

3.5 Recognizing the Good

Unit Introduction

Why *Recognizing the Good*?

recognizing the good: gratitude; recognition of the good; appreciation. Like most other mature human virtues, being grateful is not a natural state. Developing a sense of appreciation is a learned behavior for everything from the gift of life to physical things. We learn through direct instruction, storytelling, modeled behavior, and experiences that practice the desired behavior.

We live at a time that is not particularly conducive to encouraging individuals to acknowledge the good done for them. Letter writing and sending thank-you cards are lost arts, and some would say that along with them went the etiquette of “please and thank you.” The political rhetoric rails against a nation over-reliant on entitlements, and educators are stunned at students’ attitudes and sense of entitlement. *recognizing the good* serves as an antidote to the all-too-human impulse to take things for granted. Judaism refers to the Biblical creation story as a confirmation that the entire world really belongs to God. We are but caretakers of all we possess, including our bodies and souls. That understanding should free us from jealousy and avarice, should empower us to share what we have with those in need, and should encourage us to use our resources to perfect creation.

The translation of *recognizing the good*, “recognizing the good,” can also be stated as “recognizing the *tove*” where *tove* is one of the names of God. Cultivating feelings of *recognizing the good* may be a gateway skill for prayer, recognizing the needs of others, as well as other virtues that get eclipsed by human ego. In young people, especially in adolescents, recognizing the good in people and situations may counter feelings of depression or cynicism. Living an appreciative life reduces anxiety and heightens joy. With satisfaction comes relaxation and calm.

Our consumer-driven society assaults us with all that we feel we must acquire. It is rare to hear statements that reinforce the notion that true happiness comes to those who are satisfied with their portion (*ayzeh-who ah-sheer hay-sah-may-ach b’chel-ko*). That is why the time we spend with students and their families, exploring the roots of Jewish values and rehearsing Jewish virtues, is a critical addition to their well-being. We hope that in absorbing the lessons of *recognizing the good* participants will also return to *ach-rai-yoot*, creating a cycle of stimulation (gratitude and appreciation) and response (acting upon one’s responsibilities as a gifted/blessed person to help others).

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Developmental Lens: Family

Overview

As third graders learn to navigate their world, it can be difficult for them to find their place. According to Jean Piaget, third grade is a time when students are concrete thinkers, learning to place themselves in categories and figuring out who they are as individuals. They are navigating new waters and, according to case studies from the University of Chicago, “with all that they are managing, physically, socially, and emotionally, there is still an openness that makes third grade children especially teachable. Their vitality, willingness to take risks, to explore new territory, and to invest themselves in all aspects of learning is especially gratifying for their teachers.” (Source: University of Chicago Lab Schools, Developmental Description <http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/schools/third-grade/index.aspx>) This is a prime age for them to explore what makes them grateful and gives students an opportunity to ground themselves in the support of family and what makes them feel safe.

Enduring Understanding

When we reflect on how family supports us, we have an opportunity to appreciate the good in our lives.

Essential Questions

- How do appreciation and gratitude enrich our lives and allow us to enrich the lives of others?
- What role(s) do we play in our families?
- What behaviors can we practice to increase the amount of gratitude in our lives?

Unit Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will:

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| Know | <i>recognizing the good</i> is defined as “recognizing the good.”
We have things in our lives to be grateful and thankful for, and Judaism asks us to appreciate those things.
Jewish stories and traditions show us the importance of recognizing the good in our lives.
Prayer is used as an outlet for <i>recognizing the good</i> and motivation to do good things for ourselves and others.
<i>Brach-oat</i> (blessings) have a common formula and are an integral part of our prayer. |
| Feel | Close to their families as a support system and positive force in their lives
Grateful and proud of things they recognize as “good”
A new appreciation for the things that seem mundane |

- Do** Recognize the good in ourselves, our families, our friends, and others.
Use the appreciation of the good things in our lives as motivation to spread kindness and good deeds.
Treat their families with kindness and respect.

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Developmental Lens: Self

The Northeast Foundation for Children describes the typical nine-year-old as follows: “The enthusiasm of eight-year-olds turns into brooding and worrying at nine. Nines tend to be critical of the world around them--nothing seems to be fair to a nine-year-old...” For nine-year-old children, absorbing the lessons of *recognizing the good* and developing behaviors that lead to recognizing the good in themselves and their surroundings can be a critical developmental intervention. This highlights why ShalomLearning’s goal is not simply to teach about a value, but to also rehearse the value’s behaviors and put the attitude into practice.

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Developmental Lens: Self

Overview

Enduring Understanding

Our lives are richer and more meaningful when we can acknowledge and show gratitude for all the good things in our lives.

Essential Questions

How can I make gratitude a habit? How does gratitude lead to happiness?

Unit Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Know:** Students will identify elements within Jewish tradition--including *blessings*, holidays, the *mitzvah* that expresses gratitude and serves to remind us of the many gifts in our lives.
- Feel:** Students will experience a sense of appreciation and gratitude for things they have, rather than feel a sense of entitlement about possessions and position.

- Do:** Students will strive to control their instinct to covet or be jealous.
- Students will engage in more behaviors to honor parents.
- Students will practice the *mitzvot* for Purim, and pledge to incorporate in-gratitude behaviors for holidays (both Jewish and American) and life cycle moments.

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Developmental Lens: Peers

Ten-year-olds are going through a period of pre-adolescent adjustment. They are broadening their areas of interest and are eager to reach out to others through community service or helping younger children. They still need to be reminded of the dos and don'ts of living in society and appreciate how rules and logic give structure to organized activities (committee work, teams, etc.). They can be deeply spiritual, but questions may come up, especially from science and history, that trouble them and can affect their relationship to God. It is a good time to introduce them to "appreciative inquiry," the ability to both analyze a situation critically and appreciate its positive aspects while going forward. They need to be exposed to a model of divine behavior that looks at what is created, recognizes the challenges, but can still conclude that "Behold it was good!"

5.5 recognizing the good

Developmental Lens: Peers

Enduring Understandings

We are a part of a sacred community that actively chooses to be thankful and recognize the goodness in the world. At the completion of this unit, students will better understand and recognize the significance of

- Creating community
- Recognizing the good
- Showing gratitude
- Rejoicing

Essential Questions

- Why is it important for us to acknowledge the kindness we experience from others and miracles of everyday life? How do we benefit from this behavior? (All lessons)

- How can we show gratitude for the good in our lives? (Week 5.5.1)
- In what ways can we infuse an attitude of gratitude into our every day? (Week 5.5.1)
- What is the connection between happiness and gratitude? (Week 5.5.2)
- How can we express our gratitude to others? (Week 5.5.2)
- How can we learn to trust one another? (Week 5.5.3)
- How can we learn to look at people and situations in a more favorable light? (Week 5.5.3)
- How can we look for the good in even the worst situations? (Week 5.5.4)

Unit Lesson Overview

- Our stories and rituals help us remember to recognize the good things around us.
- The story of Purim shows us how appreciating the other people around us can lead to happiness and joy.
- The foundation of a good friendship and community includes trusting each other, recognizing the good in each other, and showing appreciation for each other.
- When we change our perspective, we can recognize *the good* even when things are tough.

Unit Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Know:** Participants will recognize the connection between the Hebrew word for Jew and the Hebrew name which comes from the root meaning giving thanks.
- Feel:** Participants will appreciate the good even in hard situations.
- Do:** Participants will express gratitude for the blessings in their lives.

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Developmental Lens: Community

While sixth and seventh graders are expanding their ability to think abstractly and figuring out where they stand on ethical or religious matters, the changes to their bodies and minds leave them open to strong emotions and mood swings—anger, fear, dejection, and elation. They can be sullen and self-absorbed, more concerned about cliques and reputations than perfecting the world. It is at this very stage of awkwardness that they need to hear the message that they themselves, along with their skills, knowledge, and compassion, are gifts that the world needs. The consciousness and activities associated with *recognizing the good* are a way to inspire eleven- and twelve-year-olds to inventory the strengths and characteristics that they can

personally contribute to a group or to a community. This comes at a time when families are often planning to celebrate their child's becoming b'nei mitzvah and, thus, is a wonderful time to explore gratitude as a way of becoming a Jewish adult.

Unit 5: *recognizing the good*

Developmental Lens: Community

Overview

Enduring Understandings

Appreciating that the good you have been given comes from others and from God helps you to identify and appreciate the good you can contribute to the world.

Essential Questions

- How do I live a grateful life? What should my gratitude lead me to do? (All lessons)
- How can we show appreciation for the good in our lives? (Week 6.5.1)
- What is the best way to show gratitude to people who do things for us? (Week 6.5.1)
- How can we learn to “pay it forward” for all the good that we have in our lives? (Week 6.5.2)
- How does the Purim story inspire gratitude? (Week 6.5.2)
- What are some guidelines for keeping kosher? (Week 6.5.3)
- How can being mindful and appreciating what we eat help us to feel greater *recognizing the good*? (Week 6.5.3)
- How can we celebrate becoming b'nei mitzvah more meaningful? (Week 6.5.4)
- How can we use reflection as a way to feel gratitude? (Week 6.5.4)

Unit Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will:

Know: *recognizing the good*(grateful appreciation) refers to the many gifts (both spiritual and material) that we have been given, most often without any merit on our part.

The meaning of the first two sections of the *beer-kat ha-ma-zone*. Understand the role of *recognizing the good* and “paying it forward” in *meg-ill-at esther*.

Feel: A keen sense of appreciation for all these gifts and a desire to give to others in gratitude for all that we have been given.

Do: Find concrete ways to give back for all that we have received.

Begin to design a b'nei mitzvah celebration that involves contributing to others.