

## Chapter 3

# Taking Mensch Actions

Student text:  
pages 24–35

## Overview

In Chapter 3, we learn that once we've made good choices, we must perform positive actions, or *mitzvot*. One of the most important *mitzvot* is *v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho*, "love your neighbor as yourself."

## Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Discuss why it is important to follow good choices with positive action.
- Define *mitzvot*, understand why they are important, and provide several examples.
- Explain the meaning of The Golden Rule and how it leads to all other *mitzvot*.

## Vocabulary

*bikkur holim* the mitzvah to visit the sick  
*kavod* "respect"

*leiv tov* "a good heart"; generosity

*middah* value or virtue (plural: *middot*)

*mitzvah* "commandment"; an ethical or ritual obligation; any act of kindness or generosity (plural: *mitzvot*)

*rodef shalom* the mitzvah to "pursue peace"

*tzedakah* "righteousness"; the mitzvah to give to those in need

*v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho* "love your neighbor as yourself"; The Golden Rule

## Set Induction

Call pairs of volunteers to the front of the classroom to act out the following two scenes:

1. Have Student A drop a pencil on the floor. Have Student B *choose* to pick up the pencil for Student A, but take no action. (Tell Student B to wish very, very hard.)
2. Have Student A drop a pencil to the floor. Tell Student B to choose to pick up the pencil, then actually pick it up and give it to Student A.

## Ask the class:

- What was the difference between the two scenes?
- Was Student B in the first scene a mensch? (*We don't know; he or she didn't do anything.*)
- What does this exercise teach us about being a mensch? (*In order to be a mensch, we must take action.*)

## Starting Small (pages 25–26)

You may wish to turn this dialogue into a short play. Assign students the parts of the narrator, Rachel, her big brother, and their grandmother. (To make it easier, point out that Rachel speaks in the first paragraph, then every other paragraph after that. The big brother speaks in the second paragraph, then the grandmother in every other paragraph after that.)

Ask the class:

- What is the difference between Rachel and her grandmother’s approaches to helping the hungry? (*Rachel thinks in big, ambitious terms, but does nothing. Rachel’s grandmother plans to take small steps.*)
- Whose approach do you think is better? Why? Encourage your students to think in terms of which approach leads to *action*.
- Ask: Of the three specific plans that Rachel and her grandmother make, which will help people to help themselves? (*The third plan—donating seeds, so that the people can feed themselves.*)



### Expand the Conversation

Have a student read the “Quick Quote” at the bottom of page 26 aloud. Ask: How is wisdom without action like a tree without fruit? (*We cannot benefit from it unless it is something we see, feel, experience, etc.*)

Have your students think of other analogies by finishing the sentence: Wisdom without action is like \_\_\_\_\_. Allow your students to have fun with this exercise, as long as it reinforces the point that action is vital.

### The Mitzvah Marvel (page 27)

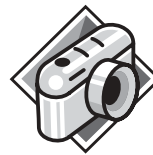
Explain that *mitzvah* literally means *commandment*. In its broadest sense, we may consider any act of kindness or generosity a *mitzvah*.

As your students complete the exercise, remind them that there are many ways to perform *mitzvot* (plural of *mitzvah*).

Invite students to share their answers with the class.

### Mitzvah Your Way to Mensch-hood (page 28)

If time permits, allow students to share personal examples of *mitzvot* they’ve performed—today, this week, and in the past.



### Photo Op (page 28)

Point to the photo of the boy at summer camp on page 28. Have a volunteer read the caption aloud. Ask: What are some other opportunities to perform *mitzvot* at summer camp? (*Answers may include cleaning the bunk, being kind to our campmates, sticking up for kids who are being picked on.*)

Explain that wherever we may be, there are opportunities to perform *mitzvot*.

### A Vote for Mitzvot (page 29)

Ask: How does your “mensch radar” help you recognize an opportunity for a *mitzvah*? Encourage your students to consider the importance of paying attention to others and their needs.

### A Mitzvah A Day (page 29)

After students have completed their exercises, invite volunteers to read their lists aloud. Write the *mitzvot* on the board. Then have students think of as many “everyday *mitzvot*” as they can. Each student should choose (either aloud or privately) one *mitzvah* from the list he or

she will perform every day, starting now.  
Leave the list on the board.



## Expand the Conversation

Read this passage from the Torah to your students:

*The commandments are not difficult, or far away...they are close to you, in your mouth, and in your heart.*

(DEUTERONOMY 30:11–14)

Ask: What do you think this quote means? (Answers may include: mitzvot don't have to be hard; there are always mitzvot to perform; everyone has the power to perform mitzvot.)

## Mensch Spotlight (page 31)

For fun, have students read this “Mensch Spotlight” by having them pretend to be newscasters, reporting a breaking story. Assign an anchor to read *Name and Scene*, one reporter to read *Action*, and another reporter to read *What Made Nahshon a Mensch* and *It's a Fact*.

Ask students to describe examples from their own experience of times when they overcame doubts or difficulties to take action, even when no one else did.

## On One Foot (page 32)

After reading the passage, refer to the list of “everyday mitzvot” on the board. Point to each one and ask: Does this help you to love your neighbor as yourself? The answer to most—or all—should be yes.

Explain that starting here, every chapter will contain a Jewish value in Hebrew, including an “Under the Mensch-ifying Glass” discussion of the Hebrew words themselves.

Ask the class to read the Hebrew inside the magnifying glass aloud. Ask: Where in the prayer service do we find this first word? What does the word mean? (In the *V'ahavta*, after the *Sh'ma*, when we remind ourselves that “you will love” Adonai you God...)

## One More Time! (page 34)

Before your students complete this exercise, ask them to think of arguments they've had in their lives. Ask them to think about:

- Why did the argument start?
- Why did the argument continue?
- Who ended the argument? How? Why?

## A Note of Middot (page 35)

Have a volunteer read the paragraph at the top of page 35. To demonstrate how *middot* work, have volunteers say “I'm sorry” in two ways: (1) as a genuine apology, and (2) a sarcastic “Sor-ree.” Ask: What is the difference between the two? Which kind helps make someone a mensch?

Have volunteers read the rest of the page. Ask: Why is *leiv tov* important in the classroom? At home? In the community? Ask your students to think of instances—when we are upset, or sick, or hungry—when we rely on one another's generosity.



## As a Family

Direct your students to perform a special mitzvah at home in the coming week—one they don't normally perform. Suggest that they put away groceries, fold the laundry, collect and take out the trash, or any other action that will illustrate the mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho*—love your neighbor (in this case, your family) as yourself.

During the next class session, ask: What mitzvah did you perform? How did your parents react? What did you learn from this mitzvah?