

מצות עם מים

LESSON PLAN

Description: This מצות עם מים bulletin board depicts seven different mitzvos that are carried out with water. The water background along with the water splashes create a water “feeling” that helps bring out the theme of the bulletin board.

Lesson objective: The month of חשוון is an appropriate time to display this water-related bulletin board, as we begin to recite "משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם" in our תפילה. This month is a good opportunity to expound on the wonders and blessings of rainwater and the significant role that it plays in our lives.

Another discussion of “מצות Related to Water” can then follow, and will give your students a new, refreshing perspective on "מים". The lesson included will broaden your students’ knowledge in regard to the seven different מצות depicted on the bulletin board.

Starter: Begin the lesson by holding up a clear glass of water.

“What do you see in this cup?”
(Let students respond: “Water!”)

“Right! Plain, simple water. But what if I told you this cup holds one of the most powerful ingredients in the world? It’s used in תפילה, in מצות, in miracles—and without it, we wouldn’t be here today.”

Ask students:

“Where do we use water in our Yiddishkeit?”

“What מצות can you think of that involve water?”

(Brainstorm their ideas on the board. Then say:)

“Today we’re going to dive into a series of מצות that are connected to water. Some are obvious—like washing hands—and some you might not even know exist!”

Lesson:

תפילת גשם

This picture is placed in the centre of the bulletin board to emphasize the fact that if we merit the fall of rain, it is "גשמי ברכה" that will enable us to live and be able to perform all the מצות that use water!

When and Where Do We Say It?

The actual תפילה is inserted into the חזון’s repetition of עשרה שמונה עשרה.

We begin saying משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם in our private עשרה שמונה עשרה from מנחה of עצרת onwards (in א"י, it’s from מוסף because they only have one day of יו"ט).

It continues until פסח, when we switch to מוריד הטל (He brings the dew).

Why עצרת שמיני?

Because סוכות is the holiday of water. ל"ח חז"ל tell us:

“בַּחַג נְדוּנִין עַל הַמַּיִם”

“On סוכות, the world is judged for rain.” (ראש השנה ט"ז ע"א)

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But during סוכות, we don't want rain! (It ruins the סוכה.)

That's why we wait until שמיני עצרת — when we no longer eat in the סוכה — to start asking for rain.

What's So Special About Rain?

For us, rain might seem annoying — but in א"י, rain is life itself. There's no major river like the Nile. Instead, ד' created a system where the people have to daven — and if they're worthy, He sends rain.

“והיה אם שמע תשמעו... ונתתי מטר ארצכם בעתו”

“If you listen to my מצוות... I will give rain in its proper time.” (דברים י"א:י"ג)

This means that in א"י, rain is a reward for listening to ד'. It's like a direct spiritual feedback system.

No rain = a wake-up call.

Rain in the right time = ד' is happy with us

That's why rain is called “גשמי ברכה” — blessed rain — because it shows our direct connection with ד'.

Too Much or Too Little- Both Are Dangerous

חז"ל explain that rain is powerful, but needs balance.

That's why we daven in תפילת גשם:

“לברכה ולא לקללה, לחיים ולא למוות”

“For blessing, not for curse. For life, not for death.”

Even rain — the symbol of ברכה — needs to come in the right way. That's the ultimate expression of relationship: not just giving, but giving in a way that matches our needs.

Story: Choni HaMe'agel (תענית י"ט ע"א)

There was once a terrible drought. The great tzaddik חוני המעגל drew a circle on the ground and said:

“ד', I'm not moving, until You send rain.”

It began to drizzle. חוני said, “Not that kind of rain!”

Then it poured and flooded.

חוני said, “Not that either! I want good, gentle, life-giving rain.”

At last, ד' sent the perfect rain.

Lesson: Even a צדיק like חוני knew — we don't just want rain. We want the right kind, at the right time, with the right בוונה.

נטילת ידים

This is the מצוה of washing one's hands:

In the morning upon awakening

Before making the ברכה of המוציא

Upon awakening:

When we wake up in the morning, we perform a special washing called Negel Vasser.

We pour water over each hand three times, alternating right-left-right-left-right-left, using a special washing cup.

Why do we need to do it?

When we're asleep, our נשמה leaves our body temporarily. While it's gone, a small טומאה lingers on our hands.

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This **טומאה** only leaves when we wash alternating hands three times.

Before eating bread:

Before eating bread made from the 5 grains (do you know what they are?), we wash our hands with a cup (usually two times each hand), and then make the **ברכה**:

“ברוך אתה... אשר קידשנו במצוותיו וציוונו על נטילת ידים”

Why Do We Wash Before Bread?

Because we have touched and been in places that are impure.

קידוש ידים ורגלים

This refers to the **מצוה** that all **כהנים** had, during the times of the **משכן** and the **במה**“ק.

‘ד commanded **משה רבינו** to make a special **כלי** called the **ביור**. It was made of **נחשת** (copper) and it was placed between the **אוהל מועד** and the **מזבח**.

Before entering the **משכן** to do their **עבודה**, the **כהנים** prepared themselves by washing their hands and feet with the water contained inside the **ביור**.

When Did They Wash?

The **כהנים** had to wash their hands and feet every time before:

Entering the **היכל**

Doing any **עבודה** (like offering **קרבנות**)

טבילת כלים

This **הלכה** is for all metal and glass utensils that are made by a **גוי** that will be used for food. They require **טבילה** in a **מקוה** before being used for the first time. The **ברכה** of **על טבילת כלים** is recited before the **טבילה**.

What Kinds of **כלים** Require **טבילה**? (Brainstorm with the class on the board)

Materials that require **טבילה** with a **ברכה**:

Metal: silver, gold, copper, iron, tin, lead, stainless steel

Glass

Items that do NOT require **טבילה**:

Made by a **איד**

Made from wood, plastic (check with your **רב**)

Items used for non-food purposes (e.g., flower vase, soap dish)

Story: During WWII, a group of **אידין** hiding in Hungary had only one pot to cook with. It was made of aluminum and found in a bombed house.

The **רב** of the group said, “We can’t use it until we **toivel** it.”

But there was no **מקוה**, and no clean body of water. They dug a pit, filled it with rainwater from dripping icicles, and waited 24 hours.

When the pit reached the **שיעור** (minimum volume), the **רב** **toiveled** the pot, and they made soup — with tears of joy.

Even in times of war, **אידין** held onto **מצוות** with **נפש** — because **קדושה** starts even in a pot!

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Story: Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l once received a metal cup as a gift. After accepting it, he stood up and prepared to go immerse it in a מקוה בלים. A תלמיד who was present offered to toivel it for him. Rav Moshe declined and explained:

"I am the one who will use the cup, so I should be the one to perform the טבילה."

He then personally took the cup and immersed it.

Message: "This incident reflects Rav Moshe's consistent approach: He never allowed someone else to do for him a מצוה that he was able to perform himself."

It highlights Rav Moshe's personal זריזות (eagerness) and responsibility in מצוות — even for something as seemingly minor as toiveling a cup.

מים שלנו

The dough that is used for מצוה פסח, both מצוה שמורה and מצוה פשוטה, is only permitted to be made with water called מים שלנו.

What is מים שלנו?

It is water that was drawn from a well and then sat out for at least 12 hours. Letting the water sit out prevents the possibility that the water would have been too warm immediately after being drawn from the well. The warmth of the water would then cause the dough to become חמ"ץ ח"ו! A special, nice כלי should be used for the מים שלנו to show our חיבוב, for the מצוה.

Story: It's told that the Rebbe of Sanz, Rav Chaim Halberstam zt"l, would personally carry the jug of מים שלנו used to bake his מצות פסח.

When his Chassidim offered to carry it for him, he said:

"This water is being prepared for מעשה אמונה. I want to carry it with the same joy as someone bringing a קרבן to the בהמ"ק"

Story: Rav Yisrael Salanter zt"l, founder of the מוסר movement, was known for his sensitivity and care in הלכה. One year before פסח, he was served מצוה in a home he visited.

He politely asked, "Was the water used for kneading these מצות, water that was מים שלנו?"

The host was unsure. Rav Yisrael gently declined to eat, explaining, "It's not about not trusting you — it's about making sure the מצוה is done with clarity and awe."

That year, he didn't eat מצוה until he could verify the water was rested properly.

Story: During the War of 1948 in א"י, a community in ירושלים was surrounded and under siege. Flour was scarce, and water had to be drawn in secret at night.

But the חזון איש ruled that even in such conditions, מים שלנו must be used — and so bochurim risked their safety to draw water and guard it until the next day.

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When people asked, "Isn't this just a חומרה?"

The מצרים חזון איש replied, "It's not a חומרה — it's the essence of פסח. We left מצרים because we followed 'ד's will. Let's not drop that now."

מים אחרונים

What is מים אחרונים?

Unlike washing מים before נטילת ידיים, which is המוציא, מן התורה, washing מים is דרבנן and ברכה סו is made. It is brought down in the גמרא, to wash one's hands one time at the end of a meal before reciting ברכת המזון.

It involves pouring a small amount of water over the fingers, from the knuckles to the fingertips. This washing of the hands can be done with or without a cup. Most people use some sort of cup for מים אחרונים, and there are many who have a special, decorative כלי designated for מים אחרונים.

Why do we do this?

We are about to speak directly to 'ד and our mouths, bodies, and hands should be clean- physically and spiritually.

Just like the כהנים washed their hands before serving 'ד, we wash before speaking words of praise.

Story: In a time when many American homes had stopped doing מים אחרונים, Rav Moshe Feinstein ז"ל still kept it carefully. He once told a student:

"When we bless 'ד for our food, we should be in a state of כבוד and cleanliness — not like someone wiping his hands on a napkin between bites." He kept a small cup and bowl just for מים אחרונים on his table- even during simple weekday meals.

ניסוך המים

We will discuss the origin of this special מצוה.

The מצוה of ניסוך המים was done only on חג הסוכות during the time of the ק"ב. Every day of the year, there was the מצוה of ניסוך היין, which was the pouring of wine on the מזבח before bringing the תמיד. However, on סוכות, there was the additional special מצוה of pouring מים, שלושה לוגים מים, onto the מזבח. This was done everyday of סוכות.

The water for this מצוה was taken from the מעין השילוח, which was a well that was located right near the בית המקדש. The waters drawn from the מעין השילוח are referred to as מעייני הישועה - waters of salvations and waters of שמחה, as the פסוק in ישעיה י"ב says, ישעיה י"ב - פ"י מהלכות תמידין ומוספין ה"ו

There is a very special reason why 'ד chose to have this מצוה done specifically on סוכות. It is brought down in the רמב"ם:

"בחג נידונין על המים" - פ"י מהלכות תמידין ומוספין ה"ו

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On סוכות we are being judged for water – how much we will have or not have during the new year. Because we are being judged for water on סוכות, the תורה gives us the unique opportunity of this great water-related מצוה, of ניסוך המים, to help be "מזכה" us, to make us "worthy" of the ברכה of מים.

As Chazal say in 'ר"ה ט"ז-א'

למה אמרה תורה נסכו מים בחג אמר הקב"ה: נסכו לפני מים בחג כדי שיתברכו לכם גשמי" ברכה"

The מצוה of ניסוך המים was done with intense שמחה and rejoicing. The כהנים, the לויים and all of בני"י joined in this מצוה. The actual ניסוך המים was followed by music, singing, and dancing. The שמחה was so great and palpable that anyone who participated in the מצוה was affected by the happiness!

The מצוה was called שמחת בית השואבה.

מעין השילוח refers to the drawing of the water from the שואבה.

"מי שלא ראה שמחה זו, לא ראה שמחה מימיו" tell us:

Whoever did not witness this happiness of the שמחת בית השואבה for ניסוך המים, never truly saw happiness in his days.

Did you know? The משנה tells us that the dancing wasn't just done by anyone — but by the greatest חכמים and תלמידי חכמים of the generation, called אנשי מעשה and חסידים.

They would juggle flaming torches in the air while dancing and singing praise to 'ד.

According to the גמרא, some would juggle 8 torches at once, and none of them touched each other.

Story: רב שמעון בן גמליאל, the סנהדרין נשיא, said:

"When I was young, I would take eight burning torches and juggle them — none touched each other."

He also described how he would stand on his hands, bending completely over and kissing the floor, then lifting himself back up without using his hands.

This wasn't a circus performance- it was a שמחה steeped in קדושה, celebrated in the ק"מ"ק as part of a מצוה.

May we all be זוכה to be able to actively rejoice in the שמחה of השואבה בית שמחת and in the מצוה of ניסוך המים!

Final message:

We can see from today's lesson, how water plays such an important role in Yiddishkeit. Water is life. It flows through our bodies, our homes, our land, and our מצוות. But in תורה, water is more than just a necessity. It's a message. It's 'ד's way of saying:

"You need Me constantly- like water."

"I am the source of all your ברכה."

"Even the most basic, physical things — like a drink of water, or a dish, or your hands — can become holy, if you use them the way I asked you to."

From גשם תפילת ידים to ניסוך המים, from the כהנים to the joy of השואבה בית שמחת, water reminds us:

"Water doesn't just keep us alive — it keeps us connected to 'ד."

When we wash, when we pour, when we immerse, when we daven for rain- we are turning water into something greater than itself. We're turning it into 'ד עבודת.