

Mitzvot Pairs

By Miriam Melamed-Turkish

A few years ago, I was fortunate to be able to participate as a learner in workshops offered over a period of a few years by two very skilled and inspiring Jewish educators from Israel whom I came to know as the “Zohars.” Chava and Ora Zohar, to be precise.

They taught us (my colleagues included) many different teaching methods that could be integrated into the Jewish classroom. One of the methods that became an adapted favorite of mine was “1-2-1-4-5.” This stood for “one-to-one for five minutes. The students are engaged with each other in pairs for five minutes and are expected to share with each other their individual take on the topic at hand, as well as listen carefully to their partner (each other). This was because, in turn, they would share with the larger group (the class) what their respective partners had shared with them.

I thought this method was simple, yet wonderful, but I considered how I could adapt it to fit a grade one class, with a Jewish spin, that would be age-appropriate and reflect our curriculum. I wanted to develop an early morning routine for my class that would facilitate connectedness among my students and fulfill a part of Jewish learning from our grade one curriculum.

Mitzvot are a very important part of our learning about how to become good Jews in our community and the world at large. I wanted the students to understand they could make a difference and that they could do *mitzvot*. I pondered how to do this. Then an “a-ha moment” - I’d create “*Mitzvot Pairs*,” adapting them to 1-2-1-4-3 for my class.

After attendance was taken, I introduced my idea of “*Mitzvot Pairs*.” I paired up the students (this was introduced at the beginning of the year) and they sat on the carpet.

I asked, “what is a *mitzvah*?”

The reply was, “A good deed! And helping others.

I said, “So now I’d like you to think about a *mitzvah* you did this week and share it with your partner. You will have three minutes to share with each other and then you will repeat what your partner said to the whole class. So listen closely.”

They all just sat there and didn’t say a word. I was devastated. Was this going to work? How can I make this work?

Then I asked, “Who helped their mom or dad do something this week?”

Hands went up.

I smiled and with relief said, “Shhh! Don’t tell the class yet -- turn to your partner and tell each other.”

The class was buzzing and all of the children began to chat with each other. I was overjoyed. Then they shared with the class their *mitzvot* –ranging from “I helped my Bubie set the table for Shabbat” to “I helped my dad rake the leaves” and “I helped my mom bake cookies.”

We continued to do “*Mitzvot Pairs*” each week – it wasn’t always easy and some students needed more assistance than others. It was even alright if they couldn’t think of a *mitzvah* during our session. They could come up and tell me their *mitzvah* during another part of the day and, most of the time, this worked well. I always mixed up the pairs every week so that all of the students would be integrated with each other over time.

"Mitzvot Pairs" became a simple little staple in our morning routine and it not only facilitated familiarity and comfort in the class, but it also provided a sense of pride in thinking about the importance of being Jewish and helping others in our community.

Dr. Miriam Melamed-Turkish is the Art Coordinator at Holy Blossom Temple Religious School in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.