

## Chapter 2

# Making Mensch Choices

Student text:  
pages 14–23

## Overview

Chapter Two explores the importance of making good, ethical choices. We learn that all of us should participate in the ongoing quest for good choices.

## Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how their choices affect themselves and others.
- Explain how the Tanach, Talmud, and *midrashim* provide valuable guidance today, just as they did for our ancestors.
- Explain how good choices lead to positive action.

## Vocabulary

*hachnasat orḥim* “bringing in guests”; the mitzvah to welcome visitors and strangers

*midrash* “interpretation”; discussions and explanations of Jewish law and culture

**Tanach** acronym (T.N.K.) for the three parts of the Hebrew Bible: the Torah (five books of Moses), Nevi'im (Prophets), and the K'tuvim (Writings)

**Talmud** “learning”; anthology of rabbinic law and lore

## Set Induction

Have each of your students recall the hardest choice he or she ever had to make. (Explain that these should be ethical dilemmas, not preferences, like the choice between vanilla and chocolate.) Ask:

- What made the choice so difficult?
- Were you pleased with the outcome?
- If presented with the same situation now, would you make the same choice?

Invite students to share their tough choices with the class. Then have students open their books to page 15. Explain that the class will now work through a tough choice *together*.

## The New-Kid Dilemma, Part 1 (page 15)

Have a volunteer read “The New-Kid Dilemma, Part 1” aloud. Each student should answer the question at the bottom of the page: What would *you* choose to do? Encourage students to think in terms of good choices, as opposed to what others might think.

## The New-Kid Choice Chart (page 16)

After someone reads the title and directions aloud, students can work individually to complete the exercise. (Obviously, choice A leads to the more positive results.) Point out that making good choices does not always lead to a

positive result, but making bad choices almost never does.

If time allows, invite students to share their “best friend” stories with the class.



### Bring It to Life

For fun, have students make a skit of “The New-Kid Choice Chart.”

Assign four students to play the parts of Alex and the three kids at the table. Have them perform the three scenarios:

1. Alex says no.
2. Alex says yes and moves to your table.
3. Alex continues to eat alone.

To include more students, assign four different students for each scenario.

### The Choice Is Yours (page 17)

Have volunteers read page 17 aloud. Ask your students to respond to the rhetorical questions in the middle of the page (Does dropping coins in the tzedakah box make a difference? Etc.). Guide students to compare answers with one another; this will illustrate the challenge of making good choices, and the fact that there is not always a perfect answer.



### Expand the Conversation

After your students have read the final paragraph, ask: What do you have in common with people who lived hundreds of years ago, and those who will live hundreds of years from now? (*Answers may include: We have*

*the same relationships: parents, siblings, friends, and neighbors; we all suffer sickness; we all grieve and cry when someone dies.*)



### Bring It to Life

Have a student read the “Quick Quote” on page 17 aloud. Ask: In what way are our “days like scrolls”? (*We write our own “stories” with the choices we make.*)

### Three Cheers, Three Jeers

(page 18)

Before your students complete this exercise, explain that they should think of their “not-so-good choices” not as mistakes, but as opportunities to learn how to make good choices in the future.

### Good Choice! (pages 19–20)

As your students read this section, interject the following questions:

- After paragraph 2 on page 19, ask: What are some other choices that we just *stumble* on? (*Answers may include: putting on a jacket when it’s cold outside; wearing a seat belt; working hard in school.*)
- After paragraph 3 on page 19, ask: Should a person who injures another pay a fine, or receive the same injury? What do you think? Explain your answer. Again, encourage a comparison of ideas.
- After the paragraphs at the top of page 20, ask: Even if we don’t find answers for some tough choices, why is it important to continue trying? Encourage students to respect the individual, even when disagreeing with

his or her opinion.

If students express interest, let them discuss one or more of the bulleted questions on page 20. Again, there are no absolute answers; the process of making a good choice based on compassion and respect is what counts.

### **Mensch-Wise** (page 20)

Before your students begin this exercise, ask: How can emotions such as anger and jealousy affect our ability to make good choices? Have students consider this as they complete the exercise.

### **Torah, Talmud, and Beyond**

(page 21)

Have volunteers read page 21 aloud. Tell the class that they are about to create their own *midrashim*.

Remind students of the story of the Golden Calf from Exodus. (As the Israelites waited impatiently for Moses to descend from Mount Sinai, they forged a golden idol.) Ask: Why did the children of Israel choose to do such a thing? (*Answers may include: they became impatient; they didn't believe God would help them; they wanted to put their faith in something they could see and touch.*) Say: You've just helped to create a *midrash!*

### **The New-Kid Dilemma, Part 2**

(page 22)

Ask: In what ways can you welcome guests and strangers at your school? (*Answers may include:*

*sharing a snack; including them in activities at recess; introducing them to classmates.*)

### **Wisdom from the Old Country**

(page 23)

After eight volunteers each read one of the Yiddish proverbs inside the bubbles on page 23, ask them to provide an example of how the proverb teaches them to make good choices. For example, “Too much of anything is unhealthy” reminds us not to overindulge—in TV, or food, or sleep.

*Note:* Before they complete the exercise at the bottom, you might explain that salt stings when it touches an open scratch or cut.



### **As a Family**

With their families, have students create their own “Good Choice Chart.” Instruct your students:

- Have each member of your household list three good choices he or she has made in the past year. (Explain that “good” does not necessarily mean “successful.”) It can be a simple act, such as helping around the house, or a daily habit, like choosing to recycle.
- As a family, discuss your lists. Why do you consider them good choices? Were you pleased with the outcome?

During the next class session, ask your students to share one or two good choices their families made.