

Read the PJ Library Book

Sammy Spider's First Mitzvah (4s)

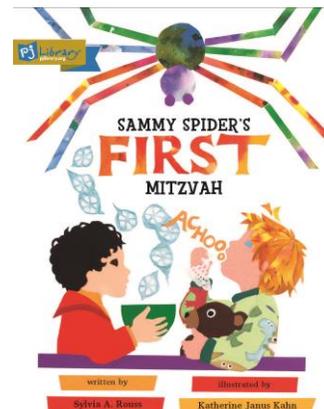
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Synopsis

Young Josh has a cold and is feeling pretty miserable. When Josh's friend Moti comes to the house, Josh warns him to stay away. Moti hasn't come to play – he is bringing chicken soup and his family's wishes for Josh to get well soon. Sammy Spider learns that the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick) can include many ways to help someone who is feeling poorly. How do you think Sammy Spider tries to cheer up Josh?



Discuss the Jewish values and vocabulary with one another

Visiting the sick / *bik-kur cho-lim* - בקור חולים

Good deeds / *mitz-vot* - מצוות

Friendship / *ye-di-dut* - ידידות

Visiting the sick / *bikkur cholim*. *Bikkur cholim* is a *mitzvah* (commandment or moral obligation) that falls under the category of *gemilut chasidim* (acts of loving kindness). Ancient sages taught that acts of loving kindness are special, because there is no personal gain from the mitzvah other than knowing we have helped someone. The Talmud, an authoritative text of Jewish laws and customs, states, “Whoever visits a sick person helps him to recover” [Nedarim 40a]. According to researchers at the Mayo Clinic, a large part of the healing process is a positive attitude. An uplifting visit can give someone just the boost they need to get on the road to recovery.

Commandments or good deeds / *mitzvot*. *Mitzvot* is the plural of the Hebrew word *mitzvah*, meaning commandment, and it refers to the 613 precepts and rules commanded by God in the Torah. “All the commandments which I command you this day shall you observe to do, that you may live, and multiply...” [Deuteronomy 8:1]. How did the word mitzvah come to mean “good deeds” in common language? Some of the mitzvot in the Torah are positive commandments, such as “honor your mother

and father,” and some are negative, such as “do not steal.” There are ethical commandments, such as “be honest in your business dealings.” Over the centuries rabbinic scholars continued to define and categorize the commandments. A general understanding emerged that mitzvot help us to become better human beings, which includes doing good deeds. [For information about specific mitzvot, please refer to these [two guides](#) in our Educators’ Center.]



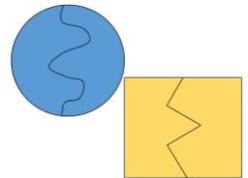
Friendship / yedidut. Friendship is mentioned many times in biblical texts. The word *yedidut* (friendship) comes from the Hebrew *yadid*, meaning beloved or dear. Ecclesiastes wrote, “Two are better than one ... For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he has not another to help him up” [4:9-10]. Jewish sages have always viewed friends as important helpmates in learning about all aspects of life, from Torah study to social behavior. In *Pirkei Avot* (*Ethics of Our Ancestors*) Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asks, “Which is the right path for a person to follow?” Rabbi Yehoshua replies, “[the path of] a good friend” [Pirkei Avot 2:9]. Rabbis explain that a true friend sees who you are and what you do, and helps you correct mistakes in judgment.

Imagine your community living these Jewish values.

How would your classroom change?
How will families be involved?

In the Classroom / Centers

- ☆ **Visiting the sick:** Make a large pot of soup during **cooking time**, and freeze single-sized portions. When someone in the classroom is absent due to illness, ask a sibling in the school or a friendly volunteer to bring a package of soup to the sick classmate’s home. You may choose to expand this to include ailing family members.
- ☆ **Visiting the sick:** Learn this simple [get-well song](#) during **music time**, and sing it via telephone or computer message whenever a classmate is home sick.
- ☆ **Good deeds:** At **morning meeting**, discuss how doing *mitzvot* (helping others) makes the recipient feel happy. Brainstorm mitzvot your students can do in your school community, such as surprising the office staff with flowers, bringing a special snack to another class, or reading books to the toddlers.
- ☆ **Good deeds:** There is a Jewish concept called *mitzvah gorreret mitzvah* (one mitzvah leads to another.) See if you can prove this **mathematically**. At afternoon meeting or at good-bye time, ask your students to try to remember all the mitzvot they witnessed during the day. Chart, graph, and count the mitzvot.
- ☆ **Friendship:** Friendship requires compromise. Create simple two-piece **puzzles** and distribute the pieces to your students. Once children have found their classmate with the matching piece, challenge them to act as a team and incorporate their shape into an **art piece** or **block structure**.
- ☆ **Friendship:** Use a combination of musical chairs and freeze dancing during **large-motor skills** time to encourage new friendships in the classroom. Play some fun dance music. When the music stops, children must find a partner and ask each other a question. You can suggest the topics, such as what foods the students like or places they have visited with family. Play more music, find another partner, and ask another question.



Bridging Home and School

Hospital Drive

Ask families to participate in a toy/game drive for your local children’s hospital or Ronald McDonald House. Collect toys, cozy blankets, and simple games or activities such as puzzles, mazes, or sticker books. Decorate some get-well cards, too. Perhaps one of your families will volunteer to deliver the donated goods.

Mitzvah Map

Create a large map of your school and neighborhood to hang in the entranceway to your school or classroom. Provide small pieces of paper and crayons near the map. As families come to school, ask them to describe a mitzvah they did on one of the papers, and think about where they were when they did this mitzvah. Add the paper to the appropriate place on the map. For example, a family might write about planting flowers in the school garden or preparing meals for a sick friend in the kitchen.



Family Engagement at Home

Being Neighborly

Tell parents you are discussing friendship and good deeds in the classroom. Encourage them to brainstorm with their children about a nice thing they could do for a neighbor, such as leaving a good morning note on their car, picking up trash from their lawn, or baking cookies. Perhaps they will share the results of their endeavors with the class.

Share your stories and experiences with everyone.

What happened?

How can the learning go deeper?

Tell us a story... about children’s understanding of mitzvot.

The concept of mitzvot can be difficult to describe. We sometimes leave children (and adults) with a vague description of mitzvot as nice behavior. The more specific you are when you label a mitzvah, the more likely children will come to understand why the behavior is considered a mitzvah. For example, “*Thank you, Bret, for helping Nancy pick up all of the crayons that fell on the floor. It’s a mitzvah to help someone with a difficult task,*” or “*Carly, you so nicely waited your turn to take a cookie from the plate. It’s a mitzvah to eat with good manners.*” [For information about specific mitzvot, please refer to a [list of mitzvot for the classroom](#) or the in-depth guide entitled “[Machon Indicators](#)” found in our Educators’ Center.]

Then share with all of us on our private Facebook group page! <http://pjfor.me/pjgts-facebook>

More resources and websites for inspiration

Mitzvah goreret mitzvah: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD0gUTaG35w>

Visiting the sick crafts: <https://www.pinterest.com/pjgts/bikkur-holimvisiting-the-sick/>

Get-well prayer: <http://pjfor.me/getwellprayer>

Psychology of friendship: <http://pjfor.me/friendship-psychology>

