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B'NEI MITZVAH AS CHEVREI KEHILAH:

Engaging with Mitzvot through Community Service

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Rhea Hirsch School of Education • 2016

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B'NEI MITZVAH AS CHEVREI KEHILAH:

Engaging with Mitzvot through Community Service

RATIONALE

You have probably heard the old joke about the rabbi and the mice. In case you haven't, here is the short version: a synagogue has been overrun by mice, and the rabbi, desperate to get rid of them, tries everything she can think of—traps, exterminators, cats—to no avail, until she suddenly gets a brilliant idea. She gathers up the mice, teaches them some Torah, puts tiny little tallitot on them, and performs a b'nei mitzvah ceremony for them. The mice leave and never come back.

The joke stings, but we cannot help but laugh at it because it rings painfully true. It reflects the reality that for far too many young Reform Jews, the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony marks the end of their Jewish learning journey, not its beginning. Liberal Jews tend to “perceive the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony as the equivalent of the high school graduation” (Aron, 319): the culmination of years of Jewish schooling and participation in Jewish life, after which they are finally free to leave all that schooling and participation behind. We can hardly be surprised when the result is “staggering rates of post-b'nei mitzvah dropout” from Jewish learning and life (B'nai Mitzvah Revolution, 2015).

Of course, becoming b'nei mitzvah is not supposed to be a Jew's ticket out of Judaism; it is supposed to be an invitation into it. We often say that to become bar or bat mitzvah is to become a Jewish “adult.” What we mean is that a bar or bat mitzvah is a fully empowered Jewish agent, capable of making choices about Jewish belief and practice, and of taking on personal and communal Jewish responsibilities. For Reform Jews, this may or may not mean taking on any particular mitzvot as they are traditionally understood, but it does mean experiencing a change in status within one's Jewish community. Students approaching b'nei mitzvah should be preparing for this change—exploring what it means to wear a tallit or to be counted in a minyan, for example, and learning how to take part in community activities generally reserved for adult Jews, such as visiting the sick and paying shiva calls. They should be investigating the norms and expectations of their particular Jewish communities, helping to serve those communities, and being guided by community members who can model integrated Jewish living.

This curriculum guide aims to engage b'nei mitzvah students in just such a process. It is a curriculum that integrates text study and sociological data gathering with community-based service learning, and it envisioned for use by a stable cohort of synagogue supplementary school students who are approaching b'nei mitzvah, although it could be used during or immediately after b'nei mitzvah as well. The service-learning aspect of the curriculum is vital to its goals of enhancing students' sense of belonging within their Jewish communities and reintegrating b'nei mitzvah into the continuum of Jewish communal life. Studies suggest that service learning tends to increase participants' feelings of social acceptance and inclusion (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014), and make them more likely to engage with community organizations, such as non-profit groups, churches, and synagogues (D'Agostino, 2010). Moreover, in her doctoral dissertation, Erica Rothblum found that students who feel disconnected from their community (in her case, a new school) can come to feel more connected through community-based service-learning. Interestingly, it was not the service itself that increased the students' sense of belonging; it was the caring, purpose-driven, empowering micro-community that they had formed among themselves over the course of their service-learning project that ultimately bridged the gap between the individual students and their larger school community (Rothblum, 2008). Informed by these important studies, this curriculum guide specifically calls for a stable cohort.

The frame for the content of this curriculum guide is a set of three mitzvot selected from Elu Devarim—welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick, and comforting the bereaved—which could be seen, equally within a Reform context as within an Orthodox one, as being incumbent upon a bar or bat mitzvah. Elu Devarim is featured for several reasons: in its musical setting, it is well known to Reform Jewish youth; at the same time, as with many Reform prayers recited in Hebrew, its content is not generally well understood; and the mitzvot it lists are all clearly ethically motivated and lend themselves to study, discussion, and action. The three specific mitzvot that I have selected are particularly outward looking (i.e. unlike honoring one's mother and father, they compel one to interact with people outside one's immediate circle of concern) and actionable. Students will examine these mitzvot from several angles: first, they will study select liturgical, biblical, rabbinic, and halachic texts in English translation that relate to these mitzvot, in order to better understand what they actually entail and why Jewish tradition regards them as important. Then, students will learn about how adults within their own synagogue communities actually observe these mitzvot, primarily through Q&As with community leaders and members, and by serving their communities directly, for example, by assisting *bikur cholim* committee members in preparing and delivering food to homebound congregants. Students will reflect on these experiences, individually and as a group,

in light of their academic study, and, over the course of the program, they will collect and refine their reflections into a joint “State of the Community” report, a brief assessment of what their community is doing well to serve its members, and where it might be able to improve. The curriculum guide culminates in the presentation of this document to synagogue leaders, followed by a final group reflection on the overall experience.

Over the course of this curriculum, students will have the opportunity to meet several different members of their synagogue community—clergy, board members, committee chairs, etc.—and to participate in a couple of different synagogue service activities. These firsthand experiences of how adults can function within their Jewish communities are especially important for adolescent learners. Most of them will be experiencing the height of what psychologist Erik Erikson called the “identity vs. role confusion” stage of psychosocial development, a period during which they must try on different identities and social roles before they can settle into selves that feel authentic to them (Erikson, 1980). The more roles they have available to explore, the more fully they can engage in this challenging work. More importantly, though, if we do not offer young Reform Jews role models for meaningful, integrated adult Jewish living, they may simply be unable to imagine what it is like to be an adult Jew, and will consequently tend to drift away from any form of lived Judaism. This is because, as sociologist Peter Berger writes, “*Homo sapiens* is the social animal” (Berger, 1967, p. 4). Berger explains that human beings can only understand themselves and their place in the world *in community with one another*, and that “all religious traditions [...] require specific communities for their continuing plausibility” (Berger, 1967, p. 46). In the case of today’s Reform bar or bat mitzvah, no connection to Judaism, no matter how personally attuned or deeply felt, can hold up to the barrage of counter-influences from secular culture without at least some support from a like-minded Jewish community.

This curriculum guide aims to help young Reform Jews to find their place within just such a community. In fact, it does so to the exclusion of other concerns, such as pursuing a broader program of *tikun olam*, not because those pursuits are not vitally important, but in the interest of narrowing the scope of the curriculum down to something manageable. This curriculum guide is not meant to exist in a vacuum: my hope is that it can be used as part of a broader, multi-year program that would cover many other topics, *tikun olam* among them.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Liberal Jews do not simply become b'nei mitzvah by turning 13—they must actively choose to become b'nei mitzvah, by taking actions like studying, discussing, and experimenting with mitzvot, or taking on obligations within their Jewish communities.

No connection to Judaism can hold up to the barrage of counter-influences from secular culture without at least some support from a like-minded Jewish community.

Obligation frees and empowers as well as constrains.

“Community service” serves no one unless it is informed by knowledge of the community’s needs and values.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What will change for me when I become bar/bat mitzvah? What will change for my community? (Or, what will change for my child when they become bar/bat mitzvah? What will change for my community?)

What is a mitzvah?

How should a liberal Jew relate to mitzvot?

Who are the strangers, sick, and mourners in my community? How can I effectively welcome, visit, and comfort them, respectively?

GOALS

To entice emerging b'nei mitzvah to engage with the range of ethical mitzvot, adult Jewish roles, and opportunities for community service newly available to them as b'nei mitzvah.

To help emerging b'nei mitzvah to envision themselves as thriving adult Jews, playing integral roles in their communities and leading lives of meaning and significance.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Unit 1 – I’m Becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah!? What Does That Mean?

- a. Students and parents will have the opportunity to reflect on their hopes, concerns, and questions regarding their or their children’s upcoming b’nei mitzvah, and to express their thoughts to one another and to their teachers, including a prominent member of their congregation’s clergy.
- b. Students and parents will explore the changes that take place when a person becomes bar/bat mitzvah.
- c. Students and parents will explore the concept of mitzvah, and the ways in which liberal Jews might relate to that concept.
- d. Students and parents will be familiarized with the website to which students will post their reflections on b’nei mitzvah at various stages of the program, and on which students, parents, and (possibly) congregation community members will have the opportunity to post their comments toward the end of the program.
- e. Memorable moment: students and parents will join together in a service activity within their congregational community, e.g. preparing and delivering food to congregants in need due to illness, shiva, or other difficulties, and will subsequently reflect on the experience together and individually.

Unit 2 – What Does My Tradition Say?

- a. Students will be introduced to Elu Devarim as a text on mitzvot that has relevance to contemporary liberal Jews.
- b. Students will brainstorm their own conceptions about what it might mean to welcome the stranger, visit the sick, and comfort the mourner—a subset of the mitzvot mentioned in Elu Devarim—and what might attract them to or push them away from these practices.
- c. Students will examine biblical, rabbinic, and halachic texts that pertain to these three mitzvot, and will compare what they learn to their own assumptions and experiences.
- d. Students will hear the perspectives of their clergy on these mitzvot, and will compare those perspectives to what they have previously learned and discussed.
- e. Students will prepare pamphlets for younger students instructing them as to how best to welcome the stranger, visit the sick, and comfort the mourner.
- f. Students will begin to participate in service activities (ideally related to one or more of the three aforementioned mitzvot) within their congregation community, each of which will conclude with time for individual written reflection.

Unit 3 – What Does My Community Need?

- a. Students will begin to share their reflections on their service experiences with one other.
- b. Students will hear from a panel of people who have served the strangers, sick, mourners, and others in their congregation community, and will have the opportunity to ask questions about their roles and experiences.
- c. Students will hear from a panel of people who have received such services from others in their congregation community, and will have the opportunity to ask questions about their experiences.
- d. Students will gather and analyze written and digital materials produced by their congregation that pertain to its mission, its policies, and the community services it provides.
- e. Students will assess what they believe their congregation is doing well in terms of meeting the needs of the stranger, the sick person, and the mourner within their community, and will brainstorm ways in which their congregation could do more to meet those individuals' needs.
- f. Optional: students will discuss additional constituencies within their congregational communities whom they believe merit special assistance, assess how well they believe their congregation is doing in supporting those constituencies, and brainstorm ways in which their congregation could do more to meet those individuals' needs.
- g. Students will record their assessments and suggestions on their individual pages on the program website.

Unit 4 – Where Do I Fit In?

- a. Students will return to the text of Elu Devarim, applying what they have learned and experienced so far to evaluate it. Students will have the opportunity to propose mitzvot that they think should have been included in Elu Devarim, or to challenge ones that were. Students will also consider what it might mean for the study of Torah to be “*k'neged kulam*” and whether or not they agree that this statement is true.
- b. Students will explore their own talents, skills, interests, and values, in order to help clarify what kind of service project would be best suited to them.
- c. Students will construct a web of relationship depicting how they are interconnected with and relate to the most important people in their lives, as well as to a person or group to whom/which they would be interested in relating via a service project.

Unit 5 – I’m Becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah! What’s Next?

- a. Students will be charged by their teacher and clergy person with tailor-made service projects to perform individually or in small groups.
- b. Students will present their finalized pamphlets to a group of 4th graders, help the 4th graders to use the pamphlets (including acting out a simulation with them), and then reflect on the experience with one another.
- c. Students will have the opportunity to reflect on their personalized service projects and to share their reflections on their group website.

- d. Students, parents, and, if desired, additional congregation and/or community members will comment upon students' web pages, and students will review the comments they receive and reflect upon them in person with one another.
- e. Students will have the opportunity to make public pledges before one another (e.g. to take further acts of service, to continue to study and experiment with mitzvot, or to incorporate their personal websites or other fruits of what they have learned and experienced through this program into what they present at their b'nei mitzvah ceremonies).

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for picking up this curriculum guide! I hope that you will find it useful.

My work on this guide grew out of my frustration with what I perceived to be a culture of narcissism and shallowness around b'nei mitzvah: a tendency for the grandiosity of the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony itself to totally eclipse the meaning of the life passage it was meant to mark; and to be largely out of step with the usual prayer *minhag* of the community in which it was taking place, to the extent that an adult not involved in a given bar or bat mitzvah could feel totally alienated from a Saturday morning service at their own synagogue. I could feel the phrase “you are not such a special snowflake” buzzing around in my brain as I began to formulate a curriculum guide about re-rooting liberal b'nei mitzvah in obligation, service, and the passage into functional, fully realized Jewish adulthood.

As I progressed through my curriculum research and development, however, I came to feel that not only was it acceptable, but vital to affirm the uniqueness of each individual student as part of the pre-b'nei mitzvah learning process. Not to do so would be to deny the reality of students' particular gifts, challenges, and passions, and to pass up capitalizing on them to enhance meaning and buy-in for students as they prepare for their b'nei mitzvah. The key was to do so in a relational context. In other words, we must affirm that every student *is* a special snowflake, but that they are letting their specialness go to waste if they are not using it to benefit others and to strengthen their communities. Although this teaching falls outside the scope of the present curriculum, I feel in my bones the truth of Emmanuel Levinas' assertion that each of us owes everything to the other, and I hope that this curriculum guide goes some small way toward instilling that idea in the hearts and minds of b'nei mitzvah. Just as I went on a journey in preparing this guide, I intend for it to take students on a journey of ever-deeper sophistication in their thinking about what it means to become b'nei mitzvah, and how they can seize that opportunity not just for themselves, but also for the benefit of those around them.

On the subject of buy-in, this curriculum guide requires significant commitment from many constituents in order to be successful. Of course, one of these constituents is you, the teacher, not least because the guide calls for you to create and administer a class website to document your students' experiences. In order to simplify this work, which you will have to do outside of class time, I have called for all submissions to the website to be documents that you can simply scan and upload to students' pages, rather than text that you would need to type in (or that you would assign students or parents to type in at home, an assignment they almost certainly would not complete). Another key participant will be your clergy partner, ideally one of your congregation's senior-most clergy people, and/or the clergy person who deals most directly with b'nei mitzvah. You will need that person to speak to your students in Lesson 2.4, help you devise individualized student service projects in advance of Unit 5, and charge students with undertaking those projects in Lesson 5.1.

Finally, you will need a significant commitment of time and energy from students and their parents, for in-class learning and for self-scheduled service learning activities. While the lessons in Units 2–5 are designed to take one hour each, the joint student-parent sessions in Unit 1 are 90 minute lessons, and the service outing that constitutes Lesson 1.3, which all students are required to attend accompanied by at least one parent, is a 3 hour program. Parents will need ample warning about these and other time commitments that this program will demand of them. I would advise informing them in writing of the program calendar and requirements several months in advance and sending reminders as important dates approach.

Good luck! It was an adventure putting this curriculum guide together, and I hope that it will be an even greater adventure for you to put it to use.

Sincerely,

Abigail Phelps

UNIT 1 – I’M BECOMING BAR/BAT MITZVAH!? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

No one is lonely when doing a mitzvah, for a mitzvah is where God and man meet.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

This unit lays the groundwork for the curriculum guide: it aims to broaden and deepen students’ and parents’ thinking about what it could mean for liberal Jews to become b’nei mitzvah. By the end of the unit, students and their parents should feel enhanced ownership of the b’nei mitzvah process, and a sense of purpose about how they want themselves or their children to experience it and be transformed by it.

Enduring Understandings

- Liberal Jews do not simply become b’nei mitzvah by turning 13—they must actively choose to become b’nei mitzvah, by taking actions like studying, discussing, and experimenting with mitzvot, or taking on obligations within their Jewish communities.
- No connection to Judaism can hold up to the barrage of counter-influences from secular culture without at least some support from a like-minded Jewish community.
- Obligation frees and empowers as well as constrains.
- “Community service” serves no one unless it is informed by knowledge of the community’s needs and values.

Essential Questions

- What will change for me/for my child when I/my child become(s) bar/bat mitzvah?
- What will change for my congregational community when I/my child become(s) bat/bar mitzvah?
- What is a mitzvah?
- How should a liberal Jew relate to mitzvot?

Goals

- To give students and their parents the resources and opportunity to think about what becoming b’nei mitzvah means to them and to their congregational community.
- To inspire students to learn about and experiment with mitzvot, to serve one another and their congregational communities, and to view their impending access to obligation as b’nei mitzvah as an exciting privilege.

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- Students will be able to (SWBAT) distinguish between aspects of going through a b’nei mitzvah ceremony and aspects of becoming b’nei mitzvah.
- SWBAT explain in what sense they think a bar or bat mitzvah becomes a Jewish adult.
- SWBAT offer a personal definition for the term “mitzvah,” and to explain why they define mitzvah in that way.
- SWBAT articulate what they imagine will change for them and for their congregational community when they become b’nei mitzvah.
- Students and parents will have the opportunity to react to a group service experience designed for them by their teacher and performed for the benefit of their congregational community, and will reflect on that experience by discussing it together with teacher facilitation, and by creating blog posts that express their thoughts and feelings about the experience.

LESSON 1.1A – WHAT ARE B’NEI MITZVAH? (FOR STUDENTS)

Materials

- Tarp or picnic blanket
- Butcher paper (at least 2 sheets) and markers
- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- Large hat, bowl, or other receptacle (for strips of paper)

Timeline

0–5 min.	Welcome and Shehecheyanu (Set Induction)
5–35 min.	Get-to-Know-You Games
35–55 min.	B’nei Mitzvah Brainstorming
55–75 min.	Reverse Engineering B’nei Mitzvah
75–80 min.	Educational Closure I
80–90 min.	Hopes, Fears, and Questions (Educational Closure II)

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- SWBAT distinguish between elements of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony and ways in which a person’s status changes when they become bar/bat mitzvah.
- SWBAT identify at least two new opportunities for Jewish practice and leadership that will be available to them upon becoming b’nei mitzvah.
- SWBAT articulate what they think it means for b’nei mitzvah to become Jewish adults.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to a barrage of information about the changes that take place upon becoming b’nei mitzvah. Students will reflect on what they anticipate will happen to and for them as they become b’nei mitzvah, and will express their reflections through anonymous statements and questions shared with their peers and parents.

Activities

Welcome and Shehecheyanu (Set Induction) (5 minutes)

Greet participants (students and their parents) as they arrive. Gather participants and thank them for coming together today to begin this exciting journey toward b’nei mitzvah. Ask participants to take a moment to think of their earliest childhood memories (or, ask students to think of their earliest childhood memories, and ask parents to think of their earliest memories of their children), and then have them turn to one another and share. After a couple of minutes, invite some or all participants (depending upon the size of the group) to share their memories publically. Explain that we have all come a long way from our unique and separate origins to find each other here, and our task for today is to understand where we are and where we are headed. In honor of this occasion, invite participants to say a Shehecheyanu with you. Dismiss students and parents to their separate classrooms.

This curriculum guide is intended to be shared between you and a clergy partner, either the senior rabbi of your congregation, or whoever is generally understood to be the clergy face of your congregation’s b’nei mitzvah program. This person should ideally join you on all occasions when students and their parents are together, including introductory and concluding activities in the first two lessons of this unit, and lead parent learning while you work with b’nei mitzvah candidates.

Get-to-Know-You Games (30 minutes)

Find Someone Who... (10 minutes): Have students stand together in a group, and instruct them each to find a partner who shares a particular trait with them, such as eye color or number of siblings. Once they've found a partner, students should introduce themselves to each other and talk a little about their shared trait, until you announce a new one and send them looking for a new partner. If there are people who can't find perfect matches, they can pair off with others who don't have matches and compare their traits instead. Ask students to try to find partners they don't already know well, and to find a different partner for each trait, and remind them that they have to say their name and learn their partner's name every time. Below is a list of ideas for traits, but feel free to use your imagination and come up with your own!

The purpose of these get-to-know-you games is not just to acquaint students with one another, but also to begin to build an atmosphere of fun, comfort, and trust among students, so that they can develop over the course of the year into a close-knit and supportive cohort. This is why so much time has been dedicated to them. If all students already know each other well, it might be best to skip the "Find Someone Who..." game in favor of extending the "All Aboard!" game, or even to choose a different game entirely. The website <http://wilderdom.com/games/> is an excellent resource for alternative team building activities.

- Eye/hair color
- Kind of pet
- Number of siblings
- Sport you play
- Favorite video game/movie/TV show/book/song/food
- Last place you went on vacation

All Aboard! (20 minutes): Place a tarp or picnic blanket on the floor, and tell the students that it is a raft in the middle of the ocean. Tell students they all have to get on board, with no one's feet or hands or any other body parts touching the ocean (a.k.a. the floor or anything else outside the tarp or blanket), and stay on board for as long as it takes to sing one verse of "David Melech Yisrael" in order to be rescued by the helicopter that's searching for them.

Depending upon the number of students you have, the amount of space you have, and your preference, you can take this in a few different directions. You can start with a "raft" that will comfortably accommodate all students, but then keep shrinking the size of the raft by folding it up and asking the students to pile back on board; or, you can start with a small raft and force them to figure out how to get on board from the start. You can also have students board a not-too-tiny raft and then instruct students to flip the raft over without dumping anyone overboard, i.e. without anyone touching anything outside the raft.

Save 5 minutes at the end for debrief. Ask the students:

- If they managed to stay on the raft—How did you do it? What do you think helped your group to succeed? (E.g. *good communication, trusting that we'd physically support one another, good strategy, positive attitude about success, etc.*) Is there anyone you want to give a shout-out to who did something especially awesome?
- If they didn't manage to stay on the raft—What happened? What do you think the group would have had to do differently in order to succeed? (E.g. *communicate better, rely on each other more, strategize more, believe we could succeed, etc.*) In what ways was your group actually

successful? (*E.g. we were actually pretty good at communicating, even if our strategy fell through.*) Is there anyone you want to give a shout-out to who did something especially awesome?

Thank students for participating in the activities and discussion. Let them know that throughout this program, you want them to keep using the skills that they just used: thinking critically about situations—asking what’s happening, why it’s happening, what role they’re playing, how things could be better, etc.—listening to each other, and looking out for one other.

B’nei Mitzvah Brainstorming (20 minutes)

Place the butcher paper somewhere where all students can see it. Ask students what they think will happen on the day of their bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies. Allow no more than 7 minutes for this part of the activity, but all answers are fair game: having a big party, getting awesome presents, and seeing Aunt June for the first time in forever are just as valid as leading the service, talking about my mitzvah project, and having my Mom and Dad hand me the Torah. Write the students’ answers down on the paper. As you go, make a mark next to any answers that describe how the students will change upon becoming b’nei mitzvah, rather than or in addition to being things what will happen at their ceremonies (this would include statements like “I will become a man” or “I can wear a talit”).

If there are enough marked answers, ask the students if they can tell you what all the marked answers have in common; if not, skip this step. Flip the sheet over (or use a new sheet) and ask them how they think they will change when they become b’nei mitzvah. Start by incorporating anything from the previous list that fits into this category. If students seem stymied, ask: What might you be able to do that you couldn’t do before you were bar or bat mitzvah? What new responsibilities or opportunities will you have? If the following answers do not come up, make sure to bring them up yourself:

- Able to make a minyan (*If needed, explain that a minyan is a group of ten adult Jews, the minimum needed to perform certain rituals and recite certain prayers, such as the Mourner’s Kaddish*)
- Able to wear ritual garments like talit and tefilin (*Describe if needed*)
- Able to lead a prayer service
- Can take on mitzvot for myself, such as fasting all day on Yom Kippur
- Have more opportunities in my Jewish community—can take on more roles, attend more activities and events, etc.
- Be a Jewish adult

Explain any terms that come up that students may not be familiar with, and gently correct any incorrect responses students offer before writing them down. Bring up the fact that according to the rabbis of the very beginning of the first millennium CE, 13 was the age at which a person could be held responsible for making and keeping a vow (or promise). Let students know that this is recorded in the Mishnah, the earliest book of rabbinic laws, and that this is still cited today as the reason why we become b’nei mitzvah at 13. Add “able to make and keep a vow” to the list.

Reverse Engineering B’nei Mitzvah (20 minutes)

Write the words “bar mitzvah” and “bat mitzvah” in Hebrew and transliteration up on a sheet of butcher paper that everyone can see. Ask students what those words literally mean. If students don’t know, coax them toward “son of commandment” and “daughter of commandment,” either through a modern dictionary or just by telling them, and write those definitions on the paper. Ask

students what they think of these titles (allow no more than 5 minutes for discussion). If they don't offer these responses, point out that the titles "bar mitzvah" and "bat mitzvah" are problematic for us for at least two reasons: 1) as liberal Jews, we don't necessarily do all the mitzvot or believe they're all commanded, so what do we really mean by "mitzvah?"; and 2) we just said that when we become b'nei mitzvah, we are considered to be Jewish adults, so why are we still called sons and daughters?

Promise students that we will return to the question of mitzvot next week, but for now, you want to focus on the question of children and adults. If we're still called kids after b'nei mitzvah, then maybe we're becoming adults in some specific or symbolic way. Tell students that their job is to look at the list of things that will change when they become b'nei mitzvah and try to figure out in what specific way they will become adults. Will they be more powerful? More responsible? Taller? What is it that's really changing? Ask students to try to find themes among the changes on the list, and to come up with adult qualities or abilities that it looks the rabbis who invented the idea of b'nei mitzvah thought they would gain by becoming b'nei mitzvah. Write these instructions on the board/butcher paper, divide students into small groups, and give them at least 10 minutes to work.

Bring students back together and ask each group to report back to the whole class. Ideas they come up with may include the following:

B'nei mitzvah become adults in that they are...

- capable of making their own choices.
- capable of keeping promises, to themselves and to others.
- capable of supporting or taking care of others.
- capable of worshipping God in a mature way.
- capable of leading others, leading a community, and/or being spiritual leaders.

Write each group's responses on a sheet of butcher paper (or, for duplicate responses, star the ones that have already been written). Allow a few minutes for discussion. Are these the things that the students already thought it meant to be a bar/bat mitzvah, or a Jewish adult? Are any of them surprising? Is anything missing?

Educational Closure I (5 minutes)

Have students write down on one piece of paper each their names and one way in which they look forward to changing when they become b'nei mitzvah. Collect these papers for scanning and uploading to the website. If there is time, you can invite students to share what they wrote if they wish.

Hopes, Fears, and Questions (Educational Closure II) (10 minutes)

Gather students back together with their parents and your clergy partner. Inform the group that both students and parents have spent time today discussing the changes they think will happen when they or their children become b'nei mitzvah, and this is an opportunity for the whole group to reflect on this idea together. Distribute pens or pencils and strips of paper, so that every participant has something to write with and a few strips of paper. Instruct participants to write statements on

This is the first of several documents that should be collected, scanned, and uploaded to individual student web pages on a central website for this class (see lesson 1.2B for more information, including thoughts about who should be able to access the website). The website should serve as an assessment tool for you, the teacher, a record for students and their parents of students' journeys over the course of the program, and an opportunity for the students' accomplishments and growth to be witnessed by their community.

the papers about their or their children's b'nei mitzvah that start with "I hope," "I worry," or "I wonder." They should not sign their names. When they finish writing a statement, they should fold it up and toss it into a central receptacle like a hat or bowl. Allow a few minutes for participants to write, then ask everyone to finish up what they are writing and stop. Pass around the receptacle and have each participant pull out a slip at random and read the statement on it out loud for the group. Once all strips have been read, lay them out together so they can all be seen (and be sure to save them after class and affix them to a sheet of butcher paper or poster board for safe-keeping). Thank participants for so candidly sharing their thoughts and feelings about their and their children's upcoming b'nei mitzvah, and assure them that over the course of the program we will continue to explore these thoughts and feelings together.

LESSON 1.1B – WHAT ARE B’NEI MITZVAH? (FOR PARENTS)

Materials

- B’nei Mitzvah Reflection Questions (Handout 1.1)
- Butcher paper/white board and markers
- B’nei Mitzvah Text Study (Handouts 1.2–1.6)
- Plain white paper or notebook paper, cut or torn into strips
- Pens or pencils
- Large hat, bowl, or other receptacle (for strips of paper)

Timeline

0–5 min.	Welcome and Shehecheyanu (Set Induction)
5–20 min.	B’nei Mitzvah: Personal Reflections
20–50 min.	B’nei Mitzvah Brainstorming
50–80 min.	Text Study
80–90 min.	Hopes, Fears, and Questions (Educational Closure)

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- SWBAT relate their own past experiences with b’nei mitzvah or other life cycle events or ceremonies to their upcoming experiences with their children’s b’nei mitzvah.
- SWBAT identify several new opportunities for Jewish practice and leadership that will be available to them upon becoming b’nei mitzvah.
- SWBAT articulate what they think it means for b’nei mitzvah to be Jewish adults.
- SWBAT name at least one early traditional view as to what transition b’nei mitzvah is intended to mark.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to a barrage of information about the changes that take place when their children become b’nei mitzvah. Students will reflect on what they anticipate will happen to and for their children as they become b’nei mitzvah, and will express their reflections through anonymous statements and questions shared with their peers and children.

Activities

Welcome and Shehecheyanu (Set Induction) (5 minutes)

Greet participants (students and their parents) as they arrive. Gather participants and thank them for coming together today to begin this exciting journey toward b’nei mitzvah. Ask participants to take a moment to think of their earliest childhood memories (or, ask students to think of their earliest childhood memories, and ask parents to think of their earliest memories of their children), and then have them turn to one another and share. After a couple of minutes, invite some or all participants (depending upon the size of the group) to share their memories publically. Explain that we have all come a long way from our unique and separate origins to find each other here, and our task for today is to understand where we are and where we are headed. In honor of this occasion, invite participants to say a Shehecheyanu with you. Dismiss students and parents to their separate classrooms.

B’nei Mitzvah: Personal Reflections (15 minutes)

Distribute the B’nei Mitzvah Reflection Questions (Handout 1.1) to parents. Ask parents to find a partner, preferably someone they don’t know well, and spend 2 minutes each responding to question

1 or 2. Once parents have partnered up, time them, letting them know when to switch and when to finish. Ask parents to find new partners and repeat, choosing from questions 3 or 4.

Bring parents together as a group. Ask for a show of hands for the following questions:

- For how many of you did these questions bring up positive memories?
- For how many did they bring up difficult memories?
- How many of you found some overlap between your experiences and at least one of the people you shared with?
- How many of you are feeling a little anxious about your child's bar or bat mitzvah?
- How many of you are feeling excited?

Tell parents that your goal is to get all of their hands in the air by the end of your next couple of sessions together (unless they were all in the air already, in which case, tell them that's wonderful!).

B'nei Mitzvah Brainstorming (30 minutes)

Place the butcher paper somewhere where all parents can see it (or write on a white board or other group display). Ask parents what they think will happen on the day of their children's bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies. Encourage parents to voice their anxieties, their excitement and pride—whatever comes to mind. Write their answers down. As you go, make a mark next to any answers that describe how their children will change upon becoming b'nei mitzvah, rather than or in addition to being things what will happen at their ceremonies (this would include statements like “my son will become a man” or “my daughter will be able to lead a service for the first time”).

If there are enough marked answers, ask the parents what they think the marked answers have in common; if not, skip this step. Begin a new list of how parents think their children will change when they become b'nei mitzvah. Start by incorporating anything from the previous list that fits into this category. If parents seem stymied, ask: What new responsibilities or opportunities will your children have as b'nei mitzvah? If the following answers do not come up, make sure to bring them up yourself:

- Able to make a minyan (*If needed, explain that a minyan is a group of ten adult Jews, the minimum needed to perform certain rituals and recite certain prayers, such as the Mourner's Kaddish*)
- Able to wear ritual garments like talit and tefilin (*Describe if needed*)
- Able to lead a prayer service
- Can take on mitzvot for themselves, such as fasting all day on Yom Kippur
- Have more opportunities within Jewish community—can take on more roles, attend more activities and events, etc.
- Be Jewish adults

Be sure to place “Jewish adults” at the bottom of the list. Explain any terms that come up that parents may not be familiar with, and gently correct any incorrect responses parents offer before writing them down.

Point out the “Jewish adults” entry, and ask if we can all agree that in at least some important physical and developmental respects, 13-year-olds don't exactly qualify as adults. (Presumably, there will be some “mm-hmm”-ing and nodding of heads.) If so, it must be that when young Jews become b'nei mitzvah, they are becoming Jewish adults in some specific or symbolic way. Ask

parents to look at the list of changes that occur upon becoming b'nei mitzvah and try to extrapolate what Jewish adulthood means in this case. Is it about power? Responsibility? Height? What is it that's really changing? Ask parents to try to identify the adult qualities or abilities that it looks the rabbis who invented the idea of b'nei mitzvah had in mind. Begin a new list of these qualities. Possible responses may include:

B'nei mitzvah become adults in that they are...

- capable of making their own choices.
- capable of keeping promises, to themselves and to others.
- capable of supporting or taking care of others.
- capable of worshipping God in a mature way.
- capable of leading others, leading a community, and/or being spiritual leaders.

B'nei Mitzvah Text Study (30 minutes)

Tell parents that we're going to go the sources now to see how our intuitions based on present-day practice match up with the ancient documents on which the practice of b'nei mitzvah is based. Divide parents into equally numbered groups, one group per text, and give each group its corresponding text study sheet (see Handouts 1.2–1.6). Instruct parents within each group to read their text aloud and then discuss it, using the questions on their text study sheets for guidance, and making sure to answer the bolded question and discuss their reactions to it. Give groups 10 minutes to study their texts. Circulate among the groups as they work, responding to questions and helping to stimulate discussion. After 10 minutes, have parents within each group count off, and then find the other parents who share their number (if there are extra participants left over, help them find groups to join). Instruct these new groups that they will have 10 total minutes for each member to report on the text they read. Again, circulate among the groups as they report to each other. After 10 minutes, bring all the parents back together and invite them to discuss what they have learned as a whole group. Ask: Was there anything in these texts that confirmed what you already thought? Was there anything in these texts that surprised you? Was there anything you think will inform the way you approach your child's process of becoming bar or bat mitzvah? Thank parents for so candidly and fully engaging in these questions, and let them know you're looking forward to working with them again in your second session.

Hopes, Fears, and Questions (10 minutes)

Gather students back together with their parents and your clergy partner. Inform the group that both students and parents have spent time today discussing the changes they think will happen when they or their children become b'nei mitzvah, and this is an opportunity for the whole group to reflect on this idea together. Distribute pens or pencils and strips of paper, so that every participant has something to write with and a few strips of paper. Instruct participants to write statements on the papers about their or their children's b'nei mitzvah that start with "I hope," "I worry," or "I wonder." They should not sign their names. When they finish writing a statement, they should fold it up and toss it into a central receptacle like a hat or bowl. Allow a few minutes for participants to write, then ask everyone to finish up what they are writing and stop. Pass around the receptacle and have each participant pull out a slip at random and read the statement on it out loud for the group. Once all strips have been read, lay them out together so they can all be seen (and be sure to save them after class and affix them to a sheet of butcher paper or poster board for safe-keeping). Thank participants for so candidly sharing their thoughts and feelings about their and their children's upcoming b'nei mitzvah, and assure them that over the course of the program we will continue to explore these thoughts and feelings together.

B'NEI MITZVAH REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Think back to your own bar or bat mitzvah (or, if you didn't have one, a rite of passage you participated in around the same time in your life, like a Confirmation, Quinceañera, scout ceremony, or graduation)...

- 1) What do you remember most fondly about your experience?
- 2) What two words would best describe your experience? Why?
- 3) What lesson that you learned from your experience has stayed with you most powerfully?
- 4) If you could change one thing about your experience, what would you change, and why? (If you wouldn't change anything, why not?)

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- 4) If you could change one thing about your experience, what would you change, and why? (If you wouldn't change anything, why not?)

B'NEI MITZVAH TEXT STUDY

Text #1 – Mishnah Niddah 5:6

Note: The Mishnah, the first major book of rabbinic thought and law, was compiled around 200 CE. Its contents are loosely organized by topic, and are divided into six sections called orders, each of which is subdivided into tractates. This is an excerpt from Tractate Niddah, which deals largely with issues of female purity.

A girl eleven years and one day old must be examined regarding her vows [as to whether she understood what she was doing]; a girl twelve years and one day old, her vows stand, but we examine [her regarding them during] the whole twelfth year. A boy twelve years and one day old must be examined regarding his vows; a boy thirteen years and one day old, his vows stand, but we examine [him regarding them during] the whole thirteenth year. Before this time, even if they say, “We know in whose name [*i.e. God's*] we have vowed” [or “We know] in whose name we have dedicated,” their vow is no vow and their dedication is no dedication. After this time, even though they say, “We do not know in whose name we vowed” [or “We do not know] in whose name we dedicated,” their vow is a [binding] vow and their dedication is [valid] dedication.

Translation adapted from Phillip Blackman.

Questions

- What strikes you about this text?
- **According to this text, what change is b'nei mitzvah supposed to mark or bring about?**

B'NEI MITZVAH TEXT STUDY

Text #2 – Pirkei Avot 5:21

Note: Pirkei Avot, or “The Chapters of the Fathers,” is a compilation of aphorisms, moral teachings, and other rabbinic sayings from around 200 CE. It is a part of the Mishnah, the first major book of rabbinic thought and law, but is also often included in prayer books and published and studied on its own.

[Yehudah son of Teima] used to say: 5 years old for Bible, 10 years old for Mishnah, 13 for mitzvot, 15 for Talmud, 18 for the marriage canopy, 20 to pursue [a career?], 30 for strength, 40 for understanding, 50 for advice, 60 for being an elder, 70 for gray hair, 80 for special strength, 90 for stooping, 100 is as if dead and gone and abolished from the world.

Translation adapted from Bradley Shavit Artson and Patricia Fenton.

Questions

- What strikes you about this text?
- What do you think this is a list of: what people should learn about at various ages? What they can be considered to be authorities on? What we can expect from them?
- **According to this text, what change is b'nei mitzvah supposed to mark or bring about?**

B'NEI MITZVAH TEXT STUDY

Text #3 – Genesis Rabbah 63:10

Note: Genesis Rabbah is a rabbinic work of interpretation of the Book of Genesis from around 300–400 CE. The prayer recorded at the end of this text became the traditional prayer for fathers to say over their sons when they became b'nei mitzvah, and is still said today in traditional Jewish communities.

Rabbi Levi offered a parable: [Jacob and Esau] were like a myrtle and a wild rosebush growing side by side; when they matured and blossomed, one yielded its fragrance and the other its thorns. For thirteen years both went to school and came home from school, [but] after this age, one went to the house of study and the other to idolatrous shrines. Rabbi Eleazar said: A parent is responsible for their child until the age of thirteen, at which point the parent must say: “Baruch shep’tarani mei’onso shel zeh—Blessed is the One who has freed me from the responsibility for this child.”

Translation adapted from Sefaria.org.

Questions

- What strikes you about this text?
- **According to this text, what change is b'nei mitzvah supposed to mark or bring about?**

B'NEI MITZVAH TEXT STUDY

Text #4 – Avot de-Rabbi Natan 16:2

Note: Avot de-Rabbi Natan, or “The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan,” is a rabbinic work of ethical and legal thought from around 700–800 CE. It comments upon an early version of Pirkei Avot, “The Chapters of the Fathers,” a compilation of aphorisms, moral teachings, and other rabbinic sayings from around 200 CE. Pirkei Avot is itself a part of the Mishnah, the first major book of rabbinic thought and law.

Rabbi Joshua said: the evil eye, the evil inclination, and the hatred of mankind drive a man out of the world.

“The evil inclination”—what does this mean? It has been said that the evil inclination is older than the good inclination by thirteen years¹, for it grows and accompanies the child from the moment it comes forth from the mother’s womb. If the child begins to profane the Sabbath, it² does not deter him; if he is about to take life, it does not deter him; if he is about to commit an immoral [sexual] act, it does not deter him. After thirteen years, however, the good inclination is born in him. If then he is about to profane the Sabbath, it³ warns him: “You fool! Scripture states, ‘Every one who profanes [the Sabbath] shall surely be put to death.’”⁴ If he is about to take life, it warns him: “You fool! Scripture states, ‘Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’”⁵ If he is about to commit an immoral [sexual] act, it warns him: “You fool! Scripture states, ‘Both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.’”⁶

Translation adapted from Eli Cashdan.

Questions

- What strikes you about this text?
- How are the evil inclination and the good inclination similar to each other? How do they differ?
- **According to this text, what change is b’nei mitzvah supposed to mark or bring about?**

¹ The evil inclination, it was held, entered the human body even before birth, whereas the good inclination was acquired at the age of thirteen, the age of religious responsibility.

² I.e. the evil inclination; the child has no sense of wrongdoing.

³ I.e. the good inclination.

⁴ Ex. 31:14.

⁵ Gen. 9:6.

⁶ Lev. 20:10.

B'NEI MITZVAH TEXT STUDY

Text #5 – Excerpt from *Bar Mitzvah: A History* by Michael Hilton

Note: This book is an amazingly thorough resource about the history and contemporary observance of b'nei mitzvah. Below, Hilton is quoting from p. 63 of A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven: The Jewish Life-Spiral as a Spiritual Path by Arthur Waskow and Phyllis Berman.

The Rabbis treated all sexuality as fraught with danger. They evidently believed that the most difficult task of a grown-up human being (or at least a male) is controlling the sexual urge: so to insist that all the mitzvot—commands or precepts—were operative at puberty meant that the community was bracing itself to govern those urges (p. 11).

Questions

- What strikes you about this text?
- **According to this text, what change is b'nei mitzvah supposed to mark or bring about?**

LESSON 1.2A – WHAT ARE MITZVOT? (FOR STUDENTS)

Materials

- Butcher paper/white board and markers
- What's A Mitzvah? handout (Handout 1.7)

Timeline

0–5 min.	Welcome
5–13 min.	Set Induction
13–68 min.	What's a Mitzvah?
68–70 min.	Educational Closure
70–90 min.	Service Fair

Objectives

- SWBAT identify at least two traditional definitions for the word “mitzvah.”
- SWBAT judge whether a given act counts as a mitzvah or not, given a specific definition of the word “mitzvah,” e.g. as a good deed.
- SWBAT define “mitzvah” in a way that is rooted in tradition and personally resonant for them.

Activities

Welcome (5 minutes)

Greet participants (students and their parents) as they arrive. Once everyone is assembled, wish the participants an enriching and enjoyable session learning together, and dismiss students and parents to their separate classrooms.

Set Induction (8 minutes)

Write the word “mitzvah” in Hebrew and transliteration somewhere that everyone can see. Whip around the room, asking students to say the first word that comes to mind when they hear the word “mitzvah.” Whenever they say something like a synonym or definition, write it down. Once “commandment” is said, write it down ominously, e.g. in all capitals with some lightning bolts on either side. After whipping around, return to commandment—ask who is doing the commanding, and make a list of possible commanders beside the term (*answers will likely include God, but possibly also Jewish history or tradition, the Jewish people, our communities, our parents, ourselves, etc.; if commanders other than God are suggested, and there is a desire in the room to discuss whether or not it is possible for mitzvot to be commanded by someone other than God, feel free to spend a few minutes discussing this question at this point*). Ask for a show of hands from all students who think that “commandment” is the most correct or traditional definition for “mitzvah” (*many students will likely raise their hands*).

What Is A Mitzvah? (55 minutes)

Distribute “What's A Mitzvah?” handout to students, and have a volunteer read the portion in the box. Ask for a show of hands of how many students are surprised by how many definitions for mitzvah were already in use a century ago.

Tell students we're going to see what happens when we try to apply some of these definitions. Ask students to brainstorm some examples of mitzvot that are often called *bein adam l'Makom*, “between people and God,” the kind of mitzvot we usually think of as being “commanded” or religious rituals. Write student suggestions on the board or butcher paper. If suggestions are sparse, one way

students could approach this would be to think about blessings they know that start with “Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha’olam asher kidshanu b’mitzvotav v’tzivanu...” and then name the conclusion of the blessing, i.e. the action that the blessing is being said for. Some possible examples could include:

- Not mixing milk and meat
- Not eating shellfish
- Not eating pork
- Lighting the Chanukah lights
- Lighting Shabbat candles
- Engaging with Torah
- Wrapping in tzitzit
- Resting on Shabbat
- Fasting on Yom Kippur

Split students into small groups and assign each group a ritual mitzvah. Have them write it in the middle section of their handout as their “official” mitzvah. Divide each group in half, and direct one sub-group to come up with an argument for why their “official” mitzvah could be considered a good deed, and the other sub-group to come up with an argument for why it might not. Give groups 5–10 minutes to work, and circulate among them to make sure they are working and getting answers to any questions.

Once groups have finished, have each report back to the whole class on their mitzvot and arguments for and against it being a good deed. Students can suggest challenges or additional arguments to other students’ groups as you go around. Once all arguments have been presented, hold a vote by show of hands on whether or not each “official” mitzvah counts as a good deed.

Now tell students it’s time to flip the question: are there good deeds that we don’t usually think of as being “official” mitzvot, but that we might want to bring into our conversation about mitzvot? Ask students to brainstorm criteria that a good deed might need to meet in order to qualify as a mitzvah, and write their suggestions up on the board or butcher paper. Let students know that these are just ideas; there are no right or wrong answers. Suggestions could include:

- Provide a substantial and lasting benefit (to someone or something)
- Increase peace in the world
- Decrease suffering in the world
- Build relationships between people and God, one another, other living beings, or the earth
- Accomplish God’s will (however that can be determined)

Once some possible criteria have been listed, ask students to use them to identify a good deed they think could qualify as a mitzvah. Each student should choose their own good deed, write it down in the third section of their handout, and write a sentence or two explaining why they think it could count as a mitzvah. Give students a few minutes to write and circulate among them. Once students have finished, give them the option to share their proposed mitzvot and rationales with the group and open them up to a group up or down vote.

Educational Closure (2 minutes)

Give students one minute to think up and write down a one-sentence definition of mitzvah that they now find compelling. Whip around the room again, asking students to read their definitions aloud.

Service Fair (20 minutes)

Students and parents rejoin each other in a space in which tables have been set up that are staffed by representatives of various congregational groups that provide direct services to the community.

Remind students and their parents that each student must sign up for at least two service outings, lasting at least one hour apiece, to be completed outside of class time between now and the end of Lesson 4.3. Service outings will be set up and coordinated by the groups represented at the Service Fair, and students can learn about them and sign up for them at the groups' tables. Students may sign up for whatever outings are most convenient or interesting to them, in coordination with their friends or not, as they choose. **All service outings must conclude with ten minutes set aside for students to complete a Service Reflection Form (Form 1.1).** Set aside and staff one table to provide information about the whole-class service outing that will take place during the program's next session.

The requirement that all students complete at least two one-hour service projects is integral to this program, and should be made clear to students and parents early and often (as should the requirement and date of the family service outing that takes place in the next lesson). Similarly, you should work well in advance of the program beginning to connect with women's and men's groups, chesed committees, and/or other congregational groups that engage in community service to form partnerships and identify service activities in which your students could participate. Ideally, try to find groups whose service activities relate to the themes of hachnasat orchim, bikur cholim, and l'vayat hamet—welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner—that students will be exploring in Unit 2. The service fair itself is a great opportunity for these groups to recruit new participants from among the parents of b'nei mitzvah students, as well as to sign up the students themselves for one-off projects. Encouraging groups to view this fair as a recruitment opportunity may help motivate them to make their displays welcoming and attractive.

WHAT'S A MITZVAH?

According to a dictionary of rabbinic language that was used from about 0–1000 CE,
the word “mitzvah” can mean:

command

meritorious (*good*) deed

charity

religious act

law

In other words, “commandment” is not the only traditional or correct definition for mitzvah!

An example of an “official” mitzvah is: _____
(*one of the 613 mitzvot*)

Explain why **this** mitzvah [**is** ___ / **is not** ___] also a good deed:

A good deed that is not an “official” mitzvah is: _____

I think this good deed should be considered a mitzvah because:

LESSON 1.2B – WHAT ARE MITZVOT? (FOR PARENTS)

Materials

- Text study handout (Handout 1.8)
- Website information handout (*instructor will have to generate this in accordance with the parameters of their website; see note to teacher below*)
- Pens or pencils

Timeline

0–5 min.	Welcome
5–10 min.	Set Induction
10–50 min.	Mitzvah Text Study
50–55 min.	Educational Closure
55–70 min.	Website Information Session
70–90 min.	Service Fair

Objectives

- SWBAT briefly and broadly describe the traditional rabbinic, Reform, and Reconstructionist views on mitzvah as expressed in rabbinic language, the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform, and the works of Mordecai Kaplan, respectively.
- SWBAT formulate their own definition of “mitzvah” that is both rooted in tradition and personally resonant.
- SWBAT articulate a hope or expectation they have about how their child will relate to mitzvot, as they understand them, upon becoming bar or bat mitzvah.

Activities

Welcome (5 minutes)

Greet participants (students and their parents) as they arrive. Once everyone is assembled, wish the participants an enriching and enjoyable session learning together, and dismiss students and parents to their separate classrooms.

Set Induction (5 minutes)

Ask participants to try to think of a time when they’ve exhorted their child to do something, or been exhorted themselves, with the expression, “it’s a mitzvah!” What were they asking or being asked to do? Why phrase it that way? Call on participants for examples. Create a definition of mitzvah based on these examples and write it up where everyone can see. Then ask if it is the definition people think is the “correct” one for mitzvah, and if it’s not, what is. Write up any “correct” definitions people offer as well.

Mitzvah Text Study (40 minutes)

Tell participants that this session will be all about exploring the definition of mitzvah—which of these things does it mean? Some? All? None? What are our children actually becoming when they become children of mitzvah?

Distribute “What Is A Mitzvah?” handouts (Handout 1.7) to participants, and give them 5–10 minutes to read the handouts, follow the instructions at the top, and jot down any notes that they might wish to. Let them know that they should leave at least some blank space at the bottom of the

back side of the page for later in the session. Once participants have had some time with the texts, go through them together as a group. Begin by having a participant read the Jastrow definition aloud and asking for reactions to it (some may be surprised, others confused, others have their views affirmed, etc.). Continue with each section of the Pittsburgh Platform, asking someone to read, someone else to summarize the section, and then asking for questions, responses, and thoughts as to what each section adds to a possible liberal understanding of mitzvah. Read through the Kaplan excerpts in the same fashion, stopping as often as needed to respond to clarifying questions. After all texts have been read, summarized, and questioned, ask participants: which of these understandings of mitzvah resonate with you, and why? Which don't, and why? Has any of this changed your understanding about what a mitzvah is? Reinforced it? Confused it? How so?

Educational Closure (10 minutes)

Remind participants of the question at the beginning of the session about a time when they've asked someone or been asked to do something because "it's a mitzvah." According to how they now understand mitzvah, what qualifies as one? What might be an example of a mitzvah they'd like to see their child become a child of? Ask parents to take a few minutes to write their responses at the bottom of their text study sheets.

Website Information Session (20 minutes)

Bring students and parents back together and distribute website handouts (see note). Explain that over the course of the year, students will have the opportunity to post their thoughts and feelings about their upcoming b'nei mitzvah to their own dedicated pages on this website.

Explain the basics of how the site will work and who will be able to post to it. Tell the parents whomever it is that you and your clergy partner recommend be able to view the website and why, and explain that these viewers (and the parents) will also be able to comment on students' pages at the end of the program, to give them feedback on their accomplishments and their journeys (although parents will NOT be allowed to comment on their own children's sites). Let parents know that you are trying to balance students' privacy against their right to have their hard work witnessed and appreciated, and that if they have any concerns about your and your clergy partner's proposal you would be happy to have their input. Allow 5 minutes for questions, and then encourage parents to submit any further questions by email.

You will have to decide what sort of website, blog, social media page, etc. would be best for your group to use as a central hub for posting student work. Whatever site you choose should allow for each student to have their own page. There should also be a way for viewers to comment on students' posts and/or pages, although you may want to restrict this ability until the very end of the program. As of 2016, a Google website would be a great option. You can find a detailed guide to creating, building, and editing a Google site, and choosing who can access it, at: https://support.google.com/sites/answer/4417369?hl=en&ref_topic=23216&rd=1.

Whatever you choose, you should create a one-page handout for parents that clearly gives the name and web address of the site, and explains how parents and students will be able to use it, including commenting on student pages.

You and your clergy partner should discuss who you would like to propose be allowed to view the site. You might, for example, prefer that the site be visible only to you, students, and their parents, so as to maximize student privacy; or you might want it to be visible to some or all members of your congregation as well, so that they can share in your students' experience and witness their accomplishments. Whatever your preference, you should propose it to parents for their approval before implementing it.

Service Fair (20 minutes)

Students and parents rejoin each other in a space in which tables have been set up that are staffed by representatives of various congregational groups that provide direct services to the community.

Remind students and their parents that each student must sign up for at least two service outings, lasting at least one hour apiece, to be completed outside of class time between now and the end of Lesson 4.3. Service outings will be set up and coordinated by the groups represented at the Service Fair, and students can learn about them and sign up for them at the groups' tables. Students may sign up for whatever outings are most convenient or interesting to them, in coordination with their friends or not, as they choose. **All service outings must conclude with ten minutes set aside for students to complete a Service Reflection Form (Form 1.1).** Set aside and staff one table to provide information about the whole-class service outing that will take place during the program's next session.

WHAT IS A MITZVAH?

Circle anything you have a question about.

Underline anything you agree with.

((Put parentheses around anything you disagree with.))

The definition of “mitzvah” from the A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature, which catalogs and defines rabbinic language in use from about 0–1000 CE. Jastrow was a Polish-born rabbi and preeminent Talmud scholar, who, in addition to writing his magnum opus on rabbinic language, helped to found the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York.

- Definitions for mitzvah include: “command,” “religious act,” “meritorious deed,” “law,” and “charity.”

From the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform, an official policy statement adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the governing body of all Reform rabbis in the US:

- “We respond to God daily: through public and private prayer, through study and through the performance of other מִצְוֹת (*mitzvot*), sacred obligations -- בֵּין אָדָם לַמָּקוֹם (*bein adam la Makom*), to God, and בֵּין אָדָם לַחֲבֵירוֹ (*bein adam la-chaveiro*), to other human beings.”
- “We are called by Torah to lifelong study in the home, in the synagogue and in every place where Jews gather to learn and teach. Through Torah study we are called to מִצְוֹת (*mitzvot*), the means by which we make our lives holy.”
- “We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of מִצְוֹת (*mitzvot*) and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these מִצְוֹת (*mitzvot*), sacred obligations, have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times.”

From Mordecai Kaplan's most famous work, Judaism as a Civilization. Kaplan was a Lithuanian-born rabbi, theologian, and educator who taught at JTS and co-founded Reconstructionist Judaism.

- “If we were henceforth to designate all ‘commandments pertaining to the relations between man and God’ as *minhagim* [customs] or ‘folkways,’ we would accomplish a twofold purpose. First, we would convey the thought that they should not be dealt with in a legalistic spirit, a spirit that often gives rise to quibbling and pettifoggery. They should be dealt with as the very stuff of Jewish life, which should be experienced with spontaneity and joy, and which can be modified as circumstances require. Second, we would convey the implication that not only should as many ‘commandments’ or folkways as possible be retained and developed, but that Jewish life should be stimulated to evolve new and additional folkways. Folkways are the social practices by which a people externalizes the reality of its collective being” (432).
- “Fortunately, there is an alternative to the traditional attitude toward the mitzvot—to treat them as religious poetry in action. The normal human being is exhilarated by any kind of ritual which gives him a sense of unity with the larger life of some group. In sharing that life, his own is redeemed from its dull and drab routine... Judaism is not merely a universe of discourse, but also a universe of sense experience” (434–435).

My thoughts on mitzvah:

LESSON 1.3 – MITZVOT IN ACTION (MEMORABLE MOMENT)

Materials

- Paper
- Pens or pencils

Timeline

0–140 min. Service Activity

140–180 min. Reflection

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- Participants will have the opportunity to react to a group service project within their congregational community, and will reflect on their experience individually by completing reflection forms, and as a group by discussing their impressions of the experience.
- SWBAT propose one way in which they hope they will change when they become bar or bat mitzvah.

Activities

Service (2 hours 20 minutes)

This activity should be created specifically for this group (although it could be planned in conjunction with existing congregational and/or service groups); it should involve significant interaction with the congregational community; and it should be geared toward exploring one or more of the themes of Unit 2: *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim*, or *l'vayat hamet*—welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner. For example, students and parents might prepare and distribute deliveries of meals, groceries, and/or other goods to home-bound members of the community, possibly include those who are ill, sitting shiva, have recently had a child, etc. The delivery aspect of this activity would be essential, as it would be the part of the activity in which students and their parents would interact with community members. All students must be accompanied by at least one parent.

Reflection (Assessment) (40 minutes)

Give participants two choices: they can either spend 5–10 minutes writing (or drawing, if they prefer) individually about their service experience, or they can spend that time discussing their experience with other participants in small groups. In either case, participants should reflect on their immediate impressions of the experience: what did they do, and whom did they meet? What was most surprising or frustrating or fun?

Once participants have had some time to reflect, have parents stand in a circle facing outward, and students form a circle around them facing inward, so that each student is paired with a parent (if there is an odd number, include yourself in the circle and pair with whomever is the odd one out). Ask students and parents to make sure that at least for the first pairing, they are not paired with their own family members. For each of the following questions, ask for one member of each pair to take two minutes to respond, and then switch. Once both members of the pair have answered the question, they can discuss until you tell one of the circles to rotate and ask a new question.

Questions for participants:

- What about this experience most stands out in your mind? Why?
- What is one thing you learned from the people you met today?
- Based on our last session, do you think that what we did today was a mitzvah? Why or why not?
- How well do you think we served our community today? Is there anything we could have done better?

Leave 5–10 minutes at the end of the session for each student to think of and write down one way in which they hope to change when they become bar or bat mitzvah. Students' responses should have an ethical, social, and/or ritual component; involve assuming or acknowledging heightened responsibility, authority, or agency; and be specific enough so as to be achievable and observable. For example, "I hope that I will form a habit of serving my community by giving tzedakah money every week" would be a much better response than "I hope that I will become better at serving my community." Have students write drafts and check them with you so that they may revise if needed. While students are writing, have parents write one way in which they hope their children will change upon becoming b'nei mitzvah. Collect student responses and scan and upload them to the students' individual pages on the website.

UNIT 2 – WHAT DOES MY TRADITION SAY?

These are the obligations without measure, whose reward, too, is without measure.

—Gates of Prayer

This unit narrows the scope of the curriculum, zooming in from mitzvot and b'nei mitzvah in general to the mitzvot of Elu Devarim in particular, and, even more specifically, to three specific mitzvot named within Elu Devarim: *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim*, and *P'vayat hamet*—welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and, in the interpretation adopted by this curriculum guide, comforting the mourner. The first lesson argues for why emerging b'nei mitzvah should focus on community-oriented ethical mitzvot like these. Subsequent lessons explore the nature of these mitzvot and how they can best be fulfilled.

Enduring Understandings

- Liberal Jews do not simply become b'nei mitzvah by turning 13—they must actively choose to become b'nei mitzvah, by taking actions like studying, discussing, and experimenting with mitzvot, or taking on obligations within their Jewish communities.
- No connection to Judaism can hold up to the barrage of counter-influences from secular culture without at least some support from a like-minded Jewish community.
- Obligation frees and empowers as well as constrains.
- “Community service” serves no one unless it is informed by knowledge of the community’s needs and values.

Essential Questions

- What does it mean for some mitzvot to be “without measure?”
- What does it mean, exactly, to welcome (the stranger)? (Is it a particular action, an affective outcome, or something else?) How can we know that we have accomplished it?
- Are there circumstances under which we should not visit the sick?
- How can we effectively comfort mourners?
- What draws me to welcoming strangers, visiting the sick, or comforting mourners? What pushes me away?

Goals

- To teach students that becoming b'nei mitzvah gives them the opportunity to say “lean on me”—to promise to care for others who understand the meaning of b'nei mitzvah and have their promises taken seriously.
- To teach students what is distinctive about the mitzvot of Elu Devarim, and why they are particularly appropriate for liberal b'nei mitzvah to study and practice.
- To teach students about traditional Jewish approaches to welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner.
- To familiarize students with and encourage them to feel ownership of classical and medieval Jewish texts.
- To enhance students’ sense of Jewish agency, in particular through having their questions answered by a clergy member, and teaching what they have learned to younger students.

Objectives

- SWBAT explain in their own words why this unit focuses specifically on the mitzvot of Elu Devarim (i.e. what differentiates these mitzvot from other mitzvot).
- SWBAT give a basic summary of traditional Jewish understandings and methods of *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*—welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner.
- SWBAT offer their own opinions as to how best to be welcoming, visit the sick, and comfort the mourner.

LESSON 2.1 – INTRODUCTION TO ELU DEVARIM

Objectives

- SWBAT explain how the song “Lean On Me” captures an important new power that they will have upon becoming b’nei mitzvah (namely, the power to obligate themselves to care for others and have those obligations take seriously).
- SWBAT state in their own words what is distinctive about the mitzvot of Elu Devarim (i.e. that they are without measure or limit, bear fruit or generate rewards in this world and the world to come, are ethical mitzvot, are community-oriented, are highlighted in our daily liturgy, etc.).

Activities

Set Induction – Lean On Me

Lead students in singing a rousing rendition of Lean On Me. Have fun with it: have it playing when they come in; use a music video or recording; play guitar, have a student play, or bring in a song leader; etc. Ask students: what does it mean to say, “lean on me?” What do you have to be prepared to do if you say that to someone?

Tell students that we’ve been talking about b’nei mitzvah mostly in terms of mitzvot up to this point (which makes sense, since mitzvah’s in the name), but another way to look at it is that once you are bar or bat mitzvah, you can say “lean on me” to people in the Jewish world and they’ll take you seriously. Give the example that before bar or bat mitzvah, if you were to promise to visit someone when they were sick, and then didn’t show up, they might say, “well, so-and-so is just a kid, I didn’t really expect them to come anyway;” but if you did that after your bar or bat mitzvah, they would feel seriously let down (assuming they were Jewish and understood what it meant to be b’nei mitzvah). Explain that because of this special opportunity that comes with b’nei mitzvah, we’re going to spend the rest of our program focusing on mitzvot that we can do for others within our Jewish community.

Elu Devarim Concept Attainment Activity

Divide students into small groups and give them a list of the mitzvot from Elu Devarim interspersed with mitzvot from other sources. Without telling students what categories to use, ask them to separate the mitzvot out into two different categories as best they can. Tell them to use whatever criteria make the most sense to them. Once students have finished, have them share their lists and criteria with each other. Possible criteria could include: ethical vs. ritual mitzvot; mitzvot done with others vs. mitzvot done alone; etc.

Distribute copies of Elu Devarim to students (you can use any or all of the translations in handout 2.1, or any others you prefer) and have someone read it aloud to the class. Compare the Elu Devarim mitzvah list and criteria (mitzvot that are without measure or limit, and whose rewards we reap in this world and the world to come) to those that students came up with. How are they similar? How are they different? What can we conclude from these comparisons about the mitzvot of Elu Devarim? Be sure to highlight the fact that they are ethical mitzvot that largely involve helping others. Explain that we’ll be focusing in for the rest of our curriculum on three specific Elu Devarim mitzvot—*bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*—because they are exactly the kinds of mitzvot that give us the opportunity to say “lean on me” to others. Let students know we’ll explore these mitzvot in greater depth in our next few classes.

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

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TEXTS OF ELU DEVARIM

אלו דברים שאין להם שעור, שאדם אוכל פרותיהם
בעולם הזה והקדו קימת לו לעולם הבא, ואלו הן:

These are the obligations without measure, whose reward, too,
is without measure:

<i>To honor father and mother;</i>	כבוד אב ואם,
<i>to perform acts of love and kindness;</i>	וגמילות חסדים,
<i>to attend the house of study daily;</i>	והשכמת בית המדרש שחרית וערבית,
<i>to welcome the stranger;</i>	והכנסת אורחים,
<i>to visit the sick;</i>	ובקור חולים,
<i>to rejoice with bride and groom;</i>	והכנסת כלה,
<i>to console the bereaved;</i>	ולוית המת,
<i>to pray with sincerity;</i>	ועיון תפלה,
<i>to make peace when there is strife.</i>	והבאת שלום

בין אדם לחברו;

And the study of Torah is equal to them. ותלמוד תורה כנגד כלם.
all, because it leads to them all.

Excerpted from Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayer Book, published by CCAR Press

These are things that are without set limits,
That a person eats of their fruits in this world, and the principal remains for them in
the world to come—

These are they:

Honoring one's father and mother,
Doing deeds of love and charity,
Arising early to go to the house of study, morning and night,
Bringing in wayfarers,
Visiting the sick,
Bringing in the bride,
Accompanying the dead (and comforting mourners),
Devotion in prayer,
Bringing peace between people;
And the study of Torah is *k'neged* them all.

Translation by Abby Phelps

LESSON 2.2 – HACHNASAT ORCHIM: WELCOMING (THE STRANGER)

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- Students will have the opportunity to react to the presence of an unexpected and unknown visitor in their classroom, and to that visitor's response to how s/he was treated by the students. Students will reflect on how they reacted to and behaved toward the visitor through group discussion.
- SWBAT state in their own words the biblical origins of the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* (namely, the story in Genesis 18:1–8 of Abraham and Sarah hurrying to welcome their mysterious visitors, and the implication that we must be welcoming in the many reminders in Exodus 23:9 and elsewhere that “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt”).
- SWBAT analyze a time when they were in a new or unfamiliar environment and felt welcomed in order to determine what was done to make them feel welcome.
- SWBAT produce one or more ideas about how one should welcome people based upon their readings of Jewish texts and their analyses of their own experiences.

Optional Texts

- Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat 127a – *hachnasat orchim* is more important than welcoming God's presence (because Abraham ceased attending to God's presence in order to welcome his visitors).
- Genesis Rabbah 58:7 – Abraham and Job kept their doors open to guests.
- Pirkei Avot 1:5 – treat the poor as members of your household; Babylonian Talmud Tractate Ta'anit 20b – Rav Huna opened his doors and proclaimed that all who were hungry should come and eat (very similar to the *ha lachma anya* portion of the Passover haggadah).
- Isaiah 19:19–25 – Egypt, Assyria, etc. are all as much God's people as Israel (hence, no one should really be considered “other” or a “stranger”).

Activities

The Stranger In Our Midst (Memorable Moment)

Recruit an adult unknown to the students to arrive early to the classroom and wait passively for students to notice their presence and interact with them. If asked who they are and why they are there, this person should explain that you, the teacher, have invited them to visit the class, and that you have told them that you might be running a few minutes late. Unless they are asked directly exactly why they are visiting the class, your guest should avoid revealing that you have invited them to give the students a real opportunity to interact with and welcome a stranger; but, if pressed, they should tell the truth rather than make up a story. After a few minutes have passed or the guest has revealed why they are there, whichever comes first, enter the classroom and reveal the guest's true purpose. Allow the guest a couple of minutes to reflect back to students how they felt as a stranger in the classroom, then invite students to pose questions to the guest. If no student asks, you should ask the guest how you and the students could have made them feel more welcome. Ask students to join you in thanking your guest for their time. Once your guest has departed, discuss students' reactions to the experience as a group.

Text Study

Distribute handout 2.2. Students can go through all but the last box aloud as a group or in small groups. Ask students if they can guess why “the stranger” is in parentheses at the top of the

handout (viz., because “stranger” is an alienating and even pejorative term, and works at cross-purposes to the idea of welcoming, which is the critical thing; thinking about others as strangers focuses us on our differences, rather than our shared humanity; etc.). At this point, if you have time, you could distribute copies of one or more of the optional texts listed above and discuss them with students. Have students fill out the last box on Handout 2.2 individually, and then invite them to share their answers with the group.

Educational Closure

Ask each student to use the information they’ve gathered in Handout 2.2 to think of at least one practice that they think is essential to welcoming. Whip around the room and have each student share their practice (multiples of the same practice are okay).

HACHNASAT ORCHIM – WELCOMING (THE STRANGER)

Genesis 18:1–8 – The Tale of Abraham, Sarah, and the Three Mysterious Men

1 Now Adonai appeared to [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot.

2 And he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing beside him, and he saw and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and he bowed down on the ground.

3 And he said, “My lords, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass on by your servant.

4 “Please take a little water, and bathe your feet, and recline under the tree.

5 “And I will take a morsel of bread, and sustain your hearts; after[wards] you shall pass on, because you have passed by your servant.” And they said, “So shall you do, as you have spoken.”

6 And Abraham hurried to the tent to Sarah, and he said, “Hurry [to get] three se’ah of meal [and] fine flour; knead and make cakes.”

7 And to the cattle did Abraham run, and he took a calf, tender and good, and he gave it to the youth, and he hurried to prepare it.

8 And he took cream and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and he placed [them] before them, and he was standing over them under the tree, and they ate.

Translation adapted by Abby Phelps from Chabad.org

How did Abraham and Sarah welcome their visitors?

Exodus 23:9 – Empathy for Strangers

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, since you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Translation adapted by Abby Phelps from Chabad.org

Think about a time in the past when you were somewhere new or unfamiliar and were made to feel welcome, or when you made someone else who was in the same position feel welcome. What was done for you, or what did you do, that felt welcoming?

LESSON 2.3 – BIKUR CHOLIM & L'VAYAT HAMET: VISITING THE SICK & COMFORTING THE MOURNER

Objectives

- SWBAT summarize the basic positions of traditional Jewish texts as to why, when, and how one should visit the sick and comfort the mourner.
- SWBAT explain how the practices prescribed by these texts are intended to help and comfort sick people and mourners.
- SWBAT judge whether or not they think these practices would be effective.

Key Texts

- Babylonian Talmud Tractate Nedarim 39b

It was taught: There is no measure for visiting the sick. What is meant by, “there is no measure?” Rav Joseph proposed: its reward is unlimited. Said Abaye to him: Is there a definite measure of reward for any mitzvah? And didn’t we learn: Be as careful with a light mitzvah as a serious one, for you do not know the reward given for mitzvot? Rather, Abaye explained it: Even a great person must visit a humble one. Raba said: [One should visit] even a hundred times a day. Rebbe Abba bar Chanina said: One who visits a sick person takes away a sixtieth of their pain.

Translation adapted by Abby Phelps from I. Epstein of Soncino Press

- Mishneh Torah Sefer Shoftim Hilchot Avel – 14:1, 4–7; 13:1–3, 6
- Hebrew-English dictionaries or copied pages showing definitions for *l'vayat* and *met*

Activities

Text Study

Present the Nedarim 39b text to students and discuss as a class. Questions could include:

- What do you think of the various rabbis’ interpretations of “without measure?” Does any one make more sense to you than the others? Do you have a different interpretation?
- What do you think of Abaye’s comment that you cannot know the reward for any mitzvah, no matter how great or small it seems? What examples can you think of to support or challenge him?
- What do you make of the idea that visiting a sick person takes away a sixtieth of their pain? How literally do you think the rabbis meant this (e.g. if 60 people visited, would the sick person’s pain be gone)? What sort of pain might the rabbis be talking about? How could visiting take it away?

Distribute copies of the Mishneh Torah halachot (the Chabad website http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/682956/jewish/Mishneh-Torah.htm has particularly clear and accessible translations), and give a little bit of background on Maimonides: he was a medieval rabbi, philosopher, and physician; he lived in Spain, Morocco, and Egypt in the 1100s; he wrote extensively about Jewish theology and thought, and his best known book is the Mishneh Torah, a book of Jewish law and ethics that uses authoritative texts like the Tanakh and Talmud and midrash as its sources. Tell students that you will be looking at some excerpts from that book, in which Maimonides states rules for visiting the sick and comforting mourners that Jews still follow today.

Before discussing the Mishnah Torah texts, ask students if they have ever experienced shiva. If so, let them explain their understanding of it to the class and fill in any needed gaps. If not, give the class a brief explanation of what shiva is. Then read the Mishneh Torah texts aloud as a class and discuss each one. Questions for each could include:

- 14:1 – What, if anything, does Maimonides add to your understanding of what the mitzvot of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet* have in common?
- 14:4 – What conclusion(s) can you draw from this text about the purpose of visiting the sick?
- 14:4 – What do you make of the claim that “whoever does not visit the sick is considered as if they shed blood?” Is this too extreme? Why or why not?
- 14:5 – Why might we wait until the third day to visit the sick? Why might we not wait if the sick person became suddenly very ill?
- 14:5 – Why might we not visit a sick person first thing in the morning? (*Note: According to the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 335:4, it is because the sick person may seem so well early in the day that we may not feel compelled to pray on their behalf; similarly, we don't visit late in the last three hours of the day because the sick person may seem so ill that we may despair that our prayers won't make any difference.*)
- 14:6 – Why should we sit below a sick person when visiting them? What do you think of the overall procedure described here for visiting a sick person?
- 14:7 – Do you agree with this text and its logic? Why or why not?
- 13:1–3 & 6 (*Note: Let students know that we also make a “meal of comfort” for mourners in their home just after the funeral, and that we continue to bring gifts of food to them throughout shiva*) – What do you think of these practices for comforting mourners? What strikes you most about what comforters are specifically supposed to do, and not do? What conclusions can you draw about what Maimonides and other Jewish thinkers thought mourners needed in order to be comforted?

What Would You Do? (Assessment)

Distribute Handout 2.3 and have students complete it in pairs. Once students have finished, ask for volunteers to read their responses back to the class. Reach consensus with the students regarding the a) portion of each question on the handout, and discuss the b) and c) portions.

Decoding “L'vayat Hamet”

Have students look up the definitions of the word *l'vayat* and *met*, either in the Jastrow dictionary for accuracy, or in a simpler to use dictionary for time, as desired. Ask students to find a partner and together come up with a definition for *l'vayat hamet* based on the dictionary entries, and to raise their hands once they think they have it. Check that each group has something like “accompanying the dead,” and then ask each pair to come up with: 1) one guess as to what that might mean, and 2) one reason why we and many others might translate this phrase as “comforting mourners” instead. Bring the class back together to discuss their answers. Explain that while accompanying the dead actually refers to staying with the dead until they are buried, for various practical, spiritual, and ritual purposes, it's a task usually reserved for those aged 18 and up, and even then it's one that not many people often are involved in. While it is important and holy to honor the dead directly, the need to comfort mourners is closely related, it's also a mature undertaking, and it's much more likely to come up in our day-to-day lives, and to be something we feel equipped to do at this stage, and that's why we and so many others are choosing to think of *l'vayat hamet* as comforting mourners.

BIKUR CHOLIM & L'VAYAT HAMET:
VISITING THE SICK & COMFORTING THE MOURNER

For each example, write: a) what traditional Jewish texts would say to do, and why; b) whether or not you agree; and c) why you do or don't agree.

1. Your best friend just came down with the flu today and is home sick, and it's late in the evening.

a. What should you do? Why?

b. Do you agree? Yes ____ No ____

c. Explain your answer:

2. It's midday, and your uncle is in the hospital recovering from surgery four days ago.

a. What should you do? Why?

b. Do you agree? Yes ____ No ____

c. Explain your answer:

3. Your great aunt died last Tuesday, and your cousins are sitting shiva (observing the seven days of mourning) at their home.

a. What should you do? Why?

b. Do you agree? Yes ____ No ____

c. Explain your answer:

LESSON 2.4 – L’DOR VADOR I: LEARNING FROM OUR ELDERS

Objectives

- SWBAT formulate at least three questions they would want to pose to a clergy member from their congregational community about welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to a clergy person’s response to their questions about welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner, and will reflect on the response they receive through individual writing and group discussion.
- SWBAT identify at least two additional key insights offered by a clergy member from their congregational community about welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner.
- Assessment: given texts from the Mishneh Torah, earlier rabbinic literature, and Torah, input from clergy, and discussion and reflection on this information and on personal experience, students will begin to create pamphlets for younger children explaining how to be welcoming, how to behave when visiting a sick person, and how to behave when comforting a mourner.

Ideally, the clergy person being interviewed in this session should be your clergy partner, the same person with whom you will be planning the students’ service projects in Unit 5. If that person is unavailable, be sure to choose someone who is familiar to the students, who communicates well with young people of this age group, and who has some experience in the areas of hachnasat orchim, bikur cholim and l’vayat hamet from a clergy perspective as well as a personal one. The broad term “clergy” is used deliberately here, as either a rabbi or a cantor could certainly fulfill this role.

Activities

Clergy Speaker Q&A Session

Allow some time before the clergy guest speaker arrives for distributing Handout 2.4 and having students write out their questions. Let the students know that this is their opportunity to be in charge of the discussion: the clergy speaker will make a few short remarks at the beginning and the end, but the rest of the time is for them to ask whatever questions they want. Encourage students to ask questions that will supplement what they already know: for example, in the clergy speaker’s experience, does visiting a sick person really take away some of that person’s pain? What is it like to sit silently with mourners until spoken to? Have they found that the traditional Jewish customs for welcoming really make people feel welcome? What do they think it means for a mitzvah to have no measure or limit? Make sure students write relevant and appropriate questions.

Have your clergy speaker very briefly (in 5 minutes or less) introduce themselves and their experience with *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*, and then answer student questions. Each student should get to pose at least one question to the speaker. Once all have students have had a chance to hear at least one response, and while there is still some time left in class to debrief and discuss the upcoming project, give the speaker a couple of minutes to conclude with their top three or so essential teachings that they want students to take away about *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*.

Once students have thanked the clergy speaker and the speaker has left, give them a few minutes to finish filling out their handouts. Discuss students’ responses to the last section of the form. What do they think were the speaker’s key points? What stood out most to them? Collect the handouts and scan and upload them to the students’ individual pages on the website.

Pamphlet Project Introduction

Tell students that their next session will be devoted entirely to one project: creating pamphlets for 4th graders to show them how to do the mitzvot of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*. Students will create the pamphlets in groups, with one group creating one pamphlet for each mitzvah. Pamphlets should have (simple) words and pictures, and their content should be drawn from the texts the students have studied, what they heard from their clergy speaker, class discussions, and their own ideas.

For now, students should get into their groups and begin drafting the first page of their pamphlets. Students can either choose their groups based on their affinity for a given mitzvah, or you can assign groups if you prefer. Once all three groups are finalized, they should use whatever class time remains to decide how they want to title their pamphlets, and to sketch out their pamphlet cover pages. The *bachnasat orchim* group, for example, might choose the title: "Hachnasat Orchim: How To Be Welcoming!"

L'DOR VADOR I: LEARNING FROM OUR ELDERS

Name _____

My top three questions for the clergy speaker about welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Circle the number of your top question and ask it during the Q&A. If it is asked, choose a different question above (or you can make up a new one).

What the clergy speaker said about my question:

My thoughts on the response to my question:

Two additional key points the clergy speaker made about welcoming (the stranger), visiting the sick, and comforting the mourner:

1. _____

2. _____

LESSON 2.5 – L’DOR VADOR II: HANDING ON WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

Objective

- Assessment: given texts from the Mishneh Torah, earlier rabbinic literature, and Torah, input from clergy, and discussion and reflection on this information and on personal experience, students will begin to create pamphlets for younger children explaining how to be welcoming, how to behave when visiting a sick person, and how to behave when comforting a mourner.

Activity/Assessment

Pamphlet Preparation

Have students return to their groups and resume working on their pamphlets. Provide students with the following checklist of criteria for an excellent pamphlet:

An excellent pamphlet:

- Tells readers what the mitzvah is, why it is important, and how it should be done according to the traditional Jewish sources that students have studied in class (students may change or omit elements of the traditional approaches to the mitzvot if they disagree with them, think they are irrelevant or age inappropriate for 4th graders, or simply think they are less important than other elements and want to economize on space; but they may only do so in consultation with their teacher)
- Incorporates at least one insight offered by the clergy speaker about the meaning and/or performance of the mitzvah
- Incorporates some of the students’ own ideas
- Uses clear language that is age-appropriate for 4th graders
- Contains readily readable text written in pen, and illustrations in color
- Has an attractive (but tonally appropriate) cover page, with a title that makes the purpose of the pamphlet clear
- Credits all contributors on the back

Each group should begin by brainstorming a list of all the points they think need to be covered in their pamphlet, including conceptual points (e.g. it’s important to visit sick people because it helps them to feel better) and practical points (e.g. when you visit a sick person, you should make sure to sit somewhere lower than them). Groups should bring their lists to you to discuss and revise if necessary until you approve them as being complete. Once a group’s list has been approved, the group should create a draft of its pamphlet that shows the layout of each page, including what text will be on the page and where the text and any artwork will go. Groups should bring their draft pamphlets to you for approval as well, and only after you have approved them should groups move on to creating their final pamphlets.

Conclude class by having the students present their pamphlets to one another. Ask each group to show its cover page, explain its title, and show off one thing in its pamphlet that it is particularly proud of. Collect the pamphlets and scan and upload them to the class website. Let students know that they and their parents will be able to see the pamphlets on the website, and that there will be an opportunity to use them later on in the program.

UNIT 3 – WHAT DOES MY COMMUNITY NEED?

“Without community service, we would not have a strong quality of life. It’s important to the person who serves as well as the recipient. It’s the way in which we ourselves grow and develop.”

–Dorothy Height

This unit shifts the students’ focus from the realm of the hypothetical to the realm of the real. It asks students to uncover the needs of their community as they relate to *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*, and to determine how well those needs are being met. Students are empowered to apply what they learned in Unit 2 to assess quality of their community’s services, and to suggest ways in which they could be improved.

Enduring Understandings

- Liberal Jews do not simply become b’nei mitzvah by turning 13—they must actively choose to become b’nei mitzvah, by taking actions like studying, discussing, and experimenting with mitzvot, or taking on obligations within their Jewish communities.
- No connection to Judaism can hold up to the barrage of counter-influences from secular culture without at least some support from a like-minded Jewish community.
- Obligation frees and empowers as well as constrains.
- “Community service” serves no one unless it is informed by knowledge of the community’s needs and values.

Essential Questions

- Who are the “strangers,” “sick,” and “mourners” in my community?
- How can we best serve those individuals within my community?
- When seeking to serve others, how should one prioritize whom one serves?

Goals

- To help students think broadly and creatively about who might count as “strangers,” “sick,” and “mourners” in need of welcome, visiting, and comfort.
- To teach students about the needs of their community in the areas of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*, the work that is already being done to address them, and the work that remains to do.
- To introduce students to diverse members of their congregational communities and strengthen their community ties.
- To provide students with viable models of Jewish adulthood, and to inspire them to further acts of service, by exposing them to members of their congregational community who are doing service work in the areas of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*.

Objectives

- SWBAT give at least one unconventional example each of a person who could be classified as a stranger, sick, or a mourner.
- SWBAT summarize what is currently being done in their community in the areas of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*.
- SWBAT evaluate how well they think their community is doing at serving its members in *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet*, and will be able to suggest at least one new service that they think their community ought to provide.

LESSON 3.1 – WHO COUNTS? DEFINING THE STRANGER, THE SICK, AND THE MOURNER

Objectives

- SWBAT say who they think are the types of strangers, sick, and mourners that they are most likely to encounter within their congregational community.
- SWBAT give at least one example each of a person who could be counted as a stranger, sick person, or mourner, even though the rabbis who developed those categories would likely not have had such a person in mind, and will be able to argue for why these people should be included in their respective categories.
- Assessment: SWBAT produce a one-page plan for how they would support a particular example of an outside-the-box stranger, sick person, or mourner.

Activities

Set Induction

Ask students to think about someone they have personally known who was a stranger, sick, or in mourning (other than them). Have students consider their responses to the following questions:

- Who was this person? What was their relationship to you?
- Why do you define them as a stranger, sick, or in mourning? Do you think anyone would question your definition?
- Did you know at the time that they were a stranger, sick, or in mourning? How did you know (or not know)?

Give students a couple of minutes to write, sketch, or think about their responses, and then pair them up and ask them to share with one another.

Thinking Outside The Box

Write *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet* up somewhere where everyone can see. Ask students who they think the rabbis had in mind as the objects of each mitzvah: who did they think fit into the categories of strangers, sick, and mourners? Write students' responses under each heading. Add to those lists whomever students think are the strangers, sick, and mourners in their own communities. If you want, you can discuss students' answers as you record them, including allowing them to challenge one another and asking them to explain unconventional responses, but try not to let anyone veto any responses. This should be more of an affirming, "Yes-And" activity than a debate about who counts for which mitzvah.

Once responses begin to slow, tell students that you are going to split them into three groups, one for each mitzvah, and ask them to think as broadly as they can about whom their mitzvah is supposed to serve. For example, could a "stranger" be someone who used to come to congregational events with a spouse, but who is now divorced and coming alone, and may need extra attention? Could a friend who's stressed out and preparing for an important exam count as someone who is "sick" and needs a visit? Could someone who has lost a beloved pet be considered a "mourner" in need of comfort? Give groups some time to work independently, and then have them report back and contribute to the communal list of possible targets for the mitzvot.

One-Page Service Plans (Assessment)

Tell each student to choose one example of someone whom they believe the rabbis did *not* have in mind as a stranger, sick person, or mourner, but whom they believe could be included in one of these categories. Have each student create a one-page plan describing the person they chose, and how they think that the community should support person. The plan can be expressed primarily in writing or as a drawing, so long as it conveys all the necessary information. Collect students' plans and scan and upload them to students' individual pages on the class website.

LESSON 3.2 – HEARING FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Objectives

- SWBAT identify 3–5 groups and programs within their congregational community that aim to welcome (the stranger), visit the sick, and comfort the mourner.
- SWBAT assess the services being provided to strangers, sick people, mourners, and others in need within their congregational communities.

Activities

Speaker Panel

Invite a diverse mix of speakers from your congregational community to speak to students about their experiences providing services within the community in the areas of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*. Try to find panelists who are community leaders (so as to show students that they are being taken seriously); who can communicate well with young people of this age group; and who have direct experience of welcoming strangers, visiting the sick, and/or comforting mourners. Before the panel begins speaking, distribute copies of Handout 3.1 to students, and encourage them to take notes on their handouts during the panel (if they are able to do so productively). Briefly introduce each panelist and the group or program they represent (if applicable), and then allow panelists to speak about their service work. Encourage panelists to strike a balance between describing their groups or programs broadly and relating anecdotal experiences. Conduct the panel as you think best: you might ask the speakers questions, for example, about how their work compares to what the students have learned from traditional Jewish texts, or about how they would define the terms “stranger,” “sick,” and “mourner” for the purposes of the mitzvot; or you might allow students to ask questions; or you might do both.

Not all students will be able to effectively take notes during the panel: some may find that note-taking distracts them from what is being said, others may need to doodle in order to focus, etc. Some students may find listening to a panel of speakers extremely challenging irrespective of note taking. Try to help each student get the most out of the panel. In some cases, that may mean encouraging attentive listening without writing until after the panel has finished speaking; in others, it might mean asking a student who is good at note-taking to share their notes with a student who struggles with auditory learning.

Post-Panel Debrief

Allow some time after the panel concludes to debrief with just the students. Begin by giving students a couple of minutes to add thoughts to Handout 3.1 (or fill it out if they didn't during the panel). Then discuss students' responses to the panel as a group. Questions could include:

- What are your first impressions of what you heard from this panel?
- Did you hear anything that particularly surprised you? Spoke to you? Troubled you? How so?
- Based on what you heard today, how do you feel about what is being done in our community to welcome the stranger, visit the sick, and comfort the mourner?
- Is there anything you wanted to say or ask that you felt you couldn't or chose not to during the panel discussion, but that you'd like to share now?

Collect students' questionnaires (which they should be sure to put their names on) and put them somewhere accessible for safekeeping. Explain that you will return their questionnaires to them in a couple of sessions so that they can refer to them for a project.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMUNITY PANEL #1

Name _____

1. Who (groups or individuals) is working in the following areas within our community, and what are they doing?

a. *bachnasat orchim* – welcoming (the stranger)

b. *bikur cholim* – visiting the sick

c. *l'vayat hamet* – comforting the mourner

d. other community services that the panelists provided

2. What questions do you have about the panelists' work?

LESSON 3.3 – HEARING FROM SERVICE RECEIVERS

Objectives

- SWBAT identify 3–5 groups and programs within their congregational community that aim to welcome (the stranger), visit the sick, and comfort the mourner.
- SWBAT assess the services being provided to strangers, sick people, mourners, and others in need within their congregational communities.

Activities

Speaker Panel

Invite a diverse mix of speakers from your congregational community to speak to students about their experiences **receiving** services from the community in the areas of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*. Look for panelists who will be willing to speak openly about their experiences, and who can communicate well with young people of this age group. Before the panel begins speaking, distribute copies of Handout 3.2 to students, and encourage them once again to take notes on their handouts during the panel (if they are able to do so productively). Briefly introduce each panelist, and then invite panelists to speak about their experiences. As with the previous panel, you might ask the panelists questions, for example, about what the services they received meant to them, or what other services they wish they or others had access to; or you might allow students to ask questions; or you might do both.

Post-Panel Debrief

Follow the same procedure as in Lesson 3.2, this time using Handout 3.2. At the end of class, ask students to bring in their Service Reflection Forms (Form 1.1) for the next session.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMUNITY PANEL #2

Name _____

3. What did you learn about our community members' experiences with being supported in the following areas?

a. *bachnasat orchim* – welcoming (the stranger)

b. *bikur cholim* – visiting the sick

c. *l'vayat hamet* – comforting the mourner

d. other community services that the panelists received

4. What questions do you have about the panelists' experiences?

LESSON 3.4 – EVALUATING SERVICE AVAILABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Objectives

- SWBAT name and describe some of the services currently being offered within their congregational community in the areas of *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*.
- SWBAT imagine at least one service that they wish their congregational community offered in one of the three areas above.
- SWBAT express informed judgments as to how well their congregational community is meeting the needs of its members in the three areas above.

Activity

Service Reflection Jigsaw

Have students form groups based on the service activities they have completed or signed up for. Students should form three groups, one each for *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet* (and, if necessary, a fourth group for any service activity that doesn't really fit with one of those three categories; if students have completed or signed up for more than one kind of activity, they should choose one for the purpose of this exercise). Have students compare their reflections on their experiences using their Service Reflection Forms (Form 1.1), and discuss how well they think they and the group or program they were working with actually served its target population.

Reconfigure students into new groups composed of one member from each of the previous groups, and have students compare notes about what they had previously discussed (for example, the former member of the *bachnasat orchim* group would summarize the overall impressions of that group about the community's approach to *bachnasat orchim*, and so on).

In order for this activity to work best, send an email to students and their parents during the week before class to remind students to bring their Service Reflection Forms (Form 1.1) in with them. Since some will undoubtedly forget or misplace their forms anyway, come prepared with blank forms, so that students can at least be reminded of the questions.

Service Accessibility Scavenger Hunt (Memorable Moment)

Distribute Handout 3.3 and split students into two teams: one tech team, and one ground team.

The tech team should complete the handout using the congregation's website and any other forms it might have of online presence, and the ground force should gather its information by exploring the building, especially any lobby and reception areas. Tell students to complete the handout as fully as they can and meet back in their usual class meeting space at a specified time. Tech team students can use computers, tablets, etc. that you provide, or their own phones for their research. When teams return, have a representative from each team report back to the class on the team's findings.

Evaluation Of Community Services (Assessment)

Distribute Handout 3.4 and give students a few minutes to complete it. Collect students' completed form and scan and upload them to the students' individual pages on the website.

ACCESSIBILITY SCAVENGER HUNT!

Find as many examples as you can of groups and programs in your congregation that provide *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet* services to your community, and put their information into the chart below.

Group/service name (e.g. Caring Committee)	Group/service description (e.g. visit sick community members in hospital & pay shiva calls)	Service frequency & location (e.g. every other Sunday at hospital, or as needed in community member homes)	How & where publicized? (e.g. Facebook post, paper pamphlet on table in lobby)	Contact info given? (Y/N)

Take a moment to think about everything you have learned about how your community supports its members through *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*.

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UNIT 4 – WHERE DO I FIT IN?

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

This unit both spirals back to the beginning of the curriculum and moves forward into personalizing the curricular content for each student. It asks the students to take a deeper look at the mitzvot of Elu Devarim, to determine how they understand them and what they think of them. It also asks students to closely examine themselves. By the end of the unit, students will have clarified their own interests, skills, and values as they relate to mitzvot and community service, and will be prepared to leap forward into the culminating projects of Unit 5.

Enduring Understandings

- Liberal Jews do not simply become b’nei mitzvah by turning 13—they must actively choose to become b’nei mitzvah, by taking actions like studying, discussing, and experimenting with mitzvot, or taking on obligations within their Jewish communities.
- No connection to Judaism can hold up to the barrage of counter-influences from secular culture without at least some support from a like-minded Jewish community.
- Obligation frees and empowers as well as constrains.
- “Community service” serves no one unless it is informed by knowledge of the community’s needs and values.

Essential Questions

- Which mitzvot are most important?
- Is “*talmud torah*” really “*k’neged kulam*?”
- How can I, in my individuality, best serve others?

Goals

- To give students an opportunity to reexamine and reevaluate Elu Devarim in light of all they have learned and experienced over the course of this program, and thereby to reexamine and reevaluate their views on mitzvot and service more broadly.
- To increase student interest and buy-in into community service by appealing to individual students’ interests and values and making use of their individual skills and talents.
- To show students how they can find meaning, satisfaction, and enjoyment through pursuing their interests and applying their talents in the service of others.
- To make students aware of the mutually supportive dimensions of their most important relationships.

Objectives

- SWBAT personally interpret the meaning of and evaluate the relative importance of *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim*, *l’vayat hamet*, and *talmud torah*, as well as other elements of Elu Devarim.
- SWBAT inventory their own top one or two “superhero skills,” passions, mitzvah interests, and service values.
- SWBAT use their self-inventories to devise one possible service project that would align with their own skills, interests, and values.
- SWBAT envision themselves as part of a web of mutually beneficial relationships with other key people and groups in their lives.

LESSON 4.1 – RETURN TO ELU DEVARIM

Objectives

- SWBAT articulate whether and how their understandings of the Elu Devarim mitzvot have changed over the course of this program.
- SWBAT use what they have learned and experienced so far to evaluate the relative importance of the Elu Devarim mitzvot, and to suggest any mitzvot that should be excluded or added.
- SWBAT develop personal interpretations of and judgments about the expression, “*talmud torah k’neged kulam*.”

Key Texts

- Elu Devarim (see Handout 2.1)
- Hebrew dictionaries, or photocopies of dictionary pages for *k’neged* and *torah* (pp. 872 and 1657 in Jastrow)
- Mishnah Pirkei Avot 2:2

Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNasi would say:
Beautiful is *talmud torah* with the way of the world, for hard work at both of them causes sin to be forgotten; and all *torah* that is not accompanied with work in the end is canceled out and brings on sin.

Translation adapted by Abby Phelps from Chabad.org

Activities

Set Induction (Assessment)

Tell students they’re returning to Elu Devarim in this class, and see how many of the Elu Devarim mitzvot they can call up from memory. Create a communal list.

Are These Really The Things Without Measure?

Distribute copies of Elu Devarim to students. Ask them to look over the mitzvot for a moment, and try to find one about which their thoughts or feelings have changed due to an experience they have had so far in this program. Give students a few moments to think, find a partner, and share a story of their experience and how it changed their view of the mitzvah.

Bring students back together for a discussion about how they now view the Elu Devarim mitzvot in light of all they have learned and experienced. Questions could include:

- Now that you have tried out several of these mitzvot, did you find that any of them were different in practice than you had expected? If so, how?
- How have your views on them changed, if at all?
- Which of them do you now think are most important?
- Are there any that you think do not fit well into Elu Devarim? If so, why?
- Are there any mitzvot that you think would fit well into Elu Devarim and should be included? If so, which one(s), and why?

Is Talmud Torah Really *K’neged Kulam*?

Make sure students have the Hebrew and transliteration for *talmud torah k’neged kulam* in front of them, and tell them that while this expression is often translated as “the study of Torah is equal to

them all,” it is actually a difficult and ambiguous phrase. Have students look up the words *k’neged* and *torah* and create a communal list of possible definitions. These may include:

Possible definitions for <i>k’neged</i> :	Possible definitions for <i>torah</i> :
equal to (from translations; generally not found as a translation in dictionaries)	Torah (Five Books of Moses)
corresponding to	Jewish biblical and rabbinic literature
against	Law of Moses, Jewish law
toward	teaching
compared to	religion
opposite, as opposed to	law
in exchange for	theory
in preparation for	dogma, doctrine
as protection against	

As a class, discuss which meanings make the most and least sense to students for each word, and why, based on the internal logic of Elu Devarim, and what they have learned and experienced about its mitzvot. There is no right answer here: the important thing is to challenge students to support their positions. Distribute copies of the first part of Pirkei Avot 2:2 and have a student read it aloud to the class. Ask students: what do you make of this text in relation to *talmud torah k’neged kulam*? Do they send conflicting messages? Do they complement one another? Do you agree with either, both, or neither?

Educational Closure (Assessment)

Have each student write a personal translation and interpretation of *talmud torah k’neged kulam* that feels authentic and defensible to them. Collect students’ responses and scan and upload them to the students’ individual pages on the website.

LESSON 4.2 – MY SKILLS, PASSIONS & VALUES

Objectives

- SWBAT identify and articulate some of their strongest skills and passions.
- SWBAT identify and articulate which of the mitzvot from this curriculum most interest them, and which values most strongly motivate them to pursue communal service.
- SWBAT generate one idea about a service project they could do based on their skills, passions, mitzvah-based interests, and service values.

Activities

Service Project Self-Inventory

Have students use Handout 4.1 to uncover their own skills, passions, and values as they pertain to serving their community in the areas of *hachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*. Students should use the handout however will be most productive for them (and manageable for you): they could sit together in small groups and help each other with the questions, or they could work independently, so long as they are actually thoughtfully answering the questions. Make sure students actually write something in response to every question; if left up to their own devices, they may be tempted to dwell indefinitely on the first two questions and never get around to the later ones.

Discussion

Leave some time at the end of class for students to discuss their self-inventories. Ask students: did you discover anything about yourself in filling out this form? Did it help you to clarify anything about yourself? Did it lead you to any questions? Invite students to share the project ideas they came up with. Collect students' handouts and scan and upload them to the students' individual pages on the website.

Handout 4.1 is also intended to aid you and your clergy partner in developing the personalized service projects with which you will be charging your students in Lesson 5.1. While you need not be beholden to the specific project ideas that students come up with, keep in mind that for service work to be successful, it is essential that volunteers feel good about what they are doing, both in terms of having something to contribute and having a good time. Students' self-selected values can be especially helpful to you here—if a couple of students who are close friends say that their primary service motivations are social, then you may want to assign them to do a project together; and you may be able to give them a project that is quite challenging in and of itself, since you know that they will draw strength and energy from each other's company.

1. What are your superhero skills and strengths? If you need help, ask classmates what they think, or imagine what your parents, siblings, or other close family or friends would say. Write (or draw, but if you draw, be clear about what you're drawing!) your answers below:
2. What are your passions? What do you love to do and care about most? They don't have to be intellectual or resumé-building things, or even the things you are best at, just anything you're passionate about.
3. Of the three mitzvot we have focused on—*bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l'vayat hamet*—which one are you most passionate about? Why (one sentence is enough)?
4. Where in our community do you see the most need for that mitzvah? What problems do you see relating to that mitzvah? What would it look like for those problems to be solved?

SERVING MY COMMUNITY – WHERE DO I FIT IN?

Name _____

5. What are your values? Look at the chart below. Identify the three service values that motivate you most and star them.

Why Volunteer?

• To make the world a better place	• Because if I don't do it, who will?
• To give back to my community	• Because it's fun
• To learn more about social justice issues	• To have an excuse to do something that I love
• To practice my leadership skills	• Because I was asked
• Because it feels good	• To challenge myself
• To connect with other people	• To learn new things
• Because my tradition teaches that I should	• Because the issue I volunteer on has personally affected me
• Because it is something that my family and friends do, so I do too	• Because it is required (by school, for example)
• To put my Jewish values into action	• Other: _____
• For recognition (such as on a résumé)	• Other: _____
• Because it is my civic duty	

Excerpted from Repair the World's "Nurturing a Lifetime of Volunteering: A Toolkit for Families Volunteering Together"

6. Using the table below, think of at least one potential service project that would fit with some of your skills, passions, and values.

My Skill	My Non-Mitzvah Passion	My Mitzvah Passion (<i>Hachnasat Orchim, Bikur Cholim, or L'vayat Hamet</i>)	The Mitzvah Need I See In My Community	Potential Project Idea

LESSON 4.3 – MYSELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS

Objectives

- SWBAT describe at least one way in which they support and are supported by the people and groups with whom they have their most significant relationships.
- SWBAT identify at least one group in their community with which they would like to be in relationship via service, and to propose at least one way in which that relationship would benefit both them and that group.

Activities

Human Knot

Have students stand together in a circle, shoulder to shoulder (or multiple circles, depending upon how many students you have—about 10 per circle is ideal). Tell students to each reach one hand into the middle of the circle and take hold of someone else's hand. (At this point, some students may realize where this activity is headed, especially if they've done it before; if they start to speak up, urge them to keep quiet and play along for now.) Then tell students to reach their other hand into the circle and take hold of a different person's hand. Explain to them that their task is to untangle themselves into a circle without letting go of anyone's hands. This direction may be met with laughter, disbelief, and even protest. All of these reactions are fine—simply reassure students that it can be done, and reiterate that they must untangle themselves without letting go of each other's hands (although slightly altering their grips on each other for comfort is allowed).

For more detailed instructions and alternate versions of this activity, visit:

<http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/HumanKnot.html>.

This activity can take a long time or very little time, depending upon the group and the configuration. If students are really struggling, you can give them up to 10 minutes before offering them the option to unclasp and re-clasp one pair of hands, a choice they will have to discuss and make carefully. If students untangle themselves too quickly, you can restart the exercise and run them through it again; as a matter of probability, they'll almost certainly have a harder time the second time. If students can untangle into two or more interlocking circles, but not one fully untangled circle, that's fine—the real point of the exercise is to simplify the knot as much as possible without unclasp any hands.

Spend a few minutes debriefing after the activity. Ask students: how do you think this went? What helped your team work well together? What could have helped you work better? What was it like not to be able to disconnect from others? How similar or different did that feel to your everyday lives?

Web Of Relationship

Give each student a couple of blank pieces of paper, and tell them that they are going to draw themselves at the center of a web of relationships with others. Explain that this will be a two-step process: students should begin by listing or sketching the principal people and groups with which they have relationships in their day-to-day lives, and noting for each of those people and groups at least one way in which they support one another. For example, a student might list their brother, and might note that they support their brother by helping him with his homework, and that their brother supports them by cheering them up when they're having a hard day. Students should also include one group that represents a group in their community with whom they would be interested

in being in relationship through a service project, and should note how such a project would benefit not only that group, but also themselves.

Students should bring their rough drafts to you for your approval. If you think that anything significant is missing from them, have students add those elements. Only after students' drafts have been approved should they move on to drawing their final webs of relationship, which should depict them connected by two opposing unidirectional arrows (↔) to all those with whom they are in relationship. Along the arrow leading away from the student should be written one way in which the student supports that person or group, and written along the arrow pointing toward the student should be one way in which that person or group supports the student. The artwork in these drawings can be as simple as stick figures, or as complex as students have the time and inclination to make it; the key thing is for students to represent their most important relationships, and to show how those relationships involve mutual support.

At the end of class, lay students' webs out on tables or quickly tack them up on the wall and do a gallery walk so that all students can see one another's work. Afterward, collect students' work and scan and upload it to the students' individual pages on the website.

Between this class and the next is the optimal minimum window for allowing comments on the class website. At this point, almost all student work will have been uploaded to the website, but there will be time yet for viewers to comment before students review and process those comments in Lesson 5.2. Before opening up the website to comments, email all those who will be able to comment to alert them to the change, to ask them to phrase all of their comments in the form of statements beginning with "I appreciate," "I notice," or "I wonder," and to remind them to comment supportively and constructively. Once comments are open, be sure to monitor them as they are posted, so that you can ask commenters to revise harsh posts, or, if necessary, take them down.

UNIT 5 – I’M BECOMING BAR/BAT MITZVAH! WHAT’S NEXT?

“Na’aseh v’nishma—We will do, and we will understand.”

—Exodus 24:7

Unit 5 is all about action and reflection. It gives students the opportunity to bring all the tools, ideas, and questions they have generated to bear in the real world, and then to take a step back to think and talk about those experiences. This unit should demonstrate to students just how much they have learned and grown over the course of this program, and lay the foundation for them to be able to continue learning and growing into Jewish adulthood and community membership going forward.

Enduring Understandings

- Liberal Jews do not simply become b’nei mitzvah by turning 13—they must actively choose to become b’nei mitzvah, by taking actions like studying, discussing, and experimenting with mitzvot, or taking on obligations within their Jewish communities.
- No connection to Judaism can hold up to the barrage of counter-influences from secular culture without at least some support from a like-minded Jewish community.
- Obligation frees and empowers as well as constrains.
- “Community service” serves no one unless it is informed by knowledge of the community’s needs and values.

Essential Questions

- How do I want to change upon becoming bar/bat mitzvah?
- What place do I want to take as a Jewish adult within my congregational community?
- What elements of Judaism and mitzvot should I carry forward into my Jewish adulthood?

Goals

- To help students reflect on and make meaning of all that they have experienced in this program.
- To give students culminating experiences in service work that will be meaningful and enjoyable, and will inspire them to further acts of service and community engagement.
- To inspire students to take control of their ongoing Jewish development and maturation.

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- Students will have the opportunity to react to putting their values, knowledge, and passions about *bachnasat orchim*, *bikur cholim* and *l’vayat hamet* into action, and will reflect on these experiences individually and in small and large groups.
- Students will be able to articulate one way in which they intend to change upon becoming b’nei mitzvah.

LESSON 5.1 – RECEIVING THE CHARGE & HEEDING THE CALL

Objectives

- SWBAT articulate how their thoughts and feelings about the expression “lean on me” have been influenced by their experiences of being metaphorically leaned on by others over the course of this program.
- SWBAT agree to take on a service project tailored to their individual skills, interests, and values.

Activities

Set Induction – Lean On Me Redux

Either play “Lean On Me” for students, or lead them in singing the song again, possibly in a more contemplative mode than in Lesson 2.1. Ask students: does this song mean anything different to you now? Has what you’ve learned or experienced colored it at all? What has it felt like so far to actually be leaned on? Discuss as a class.

Receiving The Charge

Bring students in to your clergy partner’s office, grouped according to the service project you and your partner have devised for them (i.e. individually if you are giving them an individual task, or, if they are being assigned a group project, together with their group members). Together with your clergy partner, and with as much pomp and circumstance as you can muster, charge students with whatever projects you have devised for them. In addition to verbally proposing the project, have a one-page information sheet ready to hand to the students that describes the project, any other individuals or groups who would be involved, any necessary contact information, and any scheduling constraints. If students raise objections to their projects, see if you can either allay their concerns or adjust their projects on the spot to address them; if not, schedule phone conferences with students to discuss alternative projects, and charge students with generating some alternative project ideas in the interim.

These individualized service projects are a golden opportunity for you and your clergy partner to engage every student in your class. Try to use students’ self-assessments and what you know about them wisely in order to closely tailor their projects to their passions and abilities. Structurally, every service project should take at least two hours to complete, and, as with the previous individually scheduled service projects, should conclude with ten minutes set aside to complete Form 1.1. You may be able to propose projects that have to be completed at specific dates and times if you can reach students’ parents beforehand and confirm student interest and availability; otherwise, count on proposing projects whose timing can be flexible.

While individual students and small groups are meeting with you, the rest of the students can be engaged in any number of possible activities: trust-building or team-building activities, like those described at <http://wilderdom.com/games/>; board games; even unstructured social time. Alternatively, this could be an excellent opportunity to invite board members from your congregation’s youth group to come into your class to lead your students in some fun activities, and to encourage them to get attend youth group activities in the future.

LESSON 5.2 – REFLECTING ON THE PAST

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- Students will have had the opportunity to react to individualized service projects tailored to their particular skills, interests, and values. Students will have reflected on this experience through individual writing, and will continue to reflect through group discussion.
- Students will have the opportunity to react to the feedback they have received on the class website. Students will reflect on this experience through small group processing.
- SWBAT express their opinions of the program up to this point.

Activities

Reflection On Individualized Service Projects

Welcome students to their penultimate class session, and congratulate them on completing their projects. Ask students who participated in different projects to pair up with one another and tell each other how their projects went. Each student should take a set number of minutes (2–5, as you choose) to tell the story of their service project however they wish while their partner silently listens. Then their partner should take 1 or 2 minutes to reflect back a couple of things that struck them about their story. After this, partners should switch. Once pairs have finished sharing their stories, have students come back together as a group, and ask each student to share one thing that inspired or intrigued them about what their partner said. Hold further discussion as desired.

Processing Website Comments

Give students a few minutes to review and reflect silently and privately upon the comments they received on the website. Then divide students into pre-assigned groups of four, which you should arrange to the best of your ability so that no member of any group will feel uncomfortable sharing personal thoughts and feelings with the other members of their group. Tell groups to process their comments according to the following protocol: each student should have 2 minutes to express their thoughts, feelings, and any questions they have about the comments they received while the other students listen. Then that student should sit quietly while the other three students discuss their reflections on the first students' comments and reactions to them with each other for a further 4 minutes. Finally, the first student should have 1 minute to respond to what the group said. Each group should go through this process for each of its members.

Class Evaluation

Give students a simple, one-page evaluation form to complete in the last ten minutes or so of class. The form should seek to ascertain from students information including what they found most meaningful and valuable in the program, what they found least meaningful and valuable, what (if anything) they recommend be kept exactly as it is, and what (if any) changes they recommend be made. Forms should be completed anonymously so that students can express themselves freely. Collect students' completed forms and save them for use in future implementations of the program.

LESSON 5.3 – MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

Objectives and Expressive Outcomes

- Students will have the opportunity to react to helping 4th grade students attempt to use the pamphlets they made in role playing scenarios. Students will reflect on this experience through group discussion.
- SWBAT choose and commit to one way in which they intend to change upon becoming bar or bat mitzvah.

Activities

Pamphlet Party

Organize students into the groups they formed for pamphlet making. Hand each group a stack of glossy, lovingly made copies of their pamphlet. Take students to a classroom full of 4th graders, also divided into three subgroups, and instruct them to find a group of 4th graders and offer them their pamphlets. Students should explain to the 4th graders what the pamphlets are for, answer 4th graders' questions about them, and help 4th graders to come up with ideas about how they might use the pamphlets. Then each 4th grade group should get up in front of the others and demonstrate their understanding of their pamphlet by role playing a welcoming, visiting, or comforting scenario in which a different group's b'nei mitzvah students play the role of strangers, sick people, or mourners, respectively. After each demonstration, b'nei mitzvah students should applaud 4th graders, and give them feedback in the form of supportive and constructive statements beginning with "I appreciate," "I notice," and "I wonder."

Pledges

Bring b'nei mitzvah students back to their classroom or another private location and have them sit or stand in a circle. Whip around the circle and have students say one word each about how it felt to see their pamphlets in action. Give each student a sheet of paper and ask them to think back to the beginning of the program, when they wondered how they might change when they became b'nei mitzvah. Tell them that they now have the power to take charge of that transformation, and invite them to each make a pledge about how they *want* to change when become bar or bat mitzvah. Suggestions could be, "I pledge to keep learning about and experimenting with mitzvot," "I pledge to volunteer again at the retirement home with our Brotherhood," or "I pledge to continue using Jewish values to inform my daily moral choices." Allow a few moments for everyone to think of and write down their pledge. Go around the circle and have each student announce their pledge. Lead the group in applauding each pledge, and conclude the ceremony with a Shehecheyanu.

Form 1.1

SERVICE REFLECTION FORM

Name: _____

Date: _____

What did you do? Whom did you work with?

Why did you choose this activity?

Would you choose it again? Why or why not?

Do you think you were doing a mitzvah? Why or why not?

Annotated Bibliography

Aron, I. (2010). Supplementary schooling and the law of unanticipated consequences: A review essay of Stuart Schoenfeld's "Folk Judaism, elite Judaism and the role of bar mitzvah in the development of the synagogue and Jewish school in America." *Journal of Jewish Education*, 76(4), 315–333.

Aron, I. (2015). Revolutionizing bar/bat mitzvah. *The Reform Jewish Quarterly*, 42(4), 13–39.

Berger, P. L. (1967). *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. New York: Anchor Books.

In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger lays out his theory of the socio-historical roots and dimensions of religion. His assertion that religions must furnish their members with plausible social roles and structures in order to survive was highly influential in the early stages of developing this curriculum guide.

Berger, R. (2003). *An ethic of excellence: Building a culture of craftsmanship with students*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Ron Berger makes a compelling case in this book for a classroom culture of striving for excellence, and for the practice of iteration and refinement in student work. His philosophy underpins the pamphlet assignment in this curriculum guide, as well as the overall focus on prioritizing assessment and preserving and showcasing the work students produce.

B'nai Mitzvah Revolution. (Retrieved 2015, December 21). *Our mission*. Retrieved from <http://bnaimitzvahrevolution.org/mission>

Central Conference of American Rabbis. (1999). *A statement of principles for Reform Judaism*. Platform adopted at the 1999 convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Pittsburgh, PA.

D'Agostino, M. (2010). Measuring social capital as an outcome of service learning. *Innovative Higher Education*, 35(5), 313–328.

Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. NY: Norton.

Goldstein, N. E., & Knobel, P. S. (Eds.). (1999). *Duties of the soul: The role of commandments in liberal Judaism*. NY: UAHC Press.

This book is a compilation of essays exploring liberal Jewish approaches to obligation. It offers many different perspectives on how (or whether) liberal Jews might understand themselves as commanded by God or obligated to do mitzvot, and how these understandings might play out in practice. It would serve as excellent preparation for any teacher undertaking Unit 1 of this curriculum guide.

Hilton, M. (2014). *Bar mitzvah: A history*. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society.

This book traces the development of bar and bat mitzvah ritual from its humble origins as a relatively minor legal proceeding to its present day prominence as a major life cycle event. It is a fantastic resource for anyone wishing to understand the history and evolution of b'nei mitzvah.

Jastrow, M. (2004). *Sefer ha-milim: Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic literature*. NY: Judaica Treasury.

Kackar-Cam, H., & Schmidt, J. A. (2014). Community-based service-learning as a context for youth autonomy, competence, and relatedness. *High School Journal*, 98(1), 83–108.

Kaplan, M. M. (1967). *Judaism as a civilization: Toward a reconstruction of American-Jewish life*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.

Kelman, S., & Fendel, D. (2015). *Niḥum avelim: A guide for the comforter*. Berkeley, CA: EKS Publishing Co.

This book offers spiritual and practical guidance for anyone seeking to support a Jewish mourner. It is very accessible, seeking to clearly describe and explain Jewish funerary, burial, and mourning practices to Jews and non-Jews alike, and offering helpful resources including prayer texts and a glossary. It could be useful for providing background for the teacher, and for helping students in drafting their *l'vayat hamet* pamphlets.

Kessler, R. (2000). *The soul of education: Helping students find connection, compassion, and character at school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Rachel Kessler advocates for the incorporation of spiritual content into secular education, but her arguments and techniques apply equally in a Jewish education context. In addition to effectively schematizing the top spiritual concerns of young people, she offers practical techniques for helping students to access and share with one another about their spiritual selves.

McDonald, J. P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E. C. (2013). *The power of protocols: An educator's guide to better practice* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Neusner, J. (1981). *Mitzvah*. Potomac, MD: Rossel Books.

This book is written as a guide for students who are about to become bar or bat mitzvah. As the title suggests, it focuses on mitzvah, characterizing the b'nei mitzvah experience as one of becoming commanded by God, and exploring what that might mean. Neusner's conception of b'nei mitzvah informed the development of this curriculum guide, especially Unit 1. Both teachers and students might find this book interesting as background reading.

Repair the World. (2012). *Nurturing a lifetime of volunteering: A toolkit for families volunteering together*. New York, NY: Author.

This is one of many volunteering toolkits produced by Repair the World, an organization devoted to mobilizing young Jews to serve their communities. Students or families interested in doing service projects beyond the scope of this curriculum guide can turn to this toolkit and Repair the World's other materials for inspiration and assistance.

Rothblum, E. L. (2008). *Using service learning to increase mobile students' connection to school* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI Number: 3322024).