



## Mensch in the Mirror



I wanted to live my life with purpose and virtue.

There is a Yiddish word – mensch – which has a variety of meanings. It means man or woman, responsibility, accountability, appropriateness, doing the right thing, standing



up, and especially acting in a virtuous way. A more formal definition is “a person having admirable characteristics, such as fortitude and firmness of purpose.”

“If I had a nickel for every time I heard as a kid, “Be a mensch.” I’d be an esteemed client, not an employee at this company.

Tim and I were chatting the other day he asked me if I knew a Yiddish word which means “to take ownership, hold a special place, etc.” After consulting the tribe elders, we decided mensch fits the bill. It means all of that and more.

After spending some time with the thoughts and meanings of mensch I began to look at myself, really look at myself. I think to be a true mensch, one must look in the mirror and respect the person looking back. It is not always easy to carry the load of virtue and purpose around. At times it can feel like a yolk, and you are the nag plowing a field. Other times it is weightless and even urges one forward like a hand on your back.

We spoke of the life un-lived, following urges, the power of impulse and the responsibility, ownership and accountability which accompanies such actions. We were really speaking of being a mensch.

**I decided a long time ago that I wanted to live my life with purpose and virtue.** What I never did however was take helpful hints along the way. Being open to feedback and responding accordingly is a cornerstone of mensch-kite



(acting in a mensch like way). Feedback sometimes smarts, and sometimes it can go down smoothly. Either way, it's necessary.

I swallowed a bitter pill the other day. In fact, it forced me to visit that gentleman in the mirror. It was then that I realized I had veered from my course of ownership. I felt like I let a few people down. But after fully digesting my pill (we're talking a big pill, here) I concluded that this virtuous road traveled is laden with forks and U-turns. Stopping and asking for directions every now and again is allowed. In fact, it's more than acceptable; it's part of the never-ending education of the mensch. “

I like the guy looking back at me. More and more, I like the guy looking back at me.”

— R\_Epstein, December 21, 2004

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