supports the ethical and humane treatment of animals.
  - [PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals](#), is an international organization dedicated to establishing and defending the rights of all animals.

### b. Collections

- Many local animal shelters seek to improve the adoption process by incentivizing adoption. Occasionally, they will provide those adopting animals with essential supplies for their pet, like a leash, food bowl, or blanket.
  - [OC Animal Care](#) in Tustin, California, is a no-kill animal shelter that provides adoption gift bags made from donated items with each adopted animal.

### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Assist an animal rescue with an adoption event.
  - [Adopt Me Rescue](#) in Woodland Hills, California, assists weekly with local pet adoptions.

### d. Education/Advocacy

- Experience firsthand how you can contribute to lessening the harm and exploitation of animals.
  - Using resources from [The Vegan Society](#) about meals and healthy options, try eating vegan for a week.

## Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps:

(5 Minutes)

Using Framing Document A, found on page 19 of this curriculum guide, create a concrete list of the next steps with the student. The next steps may include creating a list of possible non-profit organizations, setting deadlines for connecting with an organization, and sharing an update on their progress to the educator via email after 4 weeks. This worksheet should go home with the student after this lesson.

Using Framing Document B on page 105 of this curriculum guide, the student will be provided information about the Assessment. As the educator, you may print a copy of the two framing documents for the student on a double-sided sheet of paper.



To review the assessment, begin with reviewing what a d'var Torah is. D'var Torah literally means "word of Torah." A d'var Torah is a speech that each b'nai mitzvah student will share from the bima on the day of their service that provides insights, interpretations, reflections, or teachings about their Torah portion. The goal of the d'var Torah is to take the biblical text from the Torah portion and share its relevance and application to modern life. One of the ways that the student will do that is by writing about how their Tzedek Project connects to their Torah portion.

The student will be assessed on their comprehension of the Torah portion and their ability to connect their Tzedek Project to the social justice themes of the Torah portion. This assessment will take place after the mini-lessons have been completed and after they have at least begun their Tzedek Project. In most institutions, the writing of the d'var Torah begins about three months before the service under the supervision of a clergy member. The student should be encouraged to reach out for more support as needed.

The student should write at least one paragraph for their d'var Torah that answers the following prompts:

- What happens in the Torah portion?
- What social justice topic appears in the Torah portion?
- What did you do for your Tzedek Project?
- How is your Tzedek Project related to the Torah portion?
- Why should others care about your chosen social justice topic?
- What do you believe was the impact of your Tzedek Project?
- What did you learn from doing this project?"

This paragraph should be written within two months of this final meeting. Doing this will allow the student to get a head start on their D'var Torah, and it will be done when it is fresh in their mind. The paragraph should be emailed to the educator within those two months as a method of accountability.

## Unit 5: Deuteronomy

### **Unit Enduring Understandings:**

1. Deuteronomy is a guidebook for Jewish beliefs and values. It teaches us about promises, doing what's right, and looking out for each other.
2. Deuteronomy tells the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness to build a life in Canaan.
3. Deuteronomy includes rules and guidelines for living together fairly and peacefully.
4. Deuteronomy tells us God's rules and how to follow them.

### **Unit Essential Questions:**

1. Deuteronomy contributes to constructing Jewish identity and collective memory? How does this shape Judaism?
2. How does Deuteronomy address the challenges of establishing and maintaining a just and equitable society?
3. What insights does it offer into the responsibilities of individuals, leaders, and communities in promoting social justice and human dignity?
4. What does Deuteronomy teach us about the role of education and remembering?

# Lesson 1: Devarim, Deuteronomy 1:1–3:22

## Lesson 1a: Get to Know Your Torah Portion

### Goals:

- Students will engage in introductory activities to build rapport and establish a comfortable learning environment with the educator.
- Students will actively engage with the Torah portion through reading and discussion.
- Students will synthesize their learning by summarizing the Torah portion in their own words.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify why the Tzedek Project is a part of the b'nai mitzvah process.
- Comprehend what happens during the Torah portion.
- Produce a coherent summary of the Torah portion, highlighting key events, characters, and themes of the portion discussed during the lesson.

### Essential Questions:

- How does the Tzedek Project reflect Jewish values of social justice and responsibility towards the broader community?
- What insights can we gain from reading and discussing biblical texts like the Torah portion?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Introductions
0:05-0:10	Why Are We Here?
0:10-0:15	Read the Torah Portion
0:15-0:25	Key Points, Terms, and Players in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Summary

**Pework for the Educator:**

Familiarize yourself with the Torah portion before the lesson. You may read the portion in translation using the link above in the materials section or read a summary. A sample summary is provided below.

*Sample Summary:*

*Moses addressed the Israelites on the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year of the Israelites journeying through the desert. Moses is nearing old age and is preparing to die. Through these last few weeks of life, Moses wants to ensure that God's rules, laws, and demands are carried throughout the generations. This portion serves as a summary of the previous parshiot that came before the Book of Deuteronomy.*

*God wants the Israelites to expand and continue growing in number and how much land they live in. They are given instructions on how to expand. God has the Israelites pick one person from each of their tribes who is wise, discerning, and experienced to be a leader for the tribe.*

*God instructs that these leaders will be there to listen to their fellow Israelites and serve as impartial judges. God reminds them that if a situation is too difficult for them to rule by themselves, they can always turn to God for guidance about how to proceed. During this speech, God reflects on the Israelites' journey and all the places the Israelites have traveled and overtaken.*

*God reminds them to believe in God's powers and stay loyal, or they won't enter the promised land.*

**Introductions:**

(5 Minutes)

To begin building rapport with the student, ask the student to share about themselves. You can use the following questions to guide the introduction:

- What do you like to do for fun?
- What are your strengths?
- What is your kryptonite?
- What hobbies do you have?

- Do you play any instruments? Do you play any sports?
- What do you do for fun when you aren't in school?

Take note of the student's responses. These will be valuable information later when it is time to help the student feel connected to their Torah portion and chosen social justice topic. Feel free to share some of your responses with the student. (Example: If the student tells you they like to play soccer, ask them who their favorite team is. You can compare favorite teams and discuss games, players, or statistics.)

### **Why Are We Here?:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student if they know why b'nai mitzvah students do a Tzedek Project. To guide the student in creating an answer to this question, consider what *tzedek* means. Discuss the concept of *tikkun olam* - repairing the world.

Explain to the student that a Tzedek Project focuses on social justice and striving for a just world. This project is a way for b'nai mitzvah students to be introduced to the idea that they are beginning the transition to a Jewish adult and accepting the additional responsibility of caring for others, the world, and your community. The project will emerge from ideas in the Torah and focus on social justice topics the student can relate to and be passionate about.

Provide the student with a brief introduction to your institution's Tzedek Project guidelines. Let the student know that they will be writing a D'var Torah for their b'nai mitzvah, where they will connect their Torah portion to their Tzedek Project. You don't need to go into too much detail, as you will discuss these guidelines in depth in the third mini-lesson.

Let the student know that in the third mini-lesson, you will talk in-depth about the four best practices for the Tzedek Project. To allow the student to start thinking ahead, briefly share one sentence about each of the four best practices.

- *Philanthropy*: Monetary fundraising
- *Collections*: Collecting needed and necessary items
- *Hands-On Volunteering*: Completing tasks and projects as needed by an organization
- *Education/Advocacy*: Promoting awareness of the selected social justice issue, garnering public backing for its advocacy efforts, and strategizing methods to disseminate these concepts widely.

Ask the student if there are any ways in which they already support their community, volunteer, or contribute to *tikkun olam* or a larger social justice concern in the world. Keep note of these responses in your educator notes. The student should also take notes throughout these conversations that they can reflect on.

## **Read the Torah Portion:**

(5 Minutes)

Using The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006, translation accessed from Sefaria, have the student read their Torah portion aloud. Based on the length of the Torah portion or the student's comfort levels, you may want to read the portion together and alternate at different times. You may want to encourage the student to have come to this first meeting having read the Torah portion at least once on their own to make the reading less daunting to the student the first time.

The translated text can be found at the following link:

<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

## **Key Players, Terms, and Points in the Torah Portion:**

(10 Minutes)

After reading the Torah portion, take this time to review some of the key players, terms, and points in the Torah portion. Things you should review with the student are below. There are suggested discussion questions included throughout. Encourage the student to take notes, as this will help them narrate and write their own summary of the portion. You should also let the student know that these notes will be beneficial to the writing of the D'var Torah

### Key Players:

- Moses
  - Name means “delivered from water,” chosen by God to free the Israelites from Egypt, brother of Aaron, holds the roll of a high priest, preparing to die by passing along his knowledge to the Israelite community
    - Why is it important for Moses to share his knowledge with the community before he dies?
    - How can we keep one's memory alive even after they have died?
- God
  - What role does God play in this portion?
  - Do you agree with God's decision about who gets into the promised land? Why?
- The Israelite People
  - How do you imagine the Israelites felt during this time, knowing they were about to take on more responsibility?

### Key Terms:

- *Kibud Zekaynim* - Honoring Elders
  - How is Moses honored as an elder of the Israelite community?
  - Who do you consider your elders?
  - How can you show respect, care, and compassion for elders around you?

Key Points:

- The Israelites are at the end of the forty-year journey of wandering through the desert.
- Moses is nearing old age and is preparing to die by sharing all of his knowledge from God with the Israelites.

**Summarize Your Learning:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to summarize the Torah portion in their own words. As the educator, you should note which parts of the portion the student mentions, as those are typically the parts of the portion that are most memorable to them. Tell the student they will be asked to share this summary at the beginning of the next session. The student can write notes about it to enable them to remember and reflect on it in the following lessons. The summary will help them identify themes or make connections later.

## Lesson 1b: Connecting Your Torah Portion to Social Justice Topics

### Goals:

- Students will summarize their Torah portion in their own words.
- Students will identify social justice themes in the Torah portion and discuss their significance.
- Students will reflect on personal connections to social justice topics and formulate questions for further exploration.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate definitions of social justice terms and concepts such as tikkun olam, tzedek, justice, and injustice.
- Analyze texts from the Torah portion to identify social justice topics and discuss their implications and relevance.
- Identify social justice topics that resonate with them and generate ideas and strategies for how they can address these issues.

### Essential Questions:

- How do social justice themes manifest in biblical narratives, specifically within the Devarim?
- How do the social justice issues depicted in the Torah portion resonate with contemporary concerns and challenges?
- How can you discover your own social justice voice in Torah?
- How do the events and characters in the Torah portion relate to our contemporary understanding of social justice and ethical conduct?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>



**Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:25	Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion
0:25-0:30	Making a Connection

**Review:**

(5 Minutes)

This is a review of the previous lesson. Ask the student to summarize their Torah portion verbally in their own words. Remind the student that they can look at their notes from the previous lesson.

To introduce the next topic of study, ask the following question, “What is social justice?” To answer this, you may first ask the student to define “*tikkun olam*,” tzedek, justice, and/or injustice.

- Social Justice: Justice in relation to the balance or distribution of wealth, resources, education, or opportunities.
- Tikkun Olam: The Jewish value of repairing the world.
- Justice: Being treated in ways that are equitable and fair.
- Injustice: A lack of fairness or equity.

**Social Justice Topics in the Torah Portion:**

(20 Minutes)

Let the student know that every Torah portion calls to us differently, and at this moment, it is speaking to them in a way that prompts action. To allow the student to find their self-interest in the work, ask them what social justice topics they can identify as appearing in the Torah portion.

This section is primarily discussion-based. Below are some examples of social justice topics provided in the Torah portion and textual examples of where they are found. Each example also provides discussion questions. Ask the student how they could, or would, achieve justice for each social justice topic. These should serve as a guide. You might identify others.

Some topics may be triggering for certain students. As their educator, use your best judgment on omitting questions or social justice topics.

**Caring for Our Elders:**

As Moses approaches old age and prepares to die, he writes a speech to deliver to the people. Moses also knows that no matter what, he will not get the opportunity to enter the promised land with the others.

- How does Moses prepare the community for his death?

- The Torah emphasizes listening to elders and learning from their experiences. What practical ways can we show respect and honor toward our elders?
- How can we honor our elders?
- How does valuing and respecting elders contribute to preserving the culture and knowledge of a community?

#### Jewish Continuity and History:

This Torah portion emphasizes history by summarizing the Israelites' journey during their forty-year wandering through the desert.

- Why do you think Deuteronomy starts with a review of the history of the Israelites' journey?
- Do you think Jewish history and keeping Judaism alive is important? Why or why not?
- How does valuing and respecting elders contribute to preserving cultural heritage and wisdom within a community?
- How does passing down stories and teachings from older Jews to younger ones help Jewish people stay connected to who they are and what they believe?

#### **Making a Connection:**

(5 Minutes)

Ask the student to articulate which social justice topic in this Torah portion they would like to explore more as something you might be able to do something about. The student can think about their answer until the next lesson. The student can also choose a social justice topic they connect to today, but after thinking more about it, their answer could change by the next lesson.

Also, ask the student what questions or thoughts they may still have from the previous discussions. Have them write down those questions and ask them to come up with answers by the next lesson. Anything they have not answered independently can be answered the next time you meet.

#### **Student Next Steps:**

1. Choose a social justice topic to explore
2. Think about and answer any questions that still remain about the Torah portion
3. Bring any unanswered questions to the next lesson

## Lesson 1c: Putting Your Learning Into Action

### Goals:

- Engage the student in reflective thinking about their chosen social justice topic.
- Familiarize the student with best practices associated with different types of Tzedek Projects.
- Learn how social justice themes from the Torah portion can inform and inspire their Tzedek Project.
- Prepare the student for the assessment and writing process associated with their d'var Torah and Tzedek Project.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Articulate their interest in a specific social justice topic, project ideas from the Torah portion, and find a personal connection.
- Take the next steps in finding non-profit organizations to complete their Tzedek Project.
- Begin to outline their d'var Torah.

### Essential Questions:

- Why do Jews do a Tzedek Project as an essential part of the b'nai mitzvah process?
- Why is it important to take time from your own life to help others?
- How can you contribute to making an impact in your community through your Tzedek project?

### Materials Needed:

For the Student:

- Lined paper or a small notebook to take notes (This can live in a b'nai mitzvah binder)
- A writing utensil
- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>
- A printed copy of Framing Document A
- A printed copy of Framing Document B
- A printed copy of Framing Document C

For the Educator:

- A notebook where notes can be kept for each student you work with (Dividers may be helpful)
- A writing utensil

- Access to the translation of the Torah portion:  
<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.1?lang=en&aliyot=0>

#### **Time Table:**

0:00-0:05	Review
0:05-0:10	Tzedek Project Guidelines
0:10-0:25	What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like
0:25-0:30	Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps

#### **Review:**

(5 Minutes)

Which social justice topic in the Torah portion would you like to address? Their answer could have changed since the last lesson. This answer will guide the following session.

Revisit the student's questions they wrote down from the last lesson. Ask the student to share their questions and any responses they have come up with. If there is a question still unanswered, you can answer it together.

#### **Tzedek Project Guidelines:**

(5 Minutes)

What guidelines for the Tzedek Project are in place for your institution? Those using this curriculum will fill in this section based on their institution's requirements and guidelines for the Tzedek Project.

##### Examples of Guidelines:

- Volunteer for a certain number of hours; Provide a deadline for the hours to be completed.
- Create a presentation that will be shared with the next year's cohort of b'nai mitzvah students.
- Write a paragraph about your Tzedek Project that can be shared in a synagogue newsletter, email blast, or synagogue website.
- Create a poster that will be shared in the synagogue lobby the week before the b'nai mitzvah.
- Share a photo or other documentation of you during the Tzedek Project process.

## What Might a Tzedek Project Look Like:

(15 Minutes)

This next discussion will be based on the student's answer to the review question at the beginning of this lesson: What social justice topic do they want to explore for the Tzedek Project? If the student has a clear answer about which topic they want to explore, then as the educator, you can focus on just one subsection to guide the discussion and decision. I would recommend exploring at most two social justice topics for timing purposes.

These subsections are based on the social justice topics from the previous lesson. Students may find a connection to a different social justice topic not outlined in this or the previous lesson. That is okay. Each subsection will have ideas and examples of organizations that can accomplish a Tzedek Project based on four best practices: philanthropy, collections, hands-on volunteering, and education/advocacy. Remind the student that they should have a parent or guardian's permission before committing to anything or making any online posts. Together, review Framing Document C on page 20 of this curriculum guide.

### 1. Caring for Our Elders

#### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money for an organization that provides warm meals to homebound seniors who cannot cook for themselves.
  - [City Meals on Wheels](#) in New York, New York, is an example of an organization that supplies warm meals to homebound seniors.

#### b. Collections

- Run a collection drive to collect non-perishable items that can be donated to a food pantry that provides the elderly with their needed groceries.
  - [Queens Community House](#) in Queens, New York, is an example of an organization that helps provide groceries to the elderly.

#### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Spend time with and provide companionship for the elderly community.
  - [The Motion Picture and Television Retirement Community](#) in Woodland Hills, California, provides its elderly residents with daily activities like bingo and the loving support they need.

#### d. Education/Advocacy

- Engage in intergenerational dialogue and activities to foster understanding and empathy between different age groups,

promoting mutual respect and appreciation for the wisdom and experiences of older adults.

- [Kline Galland](#) is a local retirement community in Seattle, Washington, where you can spend time learning from residents.

## 2. Jewish Continuity and History

### a. Philanthropy

- You can raise money to support future campers who want to attend a Jewish summer camp.
  - [SCOPE \(Summer Camp Opportunities Promote Education\)](#) is a national organization that provides scholarships to financially disadvantaged families to send their children to camp.

### b. Collections

- You can collect books about Judaism or with Jewish themes and donate them to your local library.
  - Providing access to Jewish learning in public spaces will promote unity and continuity.

### c. Hands-On Volunteering

- Volunteer at your local [JCC \(Jewish Community Center.\)](#)
  - Cities with sizable Jewish populations generally have a JCC committed to creating a Jewish space for all ages.

### d. Education/Advocacy

- Learn from one another about the history of the Jewish people and stories of tradition.
  - Through [3GNY](#), speak with Holocaust survivors worldwide and help put their stories into writing for future generations.

## **Introduction to the Assessment and Next Steps:**

(5 Minutes)

Using Framing Document A, found on page 19 of this curriculum guide, create a concrete list of the next steps with the student. The next steps may include creating a list of possible non-profit organizations, setting deadlines for connecting with an organization, and sharing an update on their progress to the educator via email after 4 weeks. This worksheet should go home with the student after this lesson.

Using Framing Document B on page 105 of this curriculum guide, the student will be provided information about the Assessment. As the educator, you may choose to print a copy of the two framing documents for the student on a double-sided sheet of paper.

To review the assessment, begin with reviewing what a d'var Torah is. D'var Torah literally means "word of Torah." A d'var Torah is a speech that each b'nai mitzvah student will share from the bima on the day of their service that provides insights, interpretations, reflections, or teachings about their Torah portion. The goal of the d'var Torah is to take the biblical text from the Torah portion and share its relevance and application to modern life. One of the ways that the student will do that is by writing about how their Tzedek Project connects to their Torah portion.

The student will be assessed on their comprehension of the Torah portion and their ability to connect their Tzedek Project to the social justice themes of the Torah portion. This assessment will take place after the mini-lessons have been completed and after they have at least begun their Tzedek Project. In most institutions, the writing of the d'var Torah begins about three months before the service under the supervision of a clergy member. The student should be encouraged to reach out for more support as needed.

The student should write at least one paragraph for their d'var Torah that answers the following prompts:

- What happens in the Torah portion?
- What social justice topic appears in the Torah portion?
- What did you do for your Tzedek Project?
- How is your Tzedek Project related to the Torah portion?
- Why should others care about your chosen social justice topic?
- What do you believe was the impact of your Tzedek Project?
- What did you learn from doing this project?"

This paragraph should be written within two months of this final meeting. Doing this will allow the student to get a head start on their D'var Torah, and it will be done when it is fresh in their mind. The paragraph should be emailed to the educator within those two months as a method of accountability.

## Assessment

D'var Torah literally means “word of Torah.” A d'var Torah is a speech that each b'nai mitzvah student shares from the bima on the day of their service that provides insights, interpretations, reflections, or teachings about their Torah portion. The goal of the d'var Torah is to take the biblical text from the Torah portion and share its relevance and application to modern life. One of the ways that a b'nai mitzvah will do that is by writing about how their Tzedek Project connects to their Torah portion.

The student will be assessed on their comprehension of the Torah portion and their ability to connect their Tzedek Project to the social justice themes of the Torah portion through this d'var torah. This writing of the d'var Torah will take place after the mini-lessons have been completed, and after they have at least begun their Tzedek Project.

The student needs to start their project before writing their d'var Torah to discuss their Tzedek Project and how it is going for them.

In most institutions, the writing of the d'var Torah begins about three months before the service under the supervision of a clergy member. The student should be encouraged to reach out for more support as needed.

Reflecting on the previous sessions, the student should write at least one paragraph for their d'var Torah that answers the following prompts:

- What happens in the Torah portion?
- What social justice topic appears in the Torah portion?
- How is their Tzedek Project related to the Torah portion?
- Why should others care about their chosen social justice topic?
- What did they do for their Tzedek Project?



This paragraph should be written within two months of this final meeting. Doing this will allow the student to get a head start on their D'var Torah, and it will be done when it is fresh in their mind. Also, encourage the student to share at least one photo from their Tzedek Project. Ideally, this photo shows the student actively engaged with their project and can give the viewer a glimpse into what the student completed. The student may consider additional documentation.

Students will use Framing Document B to assist with this assessment, which can be found on the next page.

## Framing Document B: Assessment Worksheet for the Student

Write down notes about how your chosen social justice topic and Tzedek Project connect to your Torah portion.

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### D'var Torah Assessment

D'var Torah literally means “word of Torah.” A d'var Torah is a speech that each b'nai mitzvah student will share from the bima on the day of their service that provides insights, interpretations, reflections, or teachings about their Torah portion. The goal of the d'var Torah is to take the biblical text from the Torah portion and share its relevance and application to modern life. One of the ways that you will do that is by writing about how their Tzedek Project connects to your Torah portion.

At least one paragraph of the d'var Torah should answer the following prompts. You can check them off after you have included them in your speech.

- ☐ What happens in the Torah portion?
- ☐ What social justice topic appears in the Torah portion?
- ☐ What did you do for your Tzedek Project?
- ☐ How is your Tzedek Project related to the Torah portion?
- ☐ Why should others care about your chosen social justice topic?
- ☐ What do you believe was the impact of your Tzedek Project?
- ☐ What did you learn from doing this project?"
- ☐
- ☐

Additionally, you should share at least one photo from your Tzedek Project with your educator. Ideally, this photo shows you actively engaged with your project and can give the viewer a glimpse into what you completed. The paragraph should be written within two months of the final lesson. Doing this will allow you to get a head start on the d'var Torah, which will be done when it is fresh in your mind.

## Glossary

B Mitzvah, Bet Mitzvah, B'nai Mitzvah*	Gender-neutral terms *This is the term I chose to use throughout the curriculum guide
Bar/Bat/B'nai Mitzvah/B'not Mitzvah	Traditional terminology; Son of/Daughter of/Sons of/Daughters of the Commandments
Bima	The platform found in a sanctuary that is used as a reading table for prayer and the Torah.
Collections	One of four best practices for a Tzedek Project. Collecting needed and necessary items.
D'var Torah	The speech given by the B'nai Mitzvah student during their b'nai mitzvah service in which they teach about the Torah portion. This guide will include how the portion relates to them and how they connect their Tzedek Project to the Torah portion.
Education/Advocacy	One of four best practices for a Tzedek Project. Teaching others about the chosen social justice topic while showing public support for that cause. Thinking about how you can get these ideas out into the world.
Equality	Providing everyone with the same resources
Equity	Providing everyone with the resources they need
Hands-on Volunteering	One of four best practices for a Tzedek Project. Completing tasks and projects as needed by an organization.
Injustice	A lack of fairness or equity
Justice צדק	Being treated in ways that are equitable and fair
Mitzvah	"Commandment;" A good act or deed
Mitzvah Project	A widely used term to coin the project as a stepping-stone into Jewish adulthood because part of being a Jewish adult is accepting the additional responsibility of caring for others, the world, and your community.
Parshat, parashah, parasha (Plural: Parshiot)	Translates to "portion"
Philanthropy	One of four best practices for a Tzedek Project. Monetary

	fundraising.
Social Justice	Justice in relation to the balance or distribution of wealth, resources, education, or opportunities
Tikkun Olam	The Jewish value of repairing the world
Tzedek Project	An elevated version of the mitzvah project that places the focus on pursuing justice.

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