



I CAN HELP

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When this little duck gets lost, he needs help getting home where he belongs. Luckily, lots and lots of animals are available to help – just the way a community should be!

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Mensch is the Yiddish word for a good, helpful person, but it has come to mean even more – a person of integrity, someone we admire, and the type of person we hope our children will become. In *I Can Help* we meet one mensch after another.

When monkey helps little duck, he does a *mitzvah* (literally translated as commandment). There are 613 Biblical *mitzvot* (plural of *mitzvah*), including the Ten Commandments. But “*mitzvah*” also refers to an act of human kindness or a good deed – the sort of thing a mensch would do.

After the first *mitzvah* in this book, a chain reaction of good deeds takes place. This phenomenon is known as *mitzvah goreret mitzvah* (one good deed will bring another). So important is the idea of “*mitzvah goreret mitzvah*” that the *Talmud* (a written record of Jewish law and commentary) instructs even a poor person who receives *tzedakah* (charity) to give *tzedakah* to another who needs it even more (Gittin 7a).

This story reminds us that everyone, even the youngest members of the community, can help. As it says in *Pirkei Avot* (*Ethics of Our Fathers*, a collection of ethical teachings): “You are not responsible for completing the work [of repairing the world], but nor are you free to desist from it” (*Pirkei Avot* 2:21). The mensch-like behavior of the animals in this book encourages children to do their part.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

“I can do it by myself” is a classic toddler mantra. Young children are often eager to help out and show just how much they can do. Before you read the words in this book, look at the pictures with your little one. As you come to each animal, explore with your child what is going on.

Then go back and start reading -- but try putting the focus on feelings. Young children often need to feel a connection to someone before they act to help him or her. You can start by asking, “Do you think monkey feels scared?” or “Have you ever had a splinter like gorilla?”

As help comes to each animal, explore with your child what that might feel like. You can ask, “How does monkey feel when giraffe catches him?” or “Do you think gorilla feels better when bird gets his splinter out?”

Questions like these will help your child begin to see that helping others actually makes the helper feel better, too.

There are many ways even a young child can help. When you visit an elderly relative or give *tzedakah* to someone who is homeless, you model to your child the importance of being a mensch.