

<b>Grade Level: Middle School</b>	<b>Lesson Topic:</b>
<b>Lesson Length: 1 Hour</b>	<b>PART 2 (C): MITZVAH SUPERHEROES: TZEDAKAH IN ACTION.</b>
<b>Lesson Authors: Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty</b>	<b>Date Created: 2007</b>

**Goal(s):**

- Have students decide what action they would like to take in response to their newfound knowledge on poverty.
- Create and execute a *Tzedakah* project.

**Suggested Learning Sequence:** Week six. Sixth out of six lessons.

**Objective(s):**

- Students will read “The Hands of G-d” by Rabbi Larry Kushner to help inspire ideas for project.
- Students will come up with three projects that span the levels of Maimonides’ Ladder (shared, partially anonymous, and anonymous).
- Students will vote and complete one of the *mitzvah* projects they wish to carry out.

**Equipment and Materials:**

- Journals
- Handout#10-Maimonides Ladder
- Handout #11 (students should have this handout in their journal)
- Handout #15 Goal Worksheet
- Handout #16 The Hands of God Article

**ACTIVITY**

**Warm Up (15 Min):**

**A. Directions: *Challah* Story**

1. Distribute handout #16 to the class.
2. Have teacher read aloud “The Hands of G-d” by Rabbi Larry Kushner.
3. **Class Discussion:**
  - i. What do you think this story means? What is its message?
  - ii. Does this story inspire you to help others? Why or why not?
  - iii. How can you apply this story to what you have been learning about poverty?
  - iv. Have students look over Handout #10 and decide what level *mitzvah* the story is.

## Planning Service (30 Min):

### B. Directions: *Mitzvah* Superheroes

This is the class' opportunity to come together and combine what they have learned during the past several weeks and use their own experience to help alleviate poverty.

1. Decide on a service project to help alleviate poverty in your community/environment.
2. Brainstorm on a chalk board. Write down all ideas students have.
  - i. Remind students to think of different *mitzvah* projects that span Maimonides' Ladder (shared, partially anonymous and anonymous.)
3. Out of all the *mitzvahs*, start narrowing down options till you reach 3 the majority of the class likes the most.
4. Vote on which *mitzvah* students want to complete.
5. Here are some samples of projects which your class can do in association with Met Council:

#### LIST OF VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- **Friendly Visiting:** (shared) Come brighten the life of a lonely senior through friendly visiting, delivery of food/toiletry packages, or holiday performances.
- **Item Drives:** (partially anonymous) Help collect supplies, toiletries, and toys for our clients in need.
- **Food Packaging:** (anonymous) Come to our warehouse and help package food into family sized packages.
- **Clothing Sorting:** (anonymous) Come to our warehouse and help sort clothes for our Machson Mobile, a converted recreational vehicle that serves as a mobile clothing store where children and adults can find new and lightly used clothing appropriate to the season, in their local neighborhoods.
- **Greeting Cards:** (partially anonymous) Design and write birthday, friendly greeting or holiday cards to lonely seniors.
- **Fundraise:** (partially anonymous) Have a read-a-thon, walk-a-thon or another type of fundraiser and donate the money to a chosen charity.
- **Be Creative:** (partially anonymous) Use your own talents and hand make items like challah covers, knit scarves and baby blankets or have the students feel free to come up with projects on their own that they wish to do to help alleviate poverty.

Please contact Met Council's Volunteer Coordinator, at 212-453-9619 or [volunteer@metcouncil.org](mailto:volunteer@metcouncil.org) for assistance in coordinating project.

Alternatively, students are also encouraged to discuss who around the synagogue or school may need help. Some possible recipients may include:

- The library may need books
- The janitor may need assistance straightening up the sanctuary
- The nursery school teacher may need help cleaning or preparing for an upcoming lesson

**Teacher Wrap Up (15 Min):**

**C. Conclusion and Journal Entry:**

1. Once an idea is agreed upon, the class must decide on how the project can be carried out.
2. It is up to the teacher and class to make a timeline, comprehensive list of goals and responsibilities for the mitzvah's completion.
3. Have students make a list on the board about how they think this mitzvah is going to make a difference and how they can help in the future.
  - i. Will it make a difference on a large or small scale?
  - ii. Whose lives will it potentially change?
  - iii. What other mitzvahs are you hoping to complete in the future?
  - iv. How can you make sure you follow through?

# Goal Worksheet

<b>Project Description:</b>	<b>Goal Date of Completion:</b>
<b>What is the first step?</b>	<b>Target Date:</b> <b>Completed Date:</b>
<b>What is the second major step?</b>	<b>Target Date:</b> <b>Completed Date:</b>
<b>What is the third major step?</b>	<b>Target Date:</b> <b>Completed Date:</b>
<b>Final details...</b>	<b>Target Date:</b> <b>Completed Date:</b>

## The Hands of God

By Rabbi Larry Kushner

The following story is told by my teacher, Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi:

A long time ago in the northern part of Israel, in the town of Safed, the richest man in town was sleeping, as usual, through Shabbat morning services. Every now and then he would almost wake up, trying to get comfortable on the hard wooden bench, and then sink back into a deep sleep. One morning he awoke just long enough to hear the Torah verses from Leviticus 24:5-6 in which G-d instructs the children of Israel to place twelve loaves of *challah* on a table in the ancient wilderness tabernacle.

When services ended, the wealthy man woke up, not realizing that all he had heard was the Torah reading about how G-d wanted twelve loaves of *challah*. He thought that G-d had come to him in his sleep and had asked him personally to bring twelve loaves of *challah* to G-d. The rich man felt honored that G-d should single him out, but he also felt a little foolish. Of all the things G-d could want from a person, twelve loaves of *challah* did not seem very important. But who was he to argue with G-d? He went home and baked the bread.

Upon returning to the synagogue, he decided that the only proper place for his holy gift was alongside the Torah scrolls in the ark. He carefully arranged his loaves and said to G-d, "Thank you for telling me what You want of me. Pleasing You makes me very happy." Then he left.

No sooner had he gone than the poorest Jew in town, the synagogue janitor, entered the sanctuary. All alone, he spoke to G-d. "O Lord, I am so poor. My family is starving; we have nothing to eat. Unless You perform a miracle for us, we will surely perish." Then as was his custom, he walked around the room to tidy it up. When he ascended to the bimah and opened the ark, there before him were twelve loaves of *challah*! "A miracle!" exclaimed the poor man. "I had no idea. You worked so quickly! Blessed are You, O G-d, who answers our prayers." Then he ran home to share the bread with his family.

Minutes later, the rich man returned to the sanctuary, curious to know whether or not -od ate the *challah*. Slowly he ascended the bimah, opened the ark, and saw that the *challah* were gone. "Oh, my G-d!" he shouted, "You really ate my *challah*! I thought you were teasing. This is wonderful. You can be sure that I'll bring another twelve loaves – with raisins in them too!"

The following week, the rich man brought a dozen loaves to the synagogue and again left them in the ark. Minutes later the poor man entered the synagogue. "G-d, I don't know how to say this, but I'm out of food again. Seven loaves we ate, four we sold and one we gave to charity. But now, nothing is left and, unless You do another miracle, we surely will starve." He approached the ark and slowly opened its doors. "Another miracle!" he cried "Twelve more loaves, and with raisins too! Thank You God. This is wonderful!"

The challah exchange became a weekly ritual that continued for many years. And, like most rituals that become routine, neither man gave it much thought. Then, one day, the rabbi, detained in the sanctuary longer than usual, watched the rich man place the dozen loaves in the ark and the poor man redeem them.

Handout #17  
The rabbi called the two men together and told them what they had been doing.

"I see," said the rich man sadly, "G-d doesn't really eat *challah*."

"I understand," said the poor man, "G-d hasn't been baking challah for me after all."

They both feared that now G-d would no longer be present in their lives.

Then the rabbi asked them to look at their hands. "Your hands," he said to the rich man, "are the hands of G-d giving food to the poor. And your hands," said the rabbi to the poor man, "also are the hands of G-d, receiving gifts from the rich. So you see, G-d can still be present in your lives. Continue baking and continue taking. Your hands are the hands of G-d."