

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.

