

Transforming the World and Ourselves: 7 Areas for Using *The Social Action Manual*

By Rabbi Noah Zvi Farkas

Our teens are powerful—they work, pay taxes, lead in the use of technology, and advocate for causes that are important to them. When teens engage in social action projects, they learn about their community and its needs, their own interests, and ways to make the world a better place.

[The Social Action Manual](#) is a guidebook for transforming teens and their community through thoughtful, impactful social action projects. Because it is a Jewish book, students will also find Jewish texts that can motivate their desire for social change. The following are some ways to use *The Social Action Manual* in your school, synagogue, or institution.

1. **Hebrew High Elective:** Create a class in your Hebrew High program that uses the manual as its primary curriculum. You can teach the class over several sessions that are between 60 to 90 minutes each, punctuating the six workshops in the workbook with time spent developing social action projects. For example, you might assign a different student or group of students to teach the sacred text excerpts each week. Students can present the short passage in Hebrew or English (or both), give their interpretation, and lead a discussion or debate about the topic (e.g., “the world is built on three things: Torah, worship, and acts of loving-kindness” vs. “the world is built on three things: justice, truth, and peace”).
2. **Day Schools and Community Schools:** Form a social action club in your school that can help guide students who are passionate about social action. Have a teacher become the advisor to the group of students. He or she can co-host meetings throughout the year to teach texts, and guide students into a project that they find meaningful. For example, the students can use the “Looking for Needs” section (Workshop 3) to focus on a specific social action need, like protecting the environment, and then they can act on that need by setting up recycling facilities or raising waste awareness in the cafeteria.
3. **Teacher Training:** By creating a community of teachers that learn together and act together, you can inspire your students to do the same. You can use Workshop 1, “What is Social Action?” to orient teachers to the different types of social action, such as philanthropy and advocacy. You could then ask teachers to assess what the school does in each area, and to identify ways they can improve their work. You can also host intensive training sessions over the course of the school year that encourage your teachers to do social action together. Over six sessions they can work on preparing, acting, and evaluating a project (like a clothing drive or a letter-writing campaign) together. This could bring them closer as a staff, inspire them to be reflective about their work, and if you publicize the work to parents and students, it could influence them to act as well.

4. **Havurot:** As a family educator, you can inspire your *havurot* to use the manual for doing social action projects. Parents and children can do the workshops together as a group, create a project or an initiative, and then reflect together. This builds community, teaches both adults and children Jewish values, and helps bring social action deeper into the synagogue. In addition, you could have members of the *havura* lead an exercise from Workshop 6, “Living a Life of Social Action,” to open a discussion about the different Jewish values that animate other members of their group.
5. **Self or Peer-Directed:** The workshops are self-directed. You can distribute them to individual students or older teens who can “buddy” with younger teens to work on social action together. This would work especially well in youth groups. Have board members of your youth group lead a discussion based on Workshop 2 about translating society’s problems into specific, manageable issues (e.g., hunger is a problem, but people with little access to food is an issue).
6. **Bar and Bat Mitzvah:** You can run a class for your current bar and bat mitzvah students that helps them create and execute a social action project during their year of study. Because the guide is focused mostly on post-b’nai mitzvah students, the teacher will need to adjust some of the material developmentally. However, your bar and bat mitzvah tutor or teacher can facilitate meaningful discussions about the Jewish value of social justice (from Workshop 1), brainstorm ideas for social action projects (Workshop 3), and discuss the values, like justice and *hesed*, that are important to being a young Jewish adult (Workshop 6).
7. **Adult Learning:** Even though the guide is geared towards teenagers, the elements of social action are applicable to all ages. Use the manual as a guide for your social action committee to help direct them to think about and plan excellent social action projects. You or your rabbi can help your chairperson lead text study on the nature of social action.

In all of these contexts, bear in mind that there is a personal transformative component to doing social action. Throughout the process, have your facilitator lead discussions about who your students are (Workshop 3) and how doing social action can personally affect them (by spending time with the “Reflections” sections of each workshop).

Given the right opportunity, our teens can learn that they can make a difference in the world. [*The Social Action Manual*](#) helps students develop the skill sets, self-confidence, and moments of transformation that can change who they are, and the world around them.

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