

TOP HESED

Family Schmooze # 1

Family Schmooze offers a set of open-ended questions that may be discussed around the dinner table, in the car, or anywhere you are together. If there is more than one child in your family, the discussion will bridge the learning and thinking between younger and older, older and younger.

This last module of the year focuses on hesed, which is often translated as loving kindness, but it is much more than that. While kindness is at the core of this term, it really means going above and beyond what is expected, or “radical kindness.” This story by Alan Morinis hits the definition on the head:

“I once heard Rabbi Abraham Yachnes clarify the extent of the stretch that is necessary to have an action qualify as hesed. He said that if you are walking down the street and someone is walking beside you carrying a large box, and you offer to help the person carry the box, that’s not hesed. You’d simply be a terrible person not to help someone in that situation. What counts as hesed is when you are walking the opposite way from someone carrying a burden and you turn around to help carry that load in the direction he or she is going. That’s hesed.”

<http://jewishvalueseveryday.blogspot.com/2011/02/february-chesed-loving-kindness.html>

Today the children heard three Torah stories catch this nuance of “going above and beyond.” The first was of Abraham who greeted three strangers who stopped by his tent – he said he would get them water and some bread, but fed them a rather full meal (Genesis 18:1-8). The second was the story of Rebecca at the well who was asked by Abraham’s servant to give him water, but she also offered to get water for 10 quite thirsty camels (Genesis 24:1-20). And the final was the hesed shown by Moses’s father-in-law Yitro (Jethro) who had come just to visit, but ending up offering a solution to the long lines of people waiting all day long to have a dispute settled by Moses (Exodus 18:1-27).

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This week, keep an eye out for examples of *hesed* that occur in your family's daily life. Just by saying, "wow, that was a wonderful *hesed* you did" will help bring this Jewish value to life for your child. If you still read to, or with, your child and an act of kindness comes up in the story, you might explore whether or not it is kindness (which is great!) or *hesed* (which offers an extra special quality). And, keep an eye out for the times when you might be able to nurture a kindness into an act of *hesed*.



At the next session, children will be asked to bring to the call something that represents *hesed* or kindness. It would be helpful if this week you help them give it some thought. The item could be something that they were given, something that shows kindness to others (perhaps an item in the recycling box as a kindness to the earth, a *tz'dakah* box whose contents will help others), something that shows the kindness the family does for each other (like a broom that shows a sweeping chore they do keep their home clean), or perhaps it is a book that is about kindness or *hesed*. They will have a minute to go and get this item at the next session; giving this advance thought will help.



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Family Schmooze # 2

This session posed an interesting question – What are the acts of *hesed* that children see around them? But a kindness does not always fit the definition of *hesed* used in this module. We ARE trying to be very clear with children that kindness is wonderful, to be applauded and to be strived for. But we are also trying to help them understand that when we talk about *hesed*, it's about going above and beyond the expected.



In this week's mifgash we looked at kindnesses and created "back-stories" that raised very lovely (and kind) situations to the level of *hesed*. You know your child and where they are developmentally – if you are ready to help them push beyond kindness, you might schmooze about opportunities to do *hesed*, whether in real-time or in response to characters portrayed in stories, tv shows or movies.



We leave you with a bonus, a video by Rabbi Danya Rутtenberg who offers great wisdom as a rabbi, an educator and most importantly, as a parent. While her definition (and spelling!) of *hesed* is a bit different from what we have used for the children, this short video is definitely worth watching:

"Chesed, Tzedakah, Tzedek: What's the Difference,"

<https://tinyurl.com/y6mv8kpw>



TON HESED

Family Schmooze # 3



This week, children heard from someone who shared hesed work in the community, with a special focus on some of the needs, as well as solutions to address them.



Yes, it can be difficult for young children to get their hands into hesed work, but it is not impossible. Depending on your family's time and energy, you might be on the lookout for appropriate projects – through your synagogue, education program or community (e.g., Federation, which often has a volunteer network that extends to families with young children).



Sometimes hesed work is organized and communal, but it often is individual and one-on-one. Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg (you met her in last week's Family Schmooze) shares this wonderful story of her own family, and the power of lunchbox notes to inspire a true act of hesed by her young son. Check it out here:

“How to Raise an Upstanding Child,” with Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg:

<https://tinyurl.com/y338skc6>



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Family Schmooze # 4

This week we expanded the idea of *hesed* as bringing hope to the world. While our examples for children had to do with “simple actions” – reaching out to a person you know is lonely, helping a friend with homework, throwing a ball to the family dog extra times, or stepping up to set the dinner table when a parent has a lot to do (we hope some of you might end up being surprised by the latter!) – we used the iconic images of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel walking with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr in Selma, Alabama to make our point. After the march, Heschel was asked if he took time to pray. His response was that he prayed with his feet (or legs – there are two versions of this quote).



We do *hesed* with our feet and our hands, our heads and our hearts. Heschel would say that *hesed* is a form of prayer. And both *hesed* and prayer bring hope to those doing these acts, as well as to the world. We hope you find ways to continue this conversation at home.



TON HESED

Family Schmooze # 5



This week, the final one in the *hesed* module, children were challenged to consider ways of building the world with *hesed*. And it's not just about *hesed*, per se. It's about attention to

- Creating *sukkat shalom*, a shelter of peace and safety, for oneself and for others
- Calming BIG FEELINGS by tapping into one's *ometz lev* to create a calmer environment
- Using one's *g'vurah*, power and strength, for good
- Tapping into one's social connections to build a stronger *k'hillah*, community
- And of course, going above and beyond by finding ways not just to be kind, but to do *hesed* for others

We hope that you continue schmoozing with your child, finding ways to keep building and strengthening their toolbox. Someone once said that Jewish education is the process of becoming, in dialog with Jewish tradition. This year has brought that concept to life in very powerful ways for us who wrote this curriculum, for us who taught it, and we hope for you and your child, as well.

*May we all go from strength to strength,
in health and wellness - la'bri-ut!*

