

Hey guys! Can you believe the year is really over already? We sure did learn a lot and had tons of fun along the way. From the many Holidays, to making a Jewish Home, to mitzvot we do everyday, to book Four of the Five Books of Moshe, we covered quite a lot. There's no way we can go over everything that we learned in just a few pages, so here's a little summary just to remind you about it all.

Let's start at the beginning ...

We began the year off with learning about Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. We learned how they are both very holy and important holidays and that it is when the gates of heaven open very wide, accepting all of our prayers. During this time of year we have an ultra special connection to Hashem because it is a time to focus on repentance and forgiveness. There are many special prayers we say during the High Holidays; to gain a greater understanding of them we learned about why we pray. 'Teffilla' (prayer) is our way of connecting to Hashem and we pray to Hashem for three reasons, to ask Him for things, thank Him for things, and to praise Him.

From the High Holidays we then moved on to our special curriculum "The Jewish Home". To enhance the discussions we used workbooks themed the 'Jewish Home.' Walking through several parts of a home, we learned how each part of a home is transformed into a *Jewish* home.

Room one was the kitchen. We learned the importance of keeping a kosher kitchen by following the guidelines of the Torah laws. In this lesson we also learned about the blessings we say over food and what blessing we say for

different types of food.

While in our kitchen topic we made cupcakes and learned about Jewish birthdays. To make a Jewish birthday special we have a custom to do extra mitzvot and make new resolutions for the upcoming year.

Next room on our tour was the parents' bedroom. We discussed the importance of honoring our parents. We must keep this mitzvah as best as we can. Honoring our parents is kept by showing our parents respect. Respecting our parents means listening to what they say and helping out around the house.

We walked down the hall to the bathroom. Now how can a bathroom fit in our special topic of a "Jewish Home"? How do we make a bathroom holy? The greatest miracle is the creation of life. G-D created our bodies in a special way and we thank Him for creating us and giving us life. This is why we say the blessing of 'Asher yatzar' when we come out of the bathroom to thank God for creating our bodies and creating us in a way where everything works as it's suppose to.

Being Jewish we are taught the importance of being grateful and expressing our gratitude to Hashem. We discussed all the things that we are grateful for in our lives, and everyone said and wrote their own beautiful thoughts.

A few doors down and we made it to our own bedroom. There are many things we can do to make our room holy. For example, we say 'modeh ani' when we wake up to thank God for giving our neshama (soul) back to us and before going to bed say 'Shema yisrael.' It is also customary to keep a tzedakah (charity) box in one's room. Giving tzedekah is a beautiful mitzvah and we learned much

about it, including the 'Rambam's eight levels of charity.' The best way to give tzedekah is with a good heart. Ultimately, any penny that we can give to tzedekah counts and we should try to always set a little something aside for people that are in need.

Chanukkah then came along and we discussed the miracles that took place with the menorah, and the miracle of the oil lasting for 8 days and nights, when at first it seemed impossible. There are many customs that take place in Chanukkah and we spoke about many of them and why we do them. Some of our favorites are: Eating oily foods like 'sufganiyot' (jelly doughnuts) and 'latkes' (potato pancakes), because oil symbolizes the oil of the menorah. We learned about the brave Maccabees and the story of Chana and her seven sons, who were so brave and gave up their lives because they did not want to bow down to an Idol.

Our next topic was the fascinating Book Four of the Chumash the Book Of Bamidbar. Story after story left us in awe as we learned about our history. We went through the story of the exodus of Egypt, the ten plagues, and the splitting of the sea. After the Jews left Egypt the Egyptians that came along with them persuaded them to sin by making a golden calf. G-d and Moshe were not pleased with this, so when Moshe came down from heaven he smashed the first set of tablets. After this the Jews had to wait until the second tablets were brought down by Moshe and they were read by Har Sinai. We learned about the Ten Commandments and how they are the basis of the Torah.

We then went to learn about all the miracles Hashem performed for the Jews when they were wandering the desert. Among these miracles were: The

'Manna', a wafer that tasted like anything a person wanted, and clouds that surrounded the Jews and protected them wherever they went.

We learned about the different tribes of Israel and how they camped in the Desert. The Kohen Gadol (high priest), who was Aaron (Moshe's brother), led the services in the 'Bet Mikdash'(the Holy Temple) and he was very much respected. Korach rebelled against Moshe, saying that he wanted a high position like Moshe and his brother Aaron. Each Jew had their special job at that time and what Korach did was very wrong, because he disrespected Hashem and Moshe and his brother. Hashem made a miracle that the earth swallowed Korach and his followers and this truly ended up opening people's eyes as to how great Hashem really is.

On this note, we learned about what a 'Kiddush Hashem' is, which is when a person sanctifies G-d's name and shows people that the Jewish people are a nation of respectful G-d fearing people. On the other hand, we learned about the opposite, which is called a 'Chillul Hashem' and G-d forbid portrays the opposite.

We also learned about the nazir, who is a type of person who refrains from wine, cutting his hair, and contact with dead people. Nazirim were very holy people and chose not to be so involved with physicality, rather spirituality. Now a days instead of focusing on separating from physicality we have a special mission to elevate the physical to a spiritual level. For example, taking an apple and making a blessing over it.

We also spoke about what lashon harah is (saying/hearing mean things about another person) and how we should avoid doing it in our day to day lives. Back in the day the punishment for lashon harah was 'tzaras', which was a form

of a white rash/blemish on the skin. Lashon Hara negatively affects three people; the one who says it, the person it's referring to, and the person who hears it.

Hope you enjoyed reading over just some of the many topics we learned about this year. I really hope all of you enjoyed it as much as I did. Please be in touch! I will miss all of you very much!