Values Curriculum:
Shavuot/Mitzvot and God's Hands

OVERVIEW	This session explores the holiday of *Shavuot*, our spring harvest festival and our celebration of receiving the Torah. Using the ten commandments as the focal point, students learn about their role as "God's hands" through doing *mitzvot*.
OBJECTIVE	To understand what a *mitzvah* is and to identify the *mitzvot* we are or could be doing. To link doing *mitzvot* to receiving the Torah on the holiday of *Shavuot*.
VALUE(S)	*Doing Mitzvot (Commandments)*
STORY	"In God's Hands" by Lawrence Kushner and Gary Schmidt
MATERIALS	Ten Commandments drawing materials, *Mitzvah* line-up list, Hands of God supplies
AT HOME CHALLENGE	Students will bring home their "Hands of God" to remind them that the hands of God are their own. Families will make a *mitzvah* jar to help them pay attention to *mitzvot* in their everyday lives.

JewishLearningWorks
jewishlearning.works

Liora Brosbe, Senior Educator
liora@jewishlearning.works

Materials List

Activity One

- *Mitzvah* Line-Up List
- Rope, yarn, or tape for finish line

Activity Two

- Construction paper
- Pairs of scissors
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Gathering Activity

- Commandment cards (prepared on cardstock or index cards)
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Opening/Closing Circle

- Torah scroll (actual scroll or mini version)
- Book: "In God's Hands" by Lawrence Kushner and Gary Schmidt
- Big pad of paper and markers
- At Home Challenge Sheet

Gathering Activity: Drawing the Ten Commandments (15 Minutes)

Children will draw images for each of the Ten Commandments.

1. In advance, using the commandments provided at the end of this lesson, prepare the commandment cards by taping or gluing one commandment per card to card stock or index cards.
2. Gather the children around a table with the commandment cards.
3. Together with the children, read all of the cards.
4. Have each child choose one card to illustrate. If you have more than ten children, have some work in pairs or make more than one drawing of some commandments. If you have fewer than ten children, have some children do an additional commandment.
5. As children draw, make sure each one understands the commandment they have and check in with them about their drawing.

Opening Circle (10 Minutes)

Gather everyone into a circle, bringing their Shabbat mats with them, and begin with a melody, a niggun or a greeting song such as Hineh Ma Tov.

Tell about today's theme:

- Lay the commandments out in order.
- Invite each child to say something about their drawing and all children to ask if there is a commandment they don't understand.

- Today we are learning about *Shavuot*.
- What do we already know about *Shavuot*?
- *Shavuot* is: a spring harvest festival, a celebration of receiving the Torah (including the ten commandments), seven weeks after Passover, called the Feast of Weeks, celebrated by studying Torah (sometimes all night), eating foods made from dairy (like cheesecake, blintzes, and ice cream), reading the Book of Ruth, and wearing flower crowns.
- What do the ten commandments have to do with *Shavuot*?

Introduce today's Hebrew words — *Shavuot & Mitzvah*:

- Everybody raise one hand in front of you with all five fingers up and say, "Shah." Raise your other hand, put one finger up to make a total of six and say "Voo." Put one more finger up to make seven and say, "Oat." Put them all together for "Shah-Voo-Oat."
- *Shavuot* means weeks. It's the feast of weeks because it marks seven weeks after Passover.
- Everyone put one thumb up and say, "Mitz." Put the other thumb up and say, "Vah." Put them together and say "Mitz-vah."
- *Mitzvah* means commandment. More than one *mitzvah* are *mitzvot*. *Mitzvot* are actions the Torah commands us to do in order to make a happy, healthy world.

Story (20 Minutes)

Introduce the Story — "In God's Hands"

- Ask the children what a miracle is. Can they give any examples?
- Have they ever experienced a miracle?
- The story we're going to read is about two people, Jacob and David, who both experience a miracle. Let's find out how their miracle happens.

Read the Story. Ask some good Questions.

- **Check for Understanding**
  - ◊ What did Jacob put in the Torah ark? Why?
  - ◊ What did David pray for? How was his prayer answered?
  - ◊ What did the rabbi mean when he said Jacob's and David's hands were God's hands?
- **Get Curious**
  - ◊ What are kids wondering about the story?
  - ◊ Encourage kids to wonder about WHY something happened in the story, WHAT might happen next, or HOW someone did something.
  - ◊ Record these questions on the big pad of paper.

- These questions don't have to have answers—though kids are welcome to try and answer each other's questions.
- Have kids respond to each other's questions with "good question!" and a thumbs up.

- **Give one more Question to Ponder**
  - I'm wondering: When are your hands God's hands?

10 Minute Break

Activity One: *Mitzvah* Line-Up (20 Minutes)

In this activity, children will have the opportunity to sort what is a *mitzvah* and what is not a *mitzvah*.

Introduce the Activity:

In our story, Jacob's and David's hands became the hands of God through doing *mitzvot*. What *mitzvot* did Jacob and David do? In this game we are going to figure out which behaviors are *mitzvot* and which are not. Remember *mitzvot* are commandments from the Torah that help make a happy, healthy world. Let's play!

1. Play the game outside or in a room where there is plenty of space. Lay out a rope, yarn, or put a masking tape line on the floor to represent the finish line.
2. Have the kids stand in a row, shoulder to shoulder but with some space to move.
3. Explain that when you say a behavior that they think is a *mitzvah*, they take one jump forward. For an action that they believe is not a *mitzvah*, they take one jump back.
4. Call out an action from the table below.
5. The goal is for the group to make it to the *mitzvah* finish line together. Feel free to add some *mitzvah* commentary such as "Visiting the sick is a kind and generous thing to do because it makes another person feel better. Definitely a *mitzvah*!"
6. Along the way you can invite the children to share *mitzvot* they can think of and/or behaviors that are definitely not *mitzvot*.
7. You will need more *mitzvot* than not in order to get the children across the line.

Mitzvah

Cleaning your room

Speaking and acting politely

Showing respect to your parents

Sharing your toys

Caring for the Earth

Visiting someone who is sick

Being kind to animals

Giving clothing or shoes to someone who needs them

Lighting Shabbat candles

Celebrating a new baby

Not a *Mitzvah*

Hurting someone with your body

Making a mess and not cleaning it up

Answering NO! when a parent asks you to do something

Taking a toy home that is not yours

Ignoring a friend who needs your help

Saying a story is true when you know it isn't

Stepping on plants or flowers

Wasting food or water

Calling someone names

Taking someone else's turn

Activity Two: Hands of God (20 Minutes)

Children will make cut-outs of their own hands and commit to doing *mitzvot*, so that their hands will be the "hands of God."

Introduce the activity:

In our story, Jacob and David were just ordinary people doing ordinary things until their *mitzvot* made a miracle happen. They made that miracle happen through their *mitzvot*. And because of that miracle the rabbi called their hands the "hands of God." All of us can make our hands into the hands of God by doing *mitzvot*. Let's think about how our very own hands can be the hands of God.

1. Gather children around a table with materials.
2. Show them a sample hand and explain that on each hand they will choose one *mitzvah* that they can do, already do, or would like to try doing.
3. Have the children give a few examples of *mitzvot* they think they can do or are interested in.
4. Have each child take a piece of construction paper in a color they prefer.
5. Have them trace one of their hands on the paper with a marker, crayon, or colored pencil. If they need help, they can ask a friend to trace their hand for them.
6. Have the children cut out their construction paper hands.
7. Have them tell you which *mitzvah* they want to put on their hand before they write or draw it.

8. Have them repeat the process with their opposite hand.
9. Leave the candlesticks on the table to dry. They can pick them up the next time they are together or carry them home carefully today.
10. Have everyone look at each other's work at the table.

Closing Circle (10 Minutes)

Gather everyone into a circle with their hands of God.

Have each child share their hands including which *mitzvot* they are committing to do. Remind them that these are all *mitzvot* they can really do and when they get home they can put their hands somewhere that they will see them as a reminder about doing these and other *mitzvot*.

Review the Hebrew Words of the Day:

- Have the children practice the Hebrew words with their bodies:
- Everybody raise one hand in front of you with all 5 fingers up and say, "Shah." Raise your other hand, put one finger up to make a total of 6 and say "Voo." Put one more finger up to make 7 and say, "Oat." Put them all together for "Shah-Voo-Oat."
- Everyone put one thumb up and say, "Mitz." Put the other thumb up and say, "Vah." Put them together and say "Mitz-vah."
- Have the children say what *Shavuot* and *Mitzvah* mean (weeks and commandment).

Pass out the At Home Challenge Sheet

Sing a goodbye song like *Shalom Chaverim* or *Oseh Shalom*.

At Home Challenge: Shabbat Free Time

Today, as part of learning about *Shavuot*, we learned about doing *mitzvot*. We learned that when we do *mitzvot*/commandments, our hands become the "hands of God," and we help make a happier, healthier world. We can even make miracles happen.

Here are steps you can take at home to pay attention to practicing *mitzvot*:

1. Place your child's "hands of God" somewhere they will see them. You can put them on the refrigerator or a bulletin board or add a string and hang them up. Ask your child now and again how those *mitzvot* are going for them.
2. Make a family *mitzvah* jar.
    - ◊ Save a jar (from jam) or a tin (from tea) and repurpose it as the *mitzvah* jar.
    - ◊ Decorate it to make special (with stickers or markers or googly eyes).
    - ◊ Find something that you can put in it each time someone in the family does a *mitzvah* (marbles or pennies or buttons).
    - ◊ Once a week (at Shabbat dinner or Shabbat breakfast) or every day (at dinner or bedtime or afterschool) check in about the *mitzvot* people have done today or this week and add counters to the jar.
    - ◊ When you fill the jar, do something special as a family, like giving tzedakah, having a treat, or doing an activity, to mark your achievement.
    - ◊ Empty the jar and start over.
3. Here are some *mitzvah* ideas to get you started:
    - ◊ Bake a treat for a neighbor or a teacher
    - ◊ Collect used items and deliver them to Goodwill
    - ◊ Ask your parent how you can help around the house
    - ◊ Take care of a garden or join an environmental clean-up effort
    - ◊ Do a surprise act of kindness for someone else
    - ◊ Host friends for Shabbat (or any) dinner
    - ◊ Give Tzedakah — donate money to a cause you care about
    - ◊ Tell a family member one of the ways you think they are wonderful
    - ◊ Write thank you notes to people you appreciate and mail them
    - ◊ Make colorful "Have a great day" cards and deliver them to a facility for seniors or to a hospital

To find more great and totally doable ideas, check out Linda Cohen's 1,000 *Mitzvahs* Project
http://lindacohenconsulting.com/1000-mitzvahs-book/

10 Commandments

1. I am your God.
2. Don't worship things that are not God, like people and images.
3. Only say God's name with respect.
4. Remember Shabbat and keep it special.
5. Respect your parents.
6. Don't hurt other people.
7. Be faithful to the person you marry.
8. Don't take things that aren't yours.
9. Always tell the truth.
10. Be happy with what you have; don't wish you had other people's things.