

SuperMensch (Names/Sounds)

Participants stand in a circle, Leader explains meaning of mensch as someone who helps others and listens, like a superhero. Each of us can be a supermensch. The Leader loudly says his/her name with a movement (e.g., “Aaron!” and hula dance, or head-scratch, or hands on hips). Everyone else in the circle copies the Leader, then we proceed to the left of the Leader, all the way around the circle until everyone has an opportunity to say his/her name. If a participant is scared or struggling, encourage them to say their name with a Hand Wave or a Thumbs Up. You may repeat the game with Sounds, gibberish word/noise (e.g., “Moo!” and patting one’s belly; “Zoink!” and Thumbs Up).

Mitzvah: Sh'ma/Listening skills, Ages: 5+

“Anachnu”/“We Are”

In this activity participants take turns raising their hands and when called upon saying, “Anachnu Ducks,” or “Anachnu Baseball Players.” Everyone then has to support the suggestion by acting like “Ducks” or “Baseball Players” or whatever the suggestion was. After about 10 seconds the leader says, “Freeze” and everyone has to stop moving and raise their hand if they have a new idea. This teaches participants to support each others ideas and build community.

Mitzvah: *Kehillah*/Community, Ages 4+

“Todah Rabbah”/“Thank you”

In this activity two leaders explain and demonstrate how to play and then tell everyone to find a nearby partner and play. Person 1 says “I got you a present” and mimes handing a wrapped gift to Person 2, who mimes receiving the gift. Person 2 then mimes opening the gift says “Todah Rabbah” and names what the gift is saying, “Thanks for the Turtle” or “What a cool flashlight.” Next Person 1 then explains why they got that gift saying, “Yeah I know your rabbit ran away so I wanted to get you a slower

pet” or “I got you a flashlight because you’re so good at telling ghost stories.” The next round the partners switch roles and play again with a new gift and a new explanation. Play 5-6 times before group reflection: How did it feel to give/receive? Improv is about giving “gifts” to our scene partners.

Mitzvah: *Chesed/Kindness*, Ages: 6+

“Gam Ani”/“Me too”

A version of A Strong Wind Blows. Participants stand in a circle, with the Leader in the Middle. The Leader says a statement that is true for him/her (e.g., “I was born in New Jersey”, or “I love mint ice cream”), and any participant that agrees with that statement says, “Gam Ani” and they walk through the Middle to a different spot in the circle. Like musical chairs, the last participant to find a spot remains in the Middle and makes a new statement that is true for them (e.g., “I’ve been to Israel”). If possible, set up chairs around the circle for each participant, minus one-- like musical chairs, except this game unites people. If necessary, in order to keep the game appropriate, remind participants, “Keep suggestions out of the bedroom and the bathroom.”

Mitzvah: *Kehillah/Community*, Ages 7+

“Acharai”/“After Me”

This activity is demonstrated by two leaders and then played in partners by the participants. The goal of this activity is to have a conversation with your partner while following one important rule: The last word of your partner’s sentence, is the first word of your sentence. The conversation continues with a partner for 2-3 minutes until the leaders end the activity. So for instance a conversation might look like this.

Person 1: I really want to get a dog.

Person 2: Dogs love to chase sticks.

Person 1: Sticks come from trees in the park.

Person 2: Parking your car is difficult in the city.

Oftentimes when speaking with others, we aren't actively listening, we are simply waiting for our turn to talk. This activity encourages being an active listener and not just rushing to come up with what one wants to say next.

Mitzvah: *Shma*/Listening, Ages 5+

Mensch Moments

Choose any biblical story, divide the story into sections of 3 sentences/verses each. In groups of 3-5, participants have 5 minutes to interpret their section and bring it to life, silently! Encourage them to act as objects (e.g., Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds, people can be the water that is parted). Then everyone reconvenes and the educator narrates each section.

Mitzvah: *Lomed Torah*/Learning Torah, Ages 7+

Pirkei Avot Commercials

Divide learners into groups of 3-5. Give each group a verse from Pirkei Avot/ "Ethics of the Sages". The group has 4-5 minutes to discuss its meaning and how they would like to interpret it, in order to create a 30-second commercial. Then the groups take turns performing their commercial for the other groups. For example: "Who is strong? One who controls his/her impulses." The group could have a spokesperson say, "Drink this new Pirkei Avot Fruit Punch and you won't lose your temper anymore. See before--" Person A sees Person B eating cookies, decides to steal the cookies, Person B cries. "But watch what happens when Person A drinks our Punch!" Person A then goes to Person B, wants to steal the cookies, instead she asks to have one. Person B shares and says, "Wow, you are really strong! I know you wanted them. Thank you for controlling your impulses." Person A says, "Thank you, Pirkei Avot Punch!" A

commercial can also simply be a sketch/scene, no need to actually invent a product to “sell.”

Mitzvah: *Hochma/Wisdom*, Ages 8+

Aleph, Bet, Go!

On the board, write a Hebrew word (e.g., “shalom”). Divide learners into 2 teams, with equal numbers. Have teams line up parallel, in single file. The leader will whisper any Hebrew letter from the word (e.g., “final mem”-- not in order) to the “caboose” of each line, then say “Go!” and the caboose will use their finger to trace the word on the back of the teammate in front of them. The teammate may say “Again” if they wish to have the caboose repeat the motion. Once the teammate thinks they know the letter, s/he traces it on the back of the person in front of him/her, and it continues down the line, till the person at the head of the line shouts out the letter. Each team can shout out only once. If they get it wrong, the other team can still shout it out. Repeat until there are is just one letter left in the word. You may also start with the English version of the word (e.g., “peace”), until the learners get used to it. This can be applied to any unit, or multiple words (e.g., “Shalom Bayit” or “Chag Sameach”).

Mitzvah: *Yitzeirah/Creativity*, Ages 6+

Abraham’s Angels

Five volunteers are needed. Two volunteers act as Abraham & Sarah, they will be the Guessers. They go out of earshot so as not to hear the suggestions. Three Angels will be chosen and given unique character traits suggested by the audience (e.g., one angel acts like an Animal, another angels is playing a sport; the third angel has a profession, “He’s a cat”, “She’s a gym teacher”). Once all the traits are chosen, Sarah & Abraham are brought back to welcome the Angels into their home, one at a time, while trying to figure out what’s unique about them. When Sarah and Abraham guess the different trait of each Angel, each Angel sits down.

Start by introducing each Angel one at a time, only welcoming the next angel once the previous angel has sat down.

Mitzvah: *Hachnasat Orchim*/welcoming guests., Ages 9+
(Adapted from “Party Quirks” by Whose Line is it Anyway)

Spectrum/Thermometer Activity

Everyone stands up and enters in the “middle of a spectrum” (younger participants: “thermometer”) facing the Leaders. One wall (to the Left) is “Hot”/“They completely agree”, and the opposite wall (to the Right) is “Cold”/ “completely disagree.” The Leader is standing exactly in the middle of the two temperatures. The Leader makes a statement (“Dogs are the best pet ever!”) and participants go stand by one wall if they agree completely, the other if they disagree completely, and anywhere in between, depending on their opinion. Then the Leader can ask any participant if they would like to share why they chose to stand in their spot. Then the Leader makes a new statement. The statements can refer to a holiday (“Passover is the most important Jewish holiday!”) or a story you are studying (“Leah was better than Rachel”), and can be adjusted for more complex discussions (“Every Jew should live in Israel”).

If peer pressure is a concern, you may have all the learners stand on a line, shoulder to shoulder, facing the Leader. If they agree, take a step forward (towards the Leader), if they disagree, take a step backwards. This way the participants cannot see what their peers are doing. After the activity, discuss how participants’ opinions changed, what they considered differently as the activity progressed.

Mitzvah: *Binah*/Understanding, Ages 8+
(Adapted from Kolot Chayeinu and Matan)

“Mah Koreh?”/“What’s Happening?”

In this circle game, participants stand in a circle. The first volunteer enters the Center and acts something out (e.g., “Disco dancing”). After 3-5

seconds, someone else taps the volunteer on the shoulder and ask “Mah Koreh?” (“What’s happening?”). The person in the middle says a new action (e.g., “I’m riding a horse;”) and the person who tapped and asked must then start doing that action, while the other person returns to the circle. This can be played after a holiday unit (“I’m lighting the shabbat candles”, “I’m washing my hands”, “I’m blessing the wine”) or modified so participants must use one hebrew word in their description (“I’m washing a kelev/dog”, “I’m petting a chatool/cat”). It can be done in order, or anyone may tap the person in the Center. People standing in the Circle may add sound effects. Important rule before beginning, in order to keep the game appropriate, remind participants, “Keep suggestions out of the bedroom and the bathroom.”

Mitzvah: Creativity/*Yetzirah*, Ages 10+

Hands-on Jewish Expert

Two volunteers are brought on stage. Person A will play the Expert with their hands behind their back and Person B will act as their hands (sticks hands through Person A’s armpits). The Leader then gets a suggestions from the crowd for a topic (Jewish holiday, Biblical story), or the Expert can pretend to be a character from the Bible/story that is being studied! The Leader interviews them about it. Note: We recommend keeping volunteers the same gender because of the physical interactions in this activity.

Mitzvah: *Kehillah*/Community, Ages 8+

4 in 1 (Adapted from Georgetown Facilitation Program)

You will need pencils and paper for the activity. In groups of 4, participants will have 7 minutes to talk as a group and come up 4 things they all have in common, and 4 things that makes each of them unique in their group (e.g., “We’ve all been to the Statue of Liberty... Only I have own pet turtle”). So each group will end up with 8 items total, 4 shared, and 1

unique fact from each person. Then have the groups share their responses with the whole room.

Mitzvah: *Kehillah*/Community, Ages 10+

Sign Language Sh'ma

Recite the first line of the Sh'ma with sign language. The 1st rule of Improv is "Always listen", just like the meaning of the "Sh'ma." Normally we cover our eyes to recite this prayer, but in this version we keep our eyes (and our minds) open and let our hands do the praying! Many versions can be easily found on YouTube (our favorite, with Rabbi Darby Jared Leigh, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDUU4vy2tmM&t=8s)

Mitzvah: Sh'ma/Listening, Ages 6+

Oseh Shalom Walk-Around

A walking around activity, a great way to introduce "Barukh she'amar," end the Amidah, the Birchot ha'Shachar or the whole service. The leader instructs the participants: "This will be a 4-part activity, beginning silently. First, please silently walk around the room and don't make eye contact with anyone.... Okay, keep walking, keep your expression the same, only now make eye contact with others... Okay, keep walking, now make eye contact and smile at others... Okay, now smile, wave and say "Shalom!" to others.

... Okay, please stop. How did you feel when no one made eye contact? How about when people smiled at you? Or enthusiastically said "Shalom" to you? This shows us the power of our eyes, our smiles, our words. Let us all try to make more peace, more "shalom" is this world today.

Mitzvah: *Shalom*/Peace, Ages 6+

Ancestors Walk

This is a great activity to use during Tefillot when leading into the "Amidah" service. This helps to feel connected to our own family, as well as

the matriarchs and patriarchs mentioned in the first section (Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah).

The leader asks participants to slowly and silently walk around the room, which they do for the duration of this activity. After a few moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your parents walking behind you. They’re not breathing down your neck, just silently walking a few paces behind you.” After a few moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your grandparents are walking behind your parents. Maybe you’ve never met them, but there they are.” After a few more moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your great-grandparents are added to the group. Maybe you’ve never seen them, in person, think of photos or imagine them.” After a few additional moments, the leader says, “Now imagine your oldest relative that you know of, maybe you’ve never even seen a picture of them, but imagine they are following your great grandparents, who are following your grandparents, following your parents... who are following you... your relatives crossed oceans and continents and survived so that you could be here today, right now.”

Mitzvah: *Dor l’Dor* / Generation to Generation, Ages 8+

(Adapted from the Jewish Theological Seminary)

Categories

A circle game that teaches us to listen and think simultaneously. One person chooses a Category (e.g., colors), and the person to her left names a color. Then each person goes around the circle and names a color. The round ends when someone cannot think of one, or repeats a color. This person isn’t called “out,” instead she gets to be the new leader, gets to think of the next category (e.g., Hanukkah words), stands in the center of the circle and keeps the beat for the more challenging version.

To make it more challenging, try keeping a beat (hit your knees twice, then snap. Think of Queen’s song “We Will Rock You”). Answers must be given

on the snap/beat. If someone can't answer on the beat, they become the next "leader."

Mitzvah: *Ometz Lev*/Courage, Ages 10+
(Adapted from Cherub Improv)

Beastie Rap

The circle game is based on the rhyming style of those lovely Brooklyn Jewish fellas, the Beastie Boys! They would often end a verse by saying the same rhyming word in unison. The chorus is just 4 beats, as slow or fast as you like. The leader has a volunteer think of a one-syllable word (e.g., cat), the leader starts the first verse, "I really love my dear pet cat" and everyone says "cat together. Then the chorus, followed by the next person in the circle improvising the second rhyming verse, "When I play ball I use bat, " (everyone says "bat" together), then the chorus, and so on. The idea is to telegraph to your circle mates what your rhyme will be, so that they can all say it together. This game teaches us to listen and think at the same time, and forgive ourselves and others for making mistakes (perfect for the High Holidays/ Yamim nora'im).

Mitzvah: *Sh'ma*/Listening, Ages 10+
(Learned from The Magnet Theater)

"Modeh/Modah Ani"

A great exercise for the opening, morning prayer, this is an appreciation of our 5 senses. Ask participants to think of 1 thing they appreciated seeing today/recently, ask a few to share. Then think of 1 thing they smelled that was good... And so on, for taste, touch, and hearing. We often take things for granted and this helps us stop, appreciate our abilities and gifts. Now let's say Thank you., Ages 5+

Mitzvah: *Todah Rabah*/Showing Thanks

Ashrei Acrostic

Leader explains that the “Ashrei” prayer is an acrostic, of praising God. Students go through the alphabet (1 letter per student, going around the room) and they name something they are grateful for that begins with the next letter of the Alphabet. This can be done with the Hebrew aleph-bet as well, just thinking of words that begin with the same sound as the letter... or, even with actual Hebrew words!

Mitzvah: Todah Rabah/Showing Thanks, Ages 7+

Vision Circles/Rosh Hashana:

Looking back at the year ahead! In groups of 3, we each share our vision of the coming year. We take turns speaking, reflecting on why the coming year will be so great, but *as if it's already happened*. I usually connect it to Rosh Hashana, but can be to the closest Jewish holiday (e.g., “It’s Rosh Hashana 2019, and it’s been a great year...”). For 2-3 minutes, the speaker proceeds, describing all the amazing things that occurred. The 2 circle-mates just listen, no facial reactions or nodding. A facilitator keeps time, gives a 20-second warning, then will indicate when time is up. The two listeners high-five the speaker, then a new speaker begins with the same phrase (“It’s Rosh Hashana 2019/Hanukkah 2019, and it’s been a great year...”). This allows us to envision our forthcoming year in a positive light of possibility!

Mitzvah: *Emunah*/Conviction, Ages 11+

(This is adapted from the Georgetown University Facilitation Program)

Shabbat Tag:

Pick 5 students to help demonstrate the elements of Shabbat: 2 challot, 2 candles, and a kiddush cup. Taggers will run around and when people are tagged they must put their feet together and become a candle (Hands straight up), a challah (Hands wound together), or a kiddush cup (Hands to the side making a bowl shape.) When students are tagged they must only hop till they can combine all 5 elements to make a Havdalah



candle by putting their hands together. They then say “Shabbat Shalom” and are free to run until they’re tagged again. This can also be done with 3 elements (one candle, one challah and one cup).

Mitzvah: Shomer Shabbat/Guard Shabbat, Ages 5+