

## The Mitzvah Curriculum

When engaging in transmitting values, the Jewish way is through Mitzvot. **Mitzvot** are described broadly and explained to young children as good deeds. However a Mitzvah is actually a commandment and goes beyond doing a good deed. A Mitzvah is a commandment that is a rule or a law that is outlined in the Torah. **Values** are general categories and standards of behaviour. **Middot** are attitudes and actions we are encouraged or required to assume according to the values to which we adhere.

The Jewish people are commanded to behave in a certain way, at certain times to do certain things and not do others. Adhering to mitzvot is a life-long commitment that begins at a very young age. The children who we teach watch us, and learn from us as teachers, as parents, as role models who provide an understanding of how to make their way in an often complicated world. We can talk about our values in the classroom but unless our students see these values in action and see their teachers and parents engaging with these values, they won't internalize the messages and messages become meaningless.

Commitment fosters commitment. If we as teachers, parents, role models are serious about our commitment to these values and our students understand that this is just not some abstract Jewish idea but is actually something that is relevant to their lives then they will internalize these values. Sometimes the values we teach at school differ from what they learn at home and they know that they are not bound by these values. That is why the mitzvah curriculum aims to bring the values from the classroom into the home and to create a meaningful dialogue through journals between home and school.

## Different types of Mitzvot:

1. Time- bound and non time-bound. Time-bound mitzvot are those that are observed at specific times during the day or at specific times during the year. The reason this distinction is important is that in traditional Jewish communities women are not obligated to perform time-bound mitzvot except certain positive mitzvot which include lighting Shabbat candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, eating Matzah on Passover and going to the Mikvah each month.
2. Mitzvot are also divided into Bein Adam Lachaveiro and Bein Adam LaMakom: this means mitzvot that are between one person and another and Mitzvot between a person and God. When we look at the Ten Commandments, the first five are between a person and God and the second five are between a person and his friend. The distinction is important when it comes to asking for forgiveness. According to Jewish custom, you may only ask God for forgiveness after you have asked for forgiveness from your friend.
3. Mishpatim and Chukim – Mishpatim are laws that are ethical and rational and one would hope would be part of a code of ethics regardless of whether they appeared in the Torah (e.g. not to murder, lie or steal). Chukim are commanded by God such as keeping kosher.

According to Maimonides each mitzvah has a purpose that is intended to help our body or our soul.

The following words are the vocabulary for practising mitzvot and will help us and our students understand what we are doing.

**Kavanah:** intention, purpose, devotion, meaning: In Jewish life simply going through the motions of doing a Mitzvah is not enough, we need to enjoy what we are doing and if possible understand why we are doing it.

**Halachah:** The process of how we apply mitzvot to specific situations. It literally means the way. Rabbis across the generations have written, taught and codified the mitzvot. Different Jewish people understand mitzvot and their obligations differently. Reform and Liberal Jews believe it is up to the individual to decide which mitzvot to observe. They also emphasize the ethical mitzvot. Masorti Jews consider Mitzvot to be binding and they preserve mitzvot and enhance them through modern decisions about Halachah. Orthodox Jews are bound by Halachah and do not enhance or change Halachah but strive to understand it and observe it according to the Rabbinic interpretations.

## **Fun Facts about Mitzvot:**

There are 613 mitzvot, 248 are positive which corresponds to the number of bones in the body, and 365 that are negative and that correspond to the number of days in the year.

Maimonides wrote down all the mitzvot and the biblical source for each mitzvah in a book called Sefer HaMitzvot.

Aaron Halevi from Barcelona lists the mitzvot in the Sefer Chinuch.

There are seven mitzvot that do not appear in the Torah:

1. Reciting a blessing for anything enjoyed
2. Washing your hands before eating
3. Lighting Shabbat candles
4. Making an eruv
5. Saying Hallel
6. Lighting Hanukkah candles
7. Reading Megilat Esther

## **Mitzvot in the Clore Tikvah Class Room:**

Each year group will be assigned three different mitzvot to focus on during the year, one for each term. One mitzvah will focus on personal responsibility. The second will be a mitzvah that includes the family and is a ritual or observing the mitzvot of a holiday and the final mitzvah will be a mitzvah that is ethical in nature and helps the community, whether it is their school community, local community, or a community in another part of the world or in Israel.

This project will be discussed weekly as a class on a Friday morning when they bring in their Mitzvah journals. They will discuss what they did that week to fulfil this Mitzvah. Each classroom will receive a board to put the names of the children on and a column with the date to record whom has completed or considered doing the Mitzvah during the week. It could also be for kids who filled in their journals. The teachers' commitment will generate commitment from the students.

Reception:

Foundation Stage/Reception : Humane treatment of animals, not being destructive or wasteful, Shabbat

Year one: Mezuzah, Havdallah, Tzeddakah

Year two: Love your neighbour as yourself, Purim, Leaving the Gleanings

Year Three: Esteeming the Elderly, Tubishvat, Don't put a stumbling block before the blind

Year Four: Welcoming Guests, Rosh Chodesh, Kashrut and Birkat Hamazon

Year Five: Refraining from Gossip, honouring your father and mother, Shavuot

Year Six: Visiting the Sick, Passover, Studying the Torah

Reception: Autumn Term:

### **Tzar Ba'alay Chayim- Encouraging humane treatment for animals.**

We need to treat animals with kindness. We are taught that animals can be used by people for our benefit but we must treat them with kindness. The Torah contains explicit rules about how animals should be treated.

Maimonides treated the mitzvah of helping to unload an animal as both positive and negative.

A small animal like a donkey should not be made to plough with an ox because animals that are not equal in strength should not be forced to work together.

Animals should not be made to work on Shabbat.

The Rabbis and the Torah were very sensitive to the feelings of the animal and Maimonides compares the pain of animals to the pain that humans suffer.

You should always let the mother bird fly free before you take her eggs.

You should not boil a kid in his mother's milk.

You were not allowed to sacrifice an animal and its young the same day.

There are a few stories in the Torah that talk about animals with kindness and even assign them human qualities like the story of Balaam and the story of Jonah. Moses found the burning bush only because he worried about the fate of one lamb lost in the wilderness. There are even more rules and laws regarding who would be a suitable pet owner. The Talmud commands that you must be able to feed and care for your pet properly and agree to this before you buy it. The laws regarding how an animal is slaughtered imply that much thought was given to the suffering of animals even regarding their death. There is also evidence that prior to the flood in the story of Noah God was expecting all people to be vegetarians. Because of a moral deterioration, human beings could not refrain from eating meat and the compromise that was reached was that they could eat meat but only with very strict dietary laws.

### **How can reception children fulfil this Mitzvah?**

The first part of learning about and doing mitzvot is to open your eyes to the world around you. Ask your class how many of them own pets? How many of their neighbours own pets? How many people do they know who own a pet? How many wild animals or birds do they see every day? There are only six weeks in this term and the real goal for this term is to introduce them to mitzvot or commandments that help them to understand their world. Each week they should bring in examples of how they helped take care of their pet or a neighbour's pet. One week ask them to be animal detectives and have them find out how different animals are cared for in the UK. In their journals they could draw pictures of the different animals they see over the next few weeks. Ask them to talk to their parents about animals and ask each student to write a poem with his parents about why it is important to treat animals with kindness.

- Tell the story of Noah and ark and ask why it was important for Noah to have so many different kinds of animals on his ark.
- Tell the story of Rebecca at the well. When Eliezer came to the well, Rebecca fetched water for all his camels before getting water for herself.
- Tell the story of Balak and Bilam and the talking donkey. When the donkey gets kicked he talks back! What does this teach us about how we treat our animals?
- Tell the students to imagine they were the animal in one of these stories, how would they like to be treated? What would they say if they could talk?
- Finish the term by talking about all the different ways people in England help animals and wildlife.

## Bal Tashchit

This means don't be destructive or wasteful. There are many guidelines for how to fulfil this commandment from not cutting down trees during a battle to not wasting food or breaking your possessions in anger. Maimonides codified all needless destruction under this heading. There is also the idea that actually the world we live in does not ultimately belong to us, but belongs to God and is on loan to us. We have an awesome responsibility to look after it and to make sure that when we are finished living in it that we have taken care of it. The same goes for our bodies. We need to take care of ourselves and treat our bodies with respect.

Today many Jewish communities approach this Mitzvah through the idea of protecting and preserving our environment. This involves understanding ecology, conserving energy, recycling and thinking carefully before we act.

How can reception children fulfil this Mitzvah?

There are lots of ways young children can fulfil this mitzvah.

- Taking care of our own things so they don't break and don't need to be replaced
- Picking up rubbish outside our home or school
- Recycling and composting at home
- Using the recycling at home to make a sculpture to bring in and show everyone.
- Coming up with ideas about how they can reuse some of things they normally throw away.
- Discussion points: How are we wasteful? How can we help protect the environment? What can we learn from our families? What can we teach our families? How can we replace some of what we use? Electricity, petrol, water, these are all resources that need to be preserved and are not unlimited. Discuss how we can help our families use these resources wisely.
- Books to read: The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein Issues to discuss: When the boy was young, what did he and the tree do? As he got older, what happened? How did the boy/young man treat the tree? What happens at the end of the story? Jewish Stories/ Honi Hameagel sleeps for seventy years, King Solomon and the Bee

Reception: Summer Term

## Shabbat

This is ritualistic Mitzvah and is one of the top Ten Commandments. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Eternal your God: You shall not do any work, you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Eternal One made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and God rested on the seventh day; therefore, the Eternal One blessed the seventh day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11)

Although there are many negative aspects regarding what you cannot do on Shabbat, resting on Shabbat is regarded as a positive mitzvah. The second positive mitzvah regarding Shabbat is remembering it and keeping it holy. This mitzvah is fulfilled by saying Kiddush on Friday evening and by reciting havdallah at the end of Shabbat when the sun goes down. One honours Shabbat by preparing for it, bathing, wearing nice clothes, and eating really good food. The mitzvot for Shabbat are considered by Maimonides to be the most important in the Torah. There are many rules regarding what is considered work and what you cannot do which come mainly from prohibitions regarding what was done in the Holy Temple.

How can reception children fulfil this mitzvah?

This is one to do together with their families. The concept of a day of rest for the whole family is one that could be very helpful to families. Actually they don't have to go to a million and one activities and could benefit from spending the day at home with friends and family, resting and remembering what life was like before television and computers. They should now be used to filling in their journals with pictures or if they can short sentences or words describing their Shabbat. Each week on the Friday encourage the children to ask their parents to try a different aspect of Shabbat. Some families may have a traditional Friday night meal with candles, Kiddush and challah. If they don't, encourage them to try and do it for this term. I have enclosed a letter to send to the families asking them to support this part of the Jewish studies curriculum.

- Shabbat story – each week tell a story that emphasizes a different part of the Shabbat experience.
- Ask for volunteers to describe a special Shabbat in their family
- Ask the children why it is important to rest after a long week of work and school.

- Use the picture describing a Shabbat scene and ask the children why we do the different things. Why do we light candles? When do we light candles? Why do we make Kiddush and drink wine or grape juice? Why do we eat Challah and why are we supposed to have two challot?
- Have a display of all the ritual objects associated with Shabbat. Discuss what they are then cover them with a cloth. Ask the children to shut their eyes. Remove one object and ask the students to open their eyes and guess which one is missing.
- After half-term focus on the brachot that we say and what they mean. Each week learn a different blessing and learn what the Hebrew words mean. Baruch means blessed, ner means candle, lechem means bread, pri hagafen means fruit of the vine.
- In their journals have them draw a picture of each blessing and what they are saying when they say the blessing.

Year 1: Autumn Term

## Mezuzah

Year 1 will start with a ritual Mitzvah. This mitzvah is the mitzvah of the Mezuzah. Mezuzah literally means doorpost and some sources trace this mitzvah to Egyptian times. The earliest Mezuzah that we know about comes from the Second Temple Period. A mezuzah parchment was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Some people believe that the Mezuzah will actually protect your house and some even add symbols to enhance the protection. However Maimonides did not like the idea of the Mezuzah as an amulet or a form of protection. He believed that it should serve as a reminder that God is all that endures. This contemplation brings us back to ourselves and ensures that we remain on a steady path.

The mezuzah clearly states that this is the home of a Jewish family and reminds us that we need to behave in a way that makes our home worthy of God's presence and reminds us when we leave that we need to behave in a way that is respectful to others at school, at work and at play.

The Mezuzah is a piece of parchment which has the words of the Shma written and the following two paragraphs. The Shma is written on the Mezuzah by someone called a Sofer STaM (**S**efer Torah, **T**efillin and **M**ezuzah). On the back of the parchment the Sofer writes the Hebrew letters Shin, Daled, Yud which stands for Shomer Delatot Yisrael (Guard the doors of Israel) or Shomer Dat Yisrael (Guard the faith of Israel). The parchment is rolled up with the Shma inside and the Shadai on the outside and put into a special case. The case is then hung up on a doorpost in the house. The Mitzvah is to have a mezuzah on every door in your house except the bathroom and storeroom. The Mezuzah is hung on the right-hand side of the doorpost and is usually hung diagonally with the top toward the inside. Before you hang up a Mezuzah, you say a blessing. Twice every seven years the Mezuzah should be inspected by a scribe to be sure the writing is still legible.

How can year 1 children fulfil this mitzvah?

Part of every mitzvah is knowing about it and understanding it. It is also a way of opening their eyes to what may be in front of them but that they never noticed.

- Talk about the mezuzah and where we see mezuzot. Ask the children if they have a mezuzah at home and if they do, do they only have one or do they have a few? Where are they hung? If they don't have them at home, have they ever seen or noticed one before? Does anyone in their family have one?
- In their journals have them stick in the prayer for the Mezuzah and the shehecheyanu which is a prayer we say whenever we do something new.
- Ask them to design a case for a Mezuzah. Show them the pictures of different Mezuzot and talk to them about all different ways you can make a mezuzah case beautiful.

Ask them to go on a Mezuzah hunt during the week and see how many they can see during their week and where they are.

- Talk about the Shma. What do the paragraphs that are in the Mezuzah say? Do they know the prayer the Shma?
- If you see a house or a building with a mezuzah, what do you know about that building?
- Each week the kids should talk about what they have seen during the week. Is there a mezuzah on their classroom door? Where are the mezuzot at school.
- If possible see if a scribe can come and talk to the class about the job of being a scribe.

Year 1: Winter Term

## Havdallah

This is a ritual ceremony that concludes Shabbat, the Sabbath. Although very few if any of the kids will observe Shabbat in a completely traditional manner, this ritual is actually a beautiful way to separate the Shabbat day from the rest of the week and in the winter months happens quite early at sunset so is something that families could do.

This mitzvah requires a few ritual objects, a special havdallah candle, wine and spices. The word Havdallah comes from the Hebrew Lehavdil which means to separate and is really a ceremony which is a bit melancholy because we are saying goodbye to Shabbat. Each week should focus on a different element of Havdallah and could also bring in the idea of Shabbat and of rest.

- How do we make Shabbat a day that is different from the rest of the week? This week ask your family if they could try to make Saturday, Shabbat different from the rest of the week. Ask for suggestions as to how this day could be different or special.
- Tell a Shabbat story that focuses on the end of Shabbat. Ask the kids to write or draw a picture of what the perfect Shabbat would look like. What sorts of things do you need for Shabbat. (Challah, Kiddush cups, white table cloth, maybe kippot)
- What do we need to end Shabbat? We need three stars in the sky, we need a special candle, wine and spices. Each week focus on a different one.
- Wine, why do we need wine?
- A special candle, why do we need a special candle?
- Spices, why do we need spices?
- If you have enough time, the kids could make their own spices by poking cloves into a satsuma.
- Ask the kids to find out a story from their families about Shabbat or about a special day that was different from other days.
- In class light the havdallah candle and see why it is different from an ordinary candle.
- Toward the end of term see if year 1 could perform the Havadallah ceremony at an assembly for the whole school. This could happen on a Monday morning to symbolize separating the weekend from the week. It is permissible to do Havdallah until Tuesday.

Year 1: Summer term

## Tzeddakah

The word Tzeddakah comes from the Hebrew word Tzedek which means just or righteous. Although it is popularly translated as charity this is an imprecise definition. The reason that Jewish people engage in charitable giving, aside from it being the right thing to do, is that Jewish people are trying to eliminate or at least lessen injustice in the world. When we give Tzeddakah we don't expect praise or thanks. Tzeddakah is a way of sharing and caring for others and living the way God wants us to live. We are using actions to help improve the world. Tzeddakah is something all Jews are expected to do no matter how much or how little you have. You can always help someone else.

Some messages from our sources:

- “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap the edges of your fields. Also, do not gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not pick your vineyard bare or gather its fallen fruit. Leave them for the poor and for the stranger. I am Adonai, your God.” Leviticus 19:9-10
- “Open your hand to the poor and your neighbours in your land who are in need.” Deuteronomy 15:11
- “Be generous in giving tzeddakah, but beware of giving all you have.” Babylonian Talmud, Arachin 28a
- “Even a poor person who lives on tzeddakah should practice tzeddakah.” Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 7a
- “The blessing of tzeddakah is greater for the person who gives than for the person who receives.” Vayikra Rabbah 34:10
- “The person who gives only a little honestly earned money to tzeddakah is better than the person who gives lots of money that has been gained through fraud.” Kohelet Rabbah 4
- “The ultimate purpose of the laws of Tzeddakah is to nurture in people the quality of mercy and kindness and not just eliminate poverty. God could have accomplished that by providing for the needs of the poor without human intervention.” Sefer Hachinuch 66, Parashat Mishpatim
- “The highest form of kindness is to help a person to become self-supporting.” Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 10:7-12
- “Tzeddakah delivers (the individual) from death.” Proverbs 10:2
- “Hillel used to say: The more tzeddakah, the more shalom.” Pirke Avot 2:8

Activities: Each child should make his or her own Tzeddakah box to take home so that each week before lighting Shabbat candles the family can give some coins. At the end of the term all the kids can bring in their boxes and the class can give a class donation to one of the school Tzeddakah projects or to one they have chosen as a class.

- See if there is a parent in the class who could help organize other forms of tzeddakah like collecting clothing for World Jewish Relief or asylum seekers or cans of food for a local shelter.
- The children could make cards at home to be brought in on Friday to send to an old age home in the area.
- There are lots of Jewish stories that have to do with Tzeddakah that you can read to the children. Each week in their journals they could draw or write one way of fulfilling the mitzvah of tzeddakah and share it with the class.

Year 2: Autumn Term –

## **Veahvta Lereichah**

According to Rabbi Akiva “loving your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) is the most important mitzvah in the entire Torah. Two thousand years ago when a non-Jew asked Hillel to teach him the whole Torah while standing on one foot, Hillel answered: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the entire Torah – all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a) It is actually very difficult if not impossible to command someone to love. For this reason Maimonides concludes that many mitzvot we are commanded to do are actually to help us to fulfil this one. Among these mitzvot are to visit the sick, comfort the mourner, help a bride and groom and dance at their wedding. Christianity also embraces this commandment second only to Loving God. There is lots of discussion as to whether these two mitzvot carry the same message or whether one focuses on the negative and one focuses on the positive. Nachmonides felt that it was more realistic to ask people to refrain from doing to others what is hateful to themselves. What do the children in your class think?

- What does what Hillel said “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour” mean to you? Can they give you some examples? Tell them that over the next half term when they are at home they should write in their journals examples of the behaviour that Hillel may have been talking about.
- Create a list of class or school rules based on this saying. The children should really think about the things they don’t like or hate and let everyone know what they are.
- How do we show our neighbours that we love them? How can neighbours be helped?
- Rabbi Hugo Gryn believed that part of knowing your neighbours, is being invited into their home and knowing and understanding how they live. Ask the children if they could make a video of their own home, which room they like the most and email it into the school and then each week watch a few videos of different kids in the class. This will show all the children in the class what each child values and likes. Tell the children that they should talk about a special room or place in the house.
- Try and set up a pen/email pal with another local primary school so that the children can get to know their neighbours.

- Ask the children to define who is a neighbour. Guide the discussion so that they expand their understanding to include all members of their community, Jewish and local as well as all people.
- Make a mural by asking the children to think about what the commandment means and at home to draw or paint what they feel.

Year 2: Winter Term

## Purim

This term should focus on the mitzvot of Purim. Purim takes place during this term and there is a lot to talk about. There are four mitzvot associated with Purim; reading the megillah, having a festive meal, mishloach manot which are gifts for your friends and family and matanot la'evyonim which are gifts for the poor. Because we will celebrate Purim during this term the story will probably be covered elsewhere in the curriculum. Purim itself this year is on the evening of the 7 March and the 8 March. On Friday the 8 March you could fulfil the Mitzvah of a seudah, a festive meal by asking each student to bring in their favourite food for a class party. The mitzvot we will focus on are those of matanot la' evyonim and mishoach manot. Both these mitzvot appear in the end of the Megillah and emphasize the understanding that we can never truly celebrate if others are in need. This term should focus on how we celebrate and enjoy ourselves and our lives and how we can help to ensure that others are happy as well. Although Purim is in the middle of the term, the mitzvah of helping the poor can continue beyond the holiday itself.

- In the beginning of the term see what they remember about the Purim story. Ask them to write the story as much as they can remember in their journals and if they want they can do it as a comic strip.
- Talk about the story and how the different characters felt at different points in the story. How does Vashti feel when she is asked to do something she doesn't want to do? How does Esther feel when her Uncle/cousin puts her in the position of having to help the Jewish people? How does Achashverosh feel when he is betrayed by his close advisor? How does Haman feel throughout the story? Should we care or even talk about how he feels? He is the bad guy. Do we care about the bad guy? Each week ask the kids to draw or describe a different character from the story.
- Matanot LaEvionim- This means gifts for the needy- There are many ways you can fulfil this mitzvah as a class. You can collect canned goods for a local shelter, you can collect tzedakah money for a charity in Israel or in through the WJR in Eastern Europe. This is a discussion that you can have with your students and maybe have them come up with different ideas, present the ideas and vote as a

class on which way would be best. In order to collect the most you should devote a few weeks to this.

- Mishloach Manot- This is a really lovely way to let people know that you appreciate them. The students should bring in different kinds of food and then make containers or boxes for them which they can do over the course of a few weeks and then distribute them around the school. Make them for all the different people who work to make the school a special place like the caretakers, the secretaries, the head teachers, the classroom and playground assistants.
- The week after Purim is over ask the children how they felt giving the mishloach manot to the different people in the school. Think about whether recognizing and valuing all the different people who help them and who make their world an easier place to live would be a good idea. Make a list of who those people might be. At home in their journals, they should sit with their parents/carers and think about all the people who help them, the postman, the bin man, the people who work in the supermarket, the nurses and doctors at the local surgery, their parents or grandparents, babysitters. There are lots of people who ensure that they are safe and well cared for and it would be a mitzvah to recognise those people with a card or a small gift.

Year 2: Summer Term

## Leaving the Gleanings

The Torah talks about a number of mitzvot to allow the poor to benefit from the agricultural wealth of the farmers. “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of our vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger” (Leviticus 19:9-10). If you forget a sheaf you are not allowed to go back and get it but rather “it should go to the stranger, fatherless, the widow- in order that the Adonai your God may bless you and your undertakings” (Deuteronomy 24:19). Maimonides finds nine mitzvot from these verses. These mitzvot prevent us from becoming selfish. Peah means corner and says that you should not harvest the corners of your fields but should leave them to the poor. There was a whole formula based on the size of your field, the number of poor and the yield of the crop as to how much should be left for the poor and needy. The second provision is called Leket which means that what was dropped during the harvest stays on the ground for the poor to collect. This is described in the Book of Ruth when Ruth collects the gleanings from Boaz’s field. The third is the Shich’chah- what you have forgotten.

How can year 2 children living in a city perform this Mitzvah?

- Learning about the mitzvah is part of performing it. Tell the children about this mitzvah. Ask them how they think they could fulfil this commandment in their own lives.
- Think about planting a small class room vegetable garden that can be grown in pots near a window. Ask parents to supply a small vegetable plant in a pot and see what produce it grows over the course of the term. When the term is coming to an end and the plants have fruit or vegetables, donate part of what was grown to a local food bank. If you can’t do this in the classroom ask them to do this at home and keep a record of how their plants are doing in their journals. In the last week of term ask them all to bring in their harvest and make a salad for the class and save some for the poor.
- Your class could be in charge of a food drive across the infants. Have the students come up with ideas for posters and emails to send home to the school families.
- Encourage your students to talk to their families/carers about this project and to see if they have any ideas.

- During Shavuot which is the last week of May, tell the story of Ruth and Boaz, ask the students to make cut out dolls at home of the characters in the story and when they bring them in they can tell the story with a partner.
- Ask the students if they know what ingredients go into making a loaf of bread. Ask the students how these mitzvot would be fulfilled by the farmer who grows the ingredients needed for bread.  
Introduce the students to different charities that help feed the hungry and talk about the famines that are happening around the world and how famine can be avoided.

## Chidur pnai Zakan – Esteeming the Elderly

The Torah is multi-generational story that deals with the community as a whole and all ages are part of the whole. Jewish tradition as first seen in the Torah has always been sensitive to the needs of the elderly. There is an understanding of the importance of wisdom accrued through life long experiences as well as an appreciation of the physical difficulties associated with growing older. “Rise up before the aged and show respect to the elderly” Leviticus (19:32). This passage instructs us to treat the elderly with respect. Jewish tradition regards living a long life and dying at an old age a blessing. It is said to be a reward for following certain mitzvot throughout your life. When we say happy birthday, Jewish people sometimes add “ad meyah ve’esrim” until 120 which was how old Moses was when he died. A society is often judged on how it treats its elderly. Isaiah said that a corrupt generation is one where the young bully the old. The sages however were not blind to the hardships of growing old. In Ecclesiastes 12:1-3 we are reminded to “appreciate your vigour in the days of your youth, before those days of sorrow come and those years arrive of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them”. Jewish scholars throughout the ages recognised the importance of learning from the elderly but also the need to care for them. When families are not able to care for the elderly the Jewish community as a collective provides support and in the last 150 years has set up Jewish homes for the aged.

How can year 3 children fulfil this Mitzvah?

- Many children do not live near their grandparents or do not have regular contact. Ask the students how many live near their grandparents or great grandparents and have regular contact with them. Talk about what it is like to spend time with them. What do they do together? In their journals they should keep a diary of when they see their grandparents and observe how they are treated by other members of the family or when they go out how they are treated by strangers in the street. Have they ever seen anyone get up and give their seat to an older person on the tube or on the bus? Would they do this? Why is this important?
- See if there is a home for the elderly in the area that the students could create a contact with and write to and maybe visit. They could visit a Jewish home just before Hanukkah.
- Ask the students during the week to see if they could spend some time with an older person, either a grandparent or a friend who is elderly and talk with them about what it was like.
- Learn a song from an older person and teach a song to an older person.

- Come up with a list of ideas as to how we can help the elderly. What do they need?
- Read the story Grandma's Latkes by Malka Drucker which tells the story about a little girl and her grandmother and the Latkes they make together.

Year 3: Winter Term

## Tubishvat

Celebrating the birthday of the trees is the celebration of creation and is a reminder of our responsibility in nature. The mitzvah associated with Tubishvat is Baal Tashchit which is not destroying. If we look at the story of creation, there are two versions. In the first version we as human beings are masters of our universe and have the capability to use the resources available to us any way we would like. The world is our oyster to do with as we feel. The second version casts us as caretakers of our world where the responsibility is ours to make sure that the natural world is protected and cared for. The truth is that it is a fine balance between both but that we have a responsibility and an obligation to protect the natural world is becoming more evident as the world becomes more industrialized. The mitzvah not to destroy the environment comes in the second chapter of Genesis and is a very important mitzvah. This Mitzvah will be one that will ask the students to open their eyes and look at the world around them, to notice what types and how many types of trees are in their garden or what do they see on their way to school. This mitzvah will get them to understand why it is that we need trees in our local community and in different parts of the world. It will be a chance for the students to become advocates for London's natural world.

### How can year 3 students fulfil this Mitzvah?

The students will use their journals to record their observations of the trees they see in their world. During this term, trees may begin to bud and they could record the changes they see in the trees that decorate their world. They can also look at the food that they eat at home and how much of it grows on trees and where does that food come from? In London in the winter months, it is hard to find local produce that grows on trees. Why is it beneficial to eat local produce? Where is our food from? Why would it be problematic to import food from countries that are far away?

- Compare what you could grow in a local English garden to what you could grow in a biblical garden. If parents are supportive, maybe each child could plant a few seeds at home from a biblical garden and a few seeds from a local garden. At

the end of the term, they could bring in their plants to show the rest of the class and maybe create a garden display for the rest of the school.

- Think about the local school environment. How could you as a class improve the physical environment? Do children litter in the school playground? Maybe year 3 could be in charge of cleaning up the playground toward the end of the break and create a poster campaign about the importance of not littering. The posters can be done at home for homework. None of this work should take place in the classroom but the discussions.
- Tell the children about the different organisations both Jewish and secular that work to preserve our physical environment such as the London Wildlife Trust or Israel Nature Defence Fund. Lots of communities around the world are very concerned about the environment and have good ideas about how to improve the natural and physical world.
- Current events: Ask a few children each week to bring in an article from the news about the environment. At the end of the term all the articles could be put together in a collage to be displayed in the school.
- Learning about the fruit that is celebrated during Tubishvat.

## **Lo Titayn Michshol – Do not put a stumbling block in front of the blind**

This has been interpreted by the Rabbis to mean not only one who is physically blind, but one who is blind to what is going on. The Rabbis further interpreted this to mean not to misrepresent or create a situation or anger that may provoke another to sin. We must be careful not create grounds where others may sin or do things wrong. This Mitzvah makes it necessary to take action and not sit passively by. Everyone in society is responsible for what is going on in the world and we are commanded to take a stand to make sure that our world is an equitable place and if it is not we should help to make it so. This mitzvah is really about the individual as only he or she knows whether acts were performed with good or bad intentions. However it is also about understanding how to help people with special needs and how to improve their lives rather than make them harder.

### **How does a child in year 3 perform this mitzvah?**

- This mitzvah is about awareness of how your own behaviour affects others as well as an awareness of how other people may have different needs that you never even think about.
- Sensitivity to people who cannot see. Ask the kids to think about what it must be like to be blind. Does anyone know someone who is blind? Can anyone think of a famous person who is blind? What must it be like to go to the playground or on the bus or the tube if you cannot see? How can life be improved for those who are blind? What can our class do for those who are blind?
- Sensitivity to those who are deaf. Does anyone know anyone who is deaf? Did anyone have a hearing problem when they were little? If you can, teach some basic Jewish signs that you can find in the Second Jewish Catalogue. You can also teach the sign for the Shma.
- In their Mitzvah journals they should record different ways that society helps people with disabilities, like signing for TV programmes or Braille at public spaces or the sounds you hear at Zebra Crossings. They should also find out from their families whether anyone in their families has special needs and how they have been helped.
- Tell the following story and see what the kids think.  
Nathan has two toy cars. One broke and he repaired it with glue. His friend Josh comes over to play and really likes the cars and offers to buy one. Nathan thinks for a moment and says sure and sells the one he repaired for 50 pence. Nathan never mentions that it had been broken. Ask the students if they think this is fair, Should Nathan have told Josh about the repair? Think of it from both sides.

Who is responsible if they car breaks again. Did Nathan put a stumbling block in front of Josh? (from Teaching Mitzvot)

- Not insulting the deaf has also been interpreted to mean do not insult anyone. What does it feel like to be insulted? Have each child draw a happy face on one side of a piece of paper and a sad face on the other side. Read out the following statements and ask them to hold up either the smiley face or the sad face. A. Your clothes are ugly. B. I like your smile. C. You jump rope really well. D. You read too slowly. E. Do you always do badly at school? F. I'm glad you are my friend. It is just as easy to make people feel good as it is to make them feel bad and it is actually a mitzvah to help people to feel good about themselves. In their journals they should write how they have tried hard to fulfil this Mitzvah.

## Hachnasat Orchim - Welcoming Guests

Hachnasat Orchim, welcoming guests or strangers, is one of the earliest mitzvot in the bible. Abraham is the first person to perform this Mitzvah when he washed the feet and offered food and drink to the visitors to his tent who turned out to be God's angels. Rebecca also performs this mitzvah when she offers Eliezer's camels water and shelter when they meet at the well. Yitro, Moses' father-in-law offers Moses hospitality when he is escaping his fate in Egypt. These biblical stories are the basis for the Jewish understanding of hospitality. The Rabbis came up with rules about how to treat guests and even that enough food should be prepared to welcome extra people at your table and that there should always be room for someone to sleep in your house. Making Kiddush in Synagogue on Friday evening and Shabbat morning was a way of ensuring that visitors heard the Kiddush and were welcome in the community. This was also the case with the communal succah.

### How can children in year 4 perform this Mitzvah?

There are many ways that this mitzvah can be performed. This is a good opportunity to see if the parents could help organize a class Friday night dinner or Shabbat Lunch. It is an opportunity for families to invite other families over for a meal. Talk with the kids about whether or not they have guests over for a meal. How often does this happen? Do they only have people they know or do they sometimes invite people round who they don't know. Would they like to invite a friend from their class round for a meal? What would that feel like?

- Discuss Abraham and why he did what he did. Ask the kids at home to make a desert themed picture with a tent with a door on each side. Why do they think that welcoming strangers was so important to Abraham? What is it like in the desert? What was it like before air conditioning or fans?
- Talk about the story of Rebecca. What made her so special? She cared for animals in the same way that she cared for the welfare of people. Ask them if they notice their parents helping others by welcoming them into their homes. Is this something that they see in their communities? How would you fulfil this mitzvah? What could each of them do to make hospitality a mitzvah that is important in their families?
- They could work to make their classroom a welcoming environment. They could make a Bruchim Habaim (welcome) sign for the classroom.

- Think about how they can work to make the school a welcoming environment. Maybe they could make welcome cards for new families who joined the school this year.
- Talk about what it feels like to be somewhere new and the difference it makes when someone welcomes you or when you are left standing on your own.

Year 4 Winter Term –

## Rosh Chodesh

Rosh Chodesh celebrates the start of each new month in the Jewish calendar. It is a mitzvah to mark this as it is counted as a half-holiday. In biblical times the new month was declared when two witnesses reported it to the Sanhedrin court in Jerusalem. Marking the months and the years were very important in Biblical times. In fact there were three new years in biblical times. Tishvat New Year of the trees, 1 Nisan the New Year for Kings, and the 15 Elul which is a harvest new year. The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar and marks the changes in the moon in its cycle around the earth which lasts approximately 29 and half days.

### How does a kid in year 4 follow this Mitzvah?

This one requires a bit of creativity. Because it is in the winter, this is a perfect time on evenings that are not cloudy, for the children to go outside and draw in their journals what the moon looks like on each night. On Rosh Chodesh or the week of Rosh Chodesh, have the children read a poem from the Hallel service which is read on the morning of Rosh Chodesh.

- During each month one week should focus on the moon, the change in shape and something to do with the moon
- One week could focus on Jewish holidays that occur in that month
- Because Rosh Chodesh was traditionally a holiday that is associated with women, one week could focus on helping your Mum. Ask them at the beginning of the week what they could do this week that would help their Mum and they should keep a record of it in their journals.
- The last week which should be introducing the new month they should think about what they could do in the next month to help their parents around the house and bring in the list. On the day that is Rosh Chodesh should be a day of celebration.

Year 4 Summer Term:

## **Kashrut and Birkat Hamazon**

This term should focus on the time we spend at the table as families. Children and their families should spend this term thinking about meal times, what is eaten and how it is appreciated. In many households in the UK food is taken for granted and is an expectation. An important part of Jewish life is meal time, preparation of the meal and thanking God for our good fortune for all we have. Birkat Hamazon is the blessing that we say after we have finished eating. This mitzvah is one which asks us to thank God for the food we have just eaten but also reminds us that God provides for us in many ways and after each meal we thank God for that. Kashrut is a mitzvah that requires Jews to think before they eat or shop. There is certain vocabulary that is associated with Kashrut:

Kosher- fit or proper and refers to food that can be eaten according the dietary laws. It can be used as a verb meaning to make something kosher and is usually used with regard to utensils or crockery.

Trayf- is something that is not kosher.

Milchik- is something that is made with milk products.

Fleishik- is something that is made with meat, poultry or any by-product of meat.

Parve- is something that contains neither meat products nor milk products and can be used with either.

Shechitah – is the term for proper slaughtering of animals and a Shochet is the slaughterer.

There are lots of rules and regulations regarding keeping kosher, not eating meat and milk together and waiting after you have eaten meat before you can eat milk. What animals and fish you can eat as prescribed by the Torah and how an animal is slaughtered. The reasons to keep kosher are constantly debated. The Torah implies that Kashrut is a way of staying holy. Some say it is a way of keeping Jews separate from other people so that the Jewish identity is maintained. Maimonides even says that the food that is deemed unkosher is unwholesome. Thinking about what we put in our mouths is what separates us from animals. While some search for meaning, the more traditional accept it as a commandment from God that needs no explanation.

## How does a year 4 kid perform this mitzvah?

This unit could begin by asking the children if they know what it means to keep Kosher? Do they keep kosher or do they know anyone who does? Food is a very important part of culture. When we go on holiday one of the things we remember most is the different foods that we eat. Being Jewish also is defined by the food we eat and how we prepare it, as well as how we give thanks. This is a great opportunity for the kids to really investigate the foods they eat and to experiment with the idea of Kashrut. In their journals they should be aware of the meals they eat at home and see if their families would like to try preparing or eating one Kosher meal a week if they don't keep kosher. If they do, then this is a time for the kids to talk to their parents about why they keep kosher.

- How do we express our thanks? We hear a lot in the news about famines around the world. What would it feel like to not know whether you will have enough food to eat when you get home from school?
- Look at the blessings in Birkat Hamazon. What do we thank God for? When they eat meals at home, they should ask their parents what they are thankful for and record it in their journals.
- Talk about the laws of Kashrut. Do they think that it is hard to keep kosher? If it is, what is the hardest part?
- See if they can come up with a list of kosher types of meat or fish. What do they think about not being able to eat certain things? Do they respect people who can keep these rules or do they think they are not important. If there is a parent or grandparent who keeps kosher maybe they can come in and discuss why they keep kosher.
- When immigrants move to a new country sometimes they want to fit and sometimes they work really hard to preserve their identity. Jewish immigrants used to live in one part of London because that is where their community was and that is where they could buy kosher food. It helped to keep the community together. Is this positive or negative?
- Each week come up with a question or a statement about kashrut that the kids should bring home to discuss with their parents. The next week ask kids to volunteer to read out their answers.

Year 5: Autumn term

## Refraining from Gossip Lashon Hara

This mitzvah is probably one of the hardest to keep, but can also be one of the most important to understand in terms of creating a peaceful community. The Talmud says that three people are hurt by gossip, the speaker, the listener, and the one who is spoken about. The Torah is full of examples of gossip and how gossip is detrimental. What is interesting is that the punishments because of gossiping are very severe, but you do not always see the harm done by gossiping to the person telling the tale. Language defines our world and influences our understanding of the community. It can be poison if used in the wrong way. Talmudic wisdom states that “Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not so many as have fallen by the tongue.” (Ecclesiasticus 28:18) The dangers of gossip can lead cities to fall in war and destruction to result from bad feelings. To counteract the people who gossip or inform on others, an additional blessing was added to the Amidah which says “slanderers shall not have hope, and may all who do evil perish in an instant...” Maimonides lists a number of examples of Lashon Hara in his book of Jewish Law: Kitzur Shulchan Oruch.

### How can a kid in year 5 perform this Mitzvah?

You could ask how can anyone perform this mitzvah? It is quite a hard one. They will have a term to really think about what they say in the playground and at home and how difficult it can be to refrain from gossiping. In their journals they should write about whether they are finding this Mitzvah difficult or easy. Some of the things Maimonides considers gossip is saying that a person did a mean thing, or saying I have heard this or that about someone. Praising a person in front of his or her enemies is also considered Lashon Hara because the enemy might want to slander him in response.

- This mitzvah could be introduced by playing Chinese Whispers. What happens when information changes during the game? What happens in real life when people tell stories about each other.
- Tell the story about Joseph reporting to his father about his brothers. Although he is telling the truth, it does not help his relationship with his brothers. Ask them to think about what a tattle tale is?
- Tell the story about the man who went to the Rabbi to understand why it is wrong to gossip. The Rabbi tells him to go home and cut open a feather pillow and empty the pillow into the street. He does this and returns to the Rabbi. The Rabbi then tells him to go back outside and collect up all the feathers. The man says that this would be impossible. The Rabbi then says that when you gossip

you can never retrieve your words. They are scattered and you have no idea where they ended up.

The journal entries should reflect thinking about what it means to speak about other people behind their backs and what it feels like when others talk about you.

Year 5: Winter Term

## **Kibbud Av Ve Em: Honouring your father and mother**

This mitzvah is one of the Ten Commandments and is number five. This is of interest because the first five commandments are considered Ben Adam Lamakom, between God and the person. But this mitzvah is about respecting your parents and it seems that it should be a mitzvah that is about your relationship with other people. The reason it is in the first five is that it acts as a transition between the two types of mitzvot. When you honour your parents you are also honouring God who plays an important part in all creation. This is one of the most important mitzvot according to Jewish commentary. One who honours one's parents is thought to be deserving of the highest respect. Another midrash states that honouring ones parents includes "providing them with food and drink, clothes and warmth, and guiding their footsteps when they are old and frail." Studying Torah and being a good person by doing good deeds is another way to honour your parents. To truly honour your parents, you should not sit in their chair, contradict their words or speak in their place. This mitzvah applies to anyone who is taking care of you as a parent would, be that step parents, adopted parents or foster parents.

### **How can a kid in year 5 observe this mitzvah?**

- This mitzvah is harder than it looks. However if you get in the habit of observing it at a relatively young age then it may bode well for future family relationships. This is a great opportunity for the kids in the class to get to know each other and a bit about each other's parents. Discuss what is special about being a parent and what makes someone a parent.
- As a class create a description of the ideal parent. Evaluate the list. Are there things on the list that their parent or carer does? Are these things that their parents or carers would agree to? If their parents were making the list, what would be on it? Ask them to talk to their parents/carers about this and see if they can come up with a joint list.
- Ask the kids to bring in pictures of their parents and each week.
- In their journals each week they should write down one way they helped their parents or carers and showed them respect.

- At the end of the term, they should look back in their journals and see whether the way they treat their parents has changed. When they show their parents respect, how do they feel?
- Toward the end of the term, they should choose some of the comments from their journal to include in a gift to their parents. On the last day of term there could be a year group assembly where each child presents the gift (a letter, poem, collage) to their parents.

Year 5: Summer Term

## Shavuot

This will be the ritual Mitzvah for this year group. It ties in with the other mitzvot they have studied this year. Shavuot celebrates receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, as well as a harvest festival and welcoming strangers into our community. The story of Ruth which is read on this holiday tells the story of someone who really understood the Mitzvah of kibbud Av Ve Em and also suffered from the gossip of others. This holiday and learning about it will bring the two previous mitzvot together. In preparation for this holiday the kids should focus on the importance of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. They will review the bible stories and think about the lessons they learn from the different stories. Shavuot takes place on Sunday 27 May this year which is just before schools break up for half-term. There are mitzvot associated with the holiday of Shavuot which are learning Torah, leaving a corner of your field for the poor to collect their own food and eating dairy products like cheese cake and cheese blintzes.

### **How can a year 5 kid fulfil this mitzvah?**

This holiday is not as well known as other Jewish holidays. This may be because it does not have a meal associated with it. It is a holiday that focuses on the intellectual side of Judaism, the study of Torah. It can also be seen as a holiday that celebrates the care that we give to the poor and the helpless. Because Ruth chose to follow Naomi, her mother-in-law, and to adopt her customs and traditions and basically become Jewish, we can use this holiday to understand how we treat people who are different from us. We can learn from Naomi's example and from the fact that it is included as one of the most important stories in the Bible. In order to fulfil this mitzvah the kids should be encouraged to learn something new over this term preferably to do with Torah but we could read it as celebrating the joy of learning. The weekly journal should focus on learning something together with their parents or carers.

- At the beginning of the term start the discussion by seeing how many stories from the Torah the kids know. Do they really know all the facts about the stories. Sometimes stories in the Torah are quite short but the Rabbis have written drashs or commentaries that fill in the gaps. Have each kid choose a story from the Torah and write the story down in their journals. They should then read the story in the Torah and compare the two. Are there details in their stories that do not appear in the original text? This may be because they have been told the story with the drash. Ask the kids to look at the story again and to come up with their own drash. What was life like for Moses' sister after he was sent away in the basket? Why did Rachel steal the idol from her father's house? The student should come up with the answer. This should be done at home with their parents/cares.
- As the holiday approaches in the weeks in May talk about the idea of harvest. What happens to people in farming areas when their crops fail? Who should help them? Ask the kids to research an area of the world and find out what happens to farmers who have a hard year. How can we help farmers in other parts of the world? One way is by purchasing fair trade products which support all sorts of farmers. When they go shopping with their parents ask them to look for a fair trade label and record all the different products that are fair trade.
- After half-term think about how their classroom might resemble a field. It is a place where work is produced and displayed. It is a place where their knowledge is fed and nurtured so that at the end of the year they blossom with new ideas. How can they leave a corner of their field of knowledge to those less fortunate than themselves? This could be done by raising money for a charity that supports education for kids from deprived countries or backgrounds. This could be done by collecting books they don't read anymore for a school in deprived neighbourhood. Ask the kids to come up with ideas as well and finish the year with a tzeddakah project called The Corner of Year 5's Field of Knowledge.

## Year 6 Autumn Term

### Bikkur Cholim Visiting the Sick

This Mitzvah originates from the story of Abraham's circumcision where the implication is that God visited Abraham when he was ill following his circumcision. The Rabbis in the Talmud say that because God visited Abraham when he was ill so we must visit the sick. It is considered a very important Mitzvah and Rabbi Akiva felt that anyone who visits the sick helps them to recover. It is such an important mitzvah that there are specific instructions so that visits are helpful and not burdensome. You should not visit one who is sick at the beginning of the day when they are more likely to be feeling well or at the end of the day when they are feeling more ill. You should not give the person false hope or reason to despair. We visit the sick to look after their needs as well as to offer them prayers. There are special prayers said in synagogue for congregants who know that someone is ill. There are also special prayers which we say at the bedside.

How can a kid in year 6 fulfil this mitzvah?

This mitzvah is very important but is also hard to fulfil at a young age. Start by talking to the group about the idea around this mitzvah. Do they think it is an important mitzvah? If yes why? If not why not? How do they think this mitzvah can be fulfilled? Make a list of ideas. Sometimes parents or carers become ill, usually for a short time but sometimes they can become ill for an extended period of time. Now that you are in year six, is there something that you could do to help out around the house? Sometimes grandparents become ill quite suddenly. This is scary but it is important to understand that they need support and love just as the kids would need if they were ill.

- Find out if there is someone from the school community who could use some cheering up if they are sick. Ask the kids to make a get well card at home and to bring it in. They could also in groups make paper flowers to give to a local Rabbi who visits congregants who are in hospital.
- Ask the kids to look on the internet to find out facts or data about how visiting the sick helps them recover.
- Ask the kids to interview someone they know who works in the medical profession or who visits people who are sick or their parents to find out what it is like to visit someone who is sick in hospital or sick at home.

- For Hanukkah ask each child to bring in something to put into a holiday box that will be delivered to Jewish patients at a local hospital or ask a rabbi to deliver them to congregants who are in hospital.
- Raise money for a local children's hospital to buy toys or games or even an ipad!
- Ask if anyone in the class has ever been in hospital and if so what made the situation better. Did lots of visitors come?

Year 6: Winter Term

## **Pesach - Passover**

This holiday can take quite a while to prepare for. There is so much to learn and to know that a term is almost not enough time. The mitzvot around Pesach include what we eat, what we say, how we cook and what we prepare. It is also about telling the story of leaving Egypt. This happens at the Passover Seder which takes place on Erev Pesach (The evening before Pesach) and in many traditional communities outside of Israel, the second night as well. Lots of communities and schools hold model seders or teaching seders at different times. The Haggadah (the book we read at the Seder) tells us that even if we are wise, knowledgeable, elders in the community, we are still obligated to tell the story of leaving Egypt. The ritual of telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt is described in the haggadah itself. The story in the hagaddah is the story of the Jewish people but there is also a universal message for all peoples who are oppressed and who yearn to be free.

What we eat on Passover is also a central mitzvah. Matzah is the bread of slavery and to observe this mitzvah Jews eat it for eight days and refrain from eating Chametz (leavened food products made from wheat, barley, spelt, oats or rye). There are many rules around what you can and cannot eat on Passover and also around cleaning your house for Passover. In traditional homes preparation for Passover begins right after Purim ends. Although much of the holiday is explained in the haggadah, children would benefit from a guide to the haggadah. The Mitzvah project for this term is to help the children create a guide for themselves to the seder. Much of this work will be done at home and will give them something to bring to their seders.

How do we do this?

The topic will be introduced at the beginning of the winter term and the first question for this Mitzvah project is how do we celebrate Passover? Part of the Mitzvah for Passover is to fully understand the holiday and why we do what we do. Do a free association activity with the class with all the ideas that pop into their heads when they think about Passover. There are fifteen steps to the seder. See if they can name all

those steps. They are listed in the table of contents of the haggadah. Each week the kids should be instructed to look at a different step of the haggadah and to talk with their parents about what it means and how we do it. If the kids don't own a haggadah they can find a hagaddah online. The idea of the seder is to understand one of the most important narratives of the Jewish people. At home they should take a sheet of A4 paper and look at the prayer in the step or a line from the story and they should write their own definition or commentary. Each week they should bring in what they have completed and a few volunteers can present what they have done to the class.

Year 6 Summer Term:

## **Talmud Torah, the Study of Torah**

The Torah is the glue that binds the Jewish people together. Although it is referred to as a book, the Torah is more than just one book. It refers to all of Jewish sacred text and learning. The study of Torah is not just study for the sake of study but is to help us to live a moral life. The Rabbis of the Talmud state “These are the things for which a person enjoys the dividends in this world while the principle remains for the person to enjoy in the world-to-come. They are: honouring parents, deeds of loving kindness, making peace between one person and another, but the study of Torah is equal to all” (Shabbat 127a). There are many examples in our sources of the importance of the study of Torah from making your home a regular meeting place for scholars (Pirke Avot 1:4) to the importance of making time to study rather than saying that I will study when I have the time (Pirke Avot 2:5).

There is a lot to think about when thinking about the importance of the study of Torah.

How does the Torah hold up the world?

Studying Torah is said to make people happy. What about those who choose not to study Torah?

It is said that there will be much reward for the study of Torah? Do you think that the reward is the study itself?

How can we as a class fulfil this Mitzvah?

There are many opportunities to fulfil this mitzvah. Each week the students should be given a task that requires them to open a Jewish book or a Jewish website. Below is a list of ten questions that could be used.

1. Look in the Torah and find mention of a tree or the fruit of a tree. Write down in your journals where the passage was found and ask them to think about why the Torah is compared to a tree of life.
2. It is said that studying Torah will help us lead a moral life. Find one story in the Torah that makes you think about what it means to lead a moral life.
3. What is your favourite story from the Torah? Write your own version of this story.
4. There are a few stories about siblings in the Torah. Find one story with siblings and write down a lesson you can learn from that story

5. The study of Torah includes Torah Be Al Peh, which refers to the oral law. The oral law was written down and in a set of books called the Mishnah. These books list many laws we need to follow. Find one law from the Mishnah to present to the class.
6. Find out information about Rabbi Akiva and what he contributed to Jewish Study.
7. Find out information about Rashi and what he contributed to Jewish Study.
8. Find out information about Rambam and what he contributed to Jewish Study.
9. Find out information about Rabbi Yosef Caro and what he contributed to Jewish Study.
10. Discuss this week's Parasha, portion, in the Torah with a teacher or a parent. Is there one message in the Parasha that is meaningful to you.