



Purim Circles of Responsibility

Topic

The *Mitzvot* of Purim and Circles of Responsibility

Grade Level(s)

4th-7th grade

This program is designed for students to engage in a *hesed* (kindness) project in the context of the *mitzvot* of the upcoming celebration of Purim.

Note: This program can be done as a family program. It can be done in advance of Purim or even on Purim eve before Megillah reading, if time allows.

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Learn the four *mitzvot* of Purim.
- Identify that the *mitzvot* of Purim connect us with people we know and people we do not yet know but to whom we are also obligated.
- Engage in an act of *hesed* by fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *matanot l'evyonim* while supporting a local community organization.

Materials needed

- Whiteboard (if no whiteboard is available, use large sticky note paper such as [here](#))
- Whiteboard markers (or markers, if using sticky note paper)
- Copies of Esther 9:22 text study
- Materials needed for the *hesed* activity (see Prepare in Advance)

Prepare in Advance

- This program centers around a *hesed* activity that can address the needs of organizations in your local community. To create a project that is most effective and sensitive, far in advance of the program, contact a local domestic shelter, homeless youth residence, elder home, or food pantry and ask them what their needs are for the season. For example, a local homeless youth residence may be in need of new socks, toothbrushes, and soap. Purchase or otherwise procure these items as well as baskets or nice bags in which to present the items. Again, be sure to be in close contact with the organization to ensure that the project meets their needs. Ask if it would be appropriate for your participants to create cards and if so, what the parameters are for those cards (some organizations, for example, do not like students to sign their names or to use glitter).
- Determine who will bring the items to the organization and when.



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Background for Teachers

Purim features four *mitzvot*:

- 1) מקרא מגילה (*mikra megillah*, reading Megillat Esther)
- 2) סעודת פורים (*se'udat Purim*, festive Purim meal) usually celebrated as a large meal on Purim afternoon, often with wine and delicacies
- 3) משלוח מנות (*mishloach manot*, sending gifts) which are usually gifts of at least two types of food sent to friends
- 4) מתנות לאביונים (*matanot l'evyonim*, "presents to the poor") which includes giving *tzedakah* to at least two people in need

These multiple *mitzvot* serve to increase general gladness and joy as they also remind us of our interconnectedness to one another. Reading the Megillah, for example, can be done alone but is customarily done in the presence of others to increase the merrymaking (and noise!) It is simply more fun with others. As another example, the *mitzvah* to give *Matanot L'evyonim* shows that, even in times of our own joy, we are connected to others and required to think of them, and not just ourselves.

Purim also features the custom to dress up in costume. While this custom is a fairly late-developing tradition, several explanations have developed for this custom. One of the primary explanations is that costumes hide celebrants in the same way that Esther hid her identity or that God (who is not mentioned in the *megillah*) hid Godself. Another explanation that has gained less traction but is still quite important is that Purim is meant to be a joyous day, and dressing up in costume is simply fun!

This pre-Purim program is designed to give text-based context and impetus to an act of *hesed* through a *matanot l'evyonim* activity that will benefit a local organization. In order to be most effective and sensitive to a local organization's needs, it does require some advance preparation (see Prepare in Advance).

Description of Activities

1. If time allows, begin the program by inviting participants to introduce themselves by stating their name and indicating their favorite Purim costume (one that they have worn or seen someone else wear). If the group is too large, encourage them to turn to a partner and answer the same questions, and then ask for a few examples.
2. Ask: Why do we wear costumes on Purim?
3. Facilitate the conversation to get to the idea that on Purim we are supposed to be happy and joyful.
4. Optional: Sing *בשמחה, מרבין אדר שנכנס* Oh Today We'll Merry, Merry Be, or another Purim song.

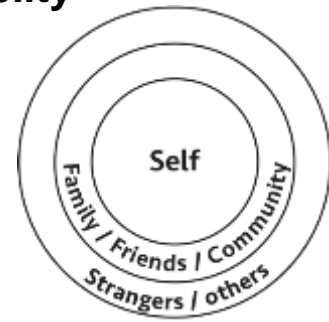


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5. Ask: Based on what you know about Purim, why is Purim so joyful? (the Jews were supposed to die but did not because Esther, Mordecai and the Jewish community came together to help itself.)
6. Explain:
 - a. *Megillat Esther* tells us to be happy on Purim. Dressing up in costumes is one way in which we can either make others or ourselves happy.
 - b. There are traditionally four *mitzvot*, commandments, associated with the holiday of Purim. The first is מקרא מגילה, to read *Megillat Esther*
7. Write “*Megillah*” on the whiteboard.
8. Indicate that there are three other *mitzvot*.
9. Distribute copies of Esther 9:22.
10. Facilitate the reading of the passage so that participants identify the other three *mitzvot* listed.
11. Write the three additional *mitzvot* on the whiteboard and explain how they are traditionally celebrated as indicated below:
 - a. סעודת פורים (*se’udat Purim*, festive Purim meal) usually celebrated as a large meal on Purim afternoon, often with wine and delicacies.
 - b. משלוח מנות (*mishloach manot*, sending gifts) which are usually gifts of at least two types of food sent to friends. These packages can be simple or quite elaborate.
 - c. מתנות לאביונים (*matanot l’evyonim*, “presents to the poor”) which includes giving *tzedakah* to at least two people in need. Notably, even those who receive *tzedakah* are obligated to give *matanot l’evyonim* to someone in greater need than themselves.
12. Participants turn to a partner and discuss for 60 seconds: “How are these *mitzvot* similar to one another? How are they different from one another?”
13. On the whiteboard, draw a line down the middle. Caption the left column “Similar” and the right column “Different.”
14. Take participants’ observations. Possible answers include:
 - a. Similar: they require joy and merriment; they are about doing something extra, like having a really large meal or giving someone two pieces of food (rather than just one); [*Mishloach manot* does not require giving to two people.]; it feels good to participate in these *mitzvot*
 - b. Different: some of the *mitzvot* can be personal (e.g. the festive meal) and some are communal (e.g. *mishloach manot* and *matanot l’evyonim*); some you receive and some you give.
15. Explain: In addition to these similarities and differences, we can glean three types of relationships that are highlighted by these four *mitzvot*.
16. Draw three concentric circles on the whiteboard and label them from inward out:



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- a. Self
 - b. Family/friends/community
 - c. Strangers/others
17. Ask:
- a. Which of these four *mitzvot* fall in the “self” circle?
 - b. Which fall in the “family/friends/community” circle?
 - c. Which fall in the “strangers/others” circle?
18. Fill in each circle as participants offer responses. The various *mitzvot* should be able to fit into multiple categories. Cultivate conversation around how this can be the case and highlight it.
19. Explain: The interconnectedness of these circles show that on Purim, everyone is recognized, everyone is obligated to someone else. We are all connected.
20. Explain that the participants will be engaging in a *hesed* (act of kindness) activity inspired by these interconnected *mitzvot* of Purim.
21. Explain (fill in to reflect your project):
- a. The nature of the project
 - b. The organization it benefits
 - c. How it responds to the stated needs of the organization
 - d. How participants will engage in it (the “how to”), especially if there are stations involved
 - e. How you believe this connects to the *mitzvot* of Purim
22. Participants will engage in the *hesed* activity and then reflect on how *matanot l’evyonim* increases the joyousness of Purim for all involved.
23. Close by thanking participants, inviting them to the community’s Purim celebration, and reminding them that our community is interconnected through *mitzvot* not just on Purim but every day.