

The Mifgash

The *mifgash* (מִפְגָּשׁ) - meeting or gathering) is a 20-30 minute weekly synchronous session with the *k'vutzah* ("group"), comprised of teacher and learners, plus any teaching assistants (*madrichim*). During each *mifgash*, there is opportunity to: check-in with the students; build community; celebrate and share some of the activities/challenges the students accomplished the previous week; and, introduce new content for the upcoming week. Each *mifgash* follows the same format to create a sense of consistency and routine:

- **Greetings/check-in (3 minutes)**

These are hellos to every individual as they enter the meeting and a quick check-in or activity.

Examples include:

- Pass the greeting – Call on someone and ask how they are feeling today and they call on another person in the group.
- Finding each other – Everyone is asked to reach to the people on either side of them and then above and below.
- Etc.

- **Reflection/Community Building (4-7 minutes)**

This is a reminder of what happened the last session and the activity or challenge that children worked on. The Flipgrid uploads are referenced and 2-3 children's postings are spotlighted each week (over the course of a number of weeks, everyone will have a chance to be in the spotlight). The teacher might also do a 3-4 minute community-building activity that fits the theme.

- **New Content (15 minutes)**

This week's learning is introduced and the main activity is accomplished together.

- **Launching At-Home Learning (5 minutes)**

The lower elementary and upper elementary learners are introduced to their activities or challenges for the upcoming week. Ideally, these are done in breakout rooms so that each age group is offered a focused (and exciting) introduction and explanation of their task. A teen assistant, prepped for the task, could meet with one group and the teacher with another.

That said, if the entire educational program meets as a whole and then *k'vutzot* or classes are divided into breakout rooms, it will be impossible for a *k'vutzah* to use the breakout rooms for this "launch." Zoom offers only one layer of breakout rooms.

If you do not have the option of breakout rooms, you may make modifications to how you handle the lesson. For example, consider asking any children working with the upper elementary challenges to take a few minute break while you orient the younger learners to this week's activity box instructions; however, the older children should stay in earshot. Introduce the activity box to the lower elementary age children, then send them off. Call back the older children and launch their learning for the week. Note that this option will increase the launch to 10 minutes time.

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Follow-Up – Whether or not teachers will be scheduling call-in/“Ask Me” times during the week, children should receive work-reminders and additional resources (links to books online with complementary themes, songs, etc.). Parents should be sent or linked to the weekly Family Schmooze, designed for casual conversation around the dinner table, while in the car or any other appropriate time.

Session 1: What is hesed, really?

The focus:

Learners learn the difference between the general concept of “kindness” and the Hebrew word hesed.

Teacher preparation:

Have ready the three stories from the Torah (in the curriculum, below).

FOR LAUNCHING AT-HOME LEARNING:

- Open on your computer (available on the *La-bri'ut* website)
 - Lower Elementary Box Instructions Video
 - Upper Elementary Challenge Video

PREPARATION NOTE REGARDING WEEK #3 – A visitor needs to be invited to the third *mifgash*, someone who can share stories of hesed from within the congregation or educational program. See Session 3's write up for details.

The session:

1) GREETINGS/CHECK-IN (3 min)

Teacher's choice

2) REFLECTION/COMMUNITY-BUILDING (7 min)

OPTION: Play the “The Clapping Game” – This is a great activity for a *madrich* or *madrichah* to lead. Tell the children that you are going to get a clapping pattern going with them. Everyone should join in – but they should do the pattern softly enough that they can hear your voice (or that of a teen) over the claps. Then, explain that you will ask a question and when anyone has an answer to the question, they should stop their rhythm and raise their hands. When a few people have their hands up, raise your own hands as a signal that everyone must stop and listen.

Practice the game by teaching a simple hand clapping pattern to the children (e.g., two pats on one's thighs and a clap) and start the rhythm going. Ask a question like, “Who has a pet?” When a few have their hands up, raise your hands and stop the rhythm. Call on 2-3 of the children to tell the name of ONE animal they have and its name. Resume the pattern and ask something like, “Who can name a Jewish holiday with great food?” Again, raise your hands and ask 2-3 children to offer their answers.”

Teach a new clapping pattern and practice it. Then ask the question, “Since the last time we were together, who saw someone be kind to another person?” and follow the instructions as with the first pattern.

Continue with the new clapping pattern and ask, “Who did something kind for another person in the last couple of days?”

End with everyone applauding for the great rhythm and great answers!

OPTION: Teacher's choice

3) NEW CONTENT (15 min)

a) DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN GENERAL KINDNESS AND HESED:

- i) Explain that in English we talk about kindness. In Hebrew there is a very special word called hesed which is generally translated as kindness, but it has a twist to its meaning. There are three stories you (or a *madrich/madrichah*) want to tell them from the Torah that each illustrate hesed. Their challenge is to figure out how hesed is different from kindness.

(1) Genesis 18:1-8 (with some slight shifts in the translation) –

Abraham was sitting at the opening to his tent on a very hot day. He wasn't feeling well, but when he saw three men near his tent, he ran to them. Abraham bowed respectfully and asked them to stop and rest.

He said, "Let me bring you a little water along with a piece of bread. I'll wash your dusty feet while you sit under the shade of the nearby tree."

When the men agreed, Abraham rushed to his wife Sarah and said, "Hurry – get some of the best flour we have and bake some cakes." Then, he cooked some meat and brought that, along with something to drink, to the three men and served them this feast of food.

Your challenge as teacher is not to give a definition of hesed – *accept children's responses to the question you are about to ask them. Feel free to probe for clarity, but do not tell them if they are right or wrong until after the third story is told.*

Abraham and Sarah showed hesed that day with the three men. What do learners think hesed means based on this story?

(2) Genesis 24:1-20 (an abridged version with some shifts in the translation) –

When Abraham was much older and his son, Isaac, was of an age to be married, Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son. The servant was told to return to the country where Abraham was born, where he had relatives, and find a wife for Isaac who would come to live where Abraham, Sarah and Isaac now lived.

The servant took 10 camels with him, each loaded up with gifts for the family of the woman who might marry Isaac. When he arrived at the city of Nahor, the servant made the ten camels kneel down by the water well outside the city.

Among the women getting water at the well for their families was Rebecca. The servant ran up to her and asked if she would give him water to drink. She lowered her water jar for him to drink and when he had enough she said, "I will also pull up enough water for all 10 camels, until they have had enough to drink."

Remember not to give a definition of hesed – accept children’s responses to the question you are about to ask them. Feel free to probe for clarity, but do not tell them if they are right or wrong until after the third story is told.

Rebecca showed hesed that day when she not only gave water to the servant, but also to ten very large and thirsty camels. What do they think hesed means based on this story?

(3) Exodus 18:1-27 (an abridged version with some shifts in translation)

Jethro (whose name in Hebrew is Yitro) was Moses’ father-in-law, the father of Moses’ wife. Yitro decided to visit Moses at the foot of Mt. Sinai because he had heard stories of how God helped the people of Israel escape Egypt.

Moses went out to greet Yitro and then shared with him the story of all that had happened in Egypt and how God saved the people.

The next day, Yitro walked around the very large camp of the Israelites. He saw that Moses sat as a judge, but there was a very long line of people waiting to talk to him.

Yitro asked Moses, “Why do you sit all alone while people have to wait to talk to you? There are so many people waiting, that you have to sit ALL day long!”

Moses answered, “When people have an argument, they come to me and I decide between one person and another based on God’s laws and teachings.”

But Yitro looked at Moses and kindly said, “This job is too big for one person - you will wear yourself out! May I give you advice? Find other wise people who understand God’s teachings and divide the work up. Let them take the easier cases, but you save yourself for the hardest of all.”

Moses did as Yitro had suggested and became a better, less tired leader.

Remember to accept children’s responses to the question you are about to ask them. Feel free to probe for clarity.

Yitro came just to visit, but ended up helping Moses. What do you think hesed means, based on this story?

By now you should be able to help them make some comparisons among the stories and hopefully come to understand that when someone acts with hesed they go out of their way to do more than what is expected of them. In the case of Yitro, he came just to visit, but ended up helping Moses.

b) A BONUS STORY

You might want to share the story told by Alan Morinis on the first page of this module. It offers a very clear image of hesed in action.

c) QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- i) What is the difference between just being kind to someone and doing hesed?
- ii) If learners wanted to find acts of hesed this week, what might they look for?

4) LAUNCHING AT-HOME LEARNING (5 min) – Ideally, this section is done in breakout rooms, one for the lower elementary learners and one for the upper elementary ones. *Madrichim* may be tapped to help lead one of these conversations. Please read the more detailed information on page seven for “Launching At-Home Learning.”

- a) **Lower elementary** (those with the activity box) – This week, learners examine which actions are acts of hesed and which are not. Learners create their own Hesed Memory Game, by cutting out one set of the image cards, the four green “*Ken* (Hebrew for: yes), this is hesed” and four red, “*Lo* (Hebrew for: no) this is not hesed” cards.

First they match each image card to a green *ken*/yes or red *lo*/no card, explaining to someone why they made those matches. A photo of these matches, with a short explanation, get posted to Flipgrid.

Next they cut out the second set of image cards and play a three-card matching game. To play, they mix up all of the cards and lay them face down. Flip over three cards; if there are two matching images out of the three, the player keeps the two matching cards. If nothing matches, the player flips them back over. Play continues until all the cards have been matched. Learners are encouraged to post photos or a video on Flipgrid showing the game being played.

- b) **Upper elementary** (those with the video challenge) – Share the video that introduces the first at-home challenge or ask learners to watch on their own at home. If watching the video as a group, consider showing it all the way through, returning to one of the embedded questions (your choice) to discuss as a group for a few minutes. Then, using screen-share, introduce learners to the Hesed Challenge Card #1.

Make sure they see and understand the challenge of the week: Discover and collect family stories of hesed – from stories they already know or through conversation with family members. Then, they make a hesed tree to display the stories and examples – the tree may be 2D or 3D! After this week, the tree is needed for future challenges, so it needs to be saved. More detailed instructions are on the challenge card.

FAMILY SCHMOOZE: A PDF of the card is on the La'bri-ut website.

This is either an idea or behavior that parents can reinforce in the coming week, or a set of open-ended questions that families may discuss around the dinner table, in the car, or anywhere they are together. If there is more than one child in the family, the schmooze will bridge the learning and thinking between younger and older, older and younger.

This last module of the year focuses on hesed, which is often translated as loving kindness, but it is much more than that. While kindness is at the core of this term, it really means going above and beyond what is expected, or “radical kindness.” This story by Alan Morinis hits the definition on the head:

“I once heard Rabbi Abraham Yachnes clarify the extent of the stretch that is necessary to have an action qualify as hesed. He said that if you are walking down the street and someone is walking beside you carrying a large box, and you offer to help the person carry the box, that’s not hesed. You’d simply be a terrible person not to help someone in that situation. What counts as hesed is when you are walking the opposite way from someone carrying a burden and you turn around to help carry that load in the direction he or she is going. That’s hesed.”¹

Today the children heard three Torah stories that illustrate this nuance of “going above and beyond.” The first was of Abraham who greeted three strangers who stopped by his tent - he said he would get them water and some bread, but instead, fed them a rather full meal (Genesis 18:1-8). The second was the story of Rebecca at the well who was asked by Abraham’s servant to give him water, but she also offered to get water for 10 quite thirsty camels (Genesis 24:1-20). And the final was the hesed shown by Moses’s father-in-law Yitro (Jethro) who had come just to visit, but ending up offering a solution to the long lines of people waiting all day long to have a dispute settled by Moses (Exodus 18:1-27).

This week, keep an eye out for examples of hesed that occur in your family’s daily life. Just by saying, “wow, that was a wonderful hesed you did” will help bring this Jewish value to life for your child. If you still read to, or with, your child and an act of kindness comes up in the story, you might explore whether or not it is kindness (which is great!) or hesed (which offers an extra special quality). And, keep an eye out for the times when you might be able to nurture a kindness into an act of hesed.

At the next session, children will be asked to bring to the call something that represents hesed or kindness. It would be helpful if this week you help them give it some thought. The item could be something that they were given, something that shows kindness to others (perhaps an item in the recycling box as a kindness to the earth, a *tz’dakah* box whose contents will help others), something that shows the kindness the family does for each other (like a broom that represents a sweeping chore they do keep their home clean), or perhaps it is a book that is about kindness or hesed. They will have a minute to go and get this item at the next session; giving this advance thought will help.

¹ <http://jewishvalueseveryday.blogspot.com/2011/02/february-chesed-loving-kindness.html>

FOLLOW-UP DURING THE WEEK

- Immediately after the session send upper elementary children and parents a link to the challenge video so they may watch it again AND send lower elementary parents a link to the box instructions video to share with their child.
- Send a check-in note to parents; include the Family Schmooze page (link is on the *La-bri'ut* website). You might want to send them this video called, "Abraham's Tent: A Playful Jewish Explanation of Why this Bible Hero Matters." <https://youtu.be/LuZVq0Mmbxg>. Within, it tells the story about Abraham and the three visitors. But it also tells much more about Abraham that adults interested in expanding their Jewish understandings would appreciate.
- Remind students to share their work on Flipgrid ("I can't wait to see what you post!").
- Respond to children's postings
 - To encourage students for future sessions
 - To choose what to share in the spotlight section of the next session