



DO UNTO OTTERS

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When a family of otters moves in next to Mr. Rabbit, he's a little nervous – he's not sure if they'll get along. But then he remembers the Golden Rule: *Do unto otters as you would have otters do unto you!* This book shows how treating others with respect is the basis of friendship, cooperation, and sharing.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Legend has it that in the first century BCE, the famous Rabbi Hillel was asked to teach the entire Torah while standing on one foot. “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor,” he is reported to have said. “That is the whole of Torah. The rest is commentary.” Since then, countless rabbis and theologians have agreed that this distills the most important message of Judaism into a single sentence. Popularly known as the Golden Rule, this is a core teaching across countless cultures and religions.

In the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, this idea first appears as “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). It sounds simple, but how does one really do this? To put the Golden Rule into action involves combining morality and etiquette. *Derech erez*, literally “the way of the land,” refers to good manners and decent behaviors – those things that help us live in relative peace and harmony. It’s important to note that the focus here is not our relationship to God, but our relationship to one another. Being a *mensch*, a good person, means being decent to fellow human beings.

Later in the Torah we read: “Love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt” (Leviticus 19:34). Judaism places special emphasis on making sure that every person we come in contact with is accorded the same level of respect and common decency.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

In this story, the animals learn some of the basic principles of *derech erez*. Talk with your children about how they can be gracious and kind to those around them:

Say please, thank you and excuse me. These little words remind us to show gratitude, and also affirm the value and dignity of every person we meet. The otters know how to say these words in many languages. Practice using the Hebrew words in sentences, and see if your friends can guess what you’re saying.

- *b’vakasha* – please
- *toda* – thank you
- *slicha* – excuse me

Be welcoming to new people (with parents by your side). The Hebrew phrase for this *mitzvah* (“commandment” or good deed) is *hachnasat orchim*. When you meet new people, greet them graciously and make them feel at home.

Use good table manners. Family mealtime is prized in Jewish culture. Table manners make the experience pleasant for everyone. Some Jewish families begin each meal with *Hamotzi*, a blessing over bread, and finish with *Birkat Ha-Mazon*, a concluding prayer of thanks. Your family might create your own ritual of gratitude.

Remember the Golden Rule. When in doubt, treat others – and otters! – the way you would want them to treat you.