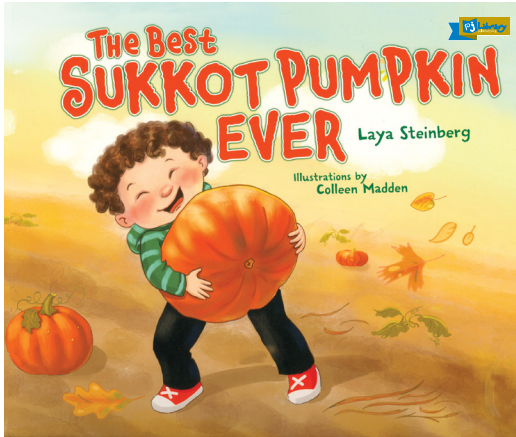


BIG QUESTION

What can we do to meet the needs of other people?



Written by Laya Steinberg
Illustrated by Colleen Madden
Published by Kar-Ben Publishing



READ

the book for Jewish values

How does this book reflect the theme of taking action in the community?

Whether it is by putting coins in a *tzedakah* box, participating in a food drive, or bringing toys and books to a shelter, children seem to readily grasp the importance of *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* is essentially giving to those in need. In *The Best Sukkot Pumpkin Ever*, a boy visits a farm to gather pumpkins to donate to a soup kitchen and gains a deeper understanding about **thinking of the needs of others before your own needs**. Thinking of others not only helps the individuals – it helps strengthen the greater community.

Three aspects of this value to consider:

- We give because helping people in need is the right and just thing to do.
- Thinking of others first and giving generously is a state of mind.
- Feeding the hungry is an important act of *tzedakah*.



Righteous giving - *Tze-da-kah* - צְדָקָה

Tzedakah is often defined as “charity,” yet the root of the word, *tzedek*, means righteousness or justice. A more precise translation of *tzedakah* is “righteous giving.” According to Jewish teachings, giving *tzedakah* is an obligation even for the poorest among us, as long as no life is endangered in performing the *mitzvah*. The Torah teaches: “Open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman of your land...” (Deuteronomy 15:11) and “your heart shall not be grieved when you give” (15:15). The 12th-century philosopher and Torah scholar Maimonides (Rambam) taught about eight levels of giving in his Ladder of *Tzedakah*. At the lowest level, *tzedakah* is given begrudgingly. At the highest level, assistance is given gladly before the recipient is impoverished, empowering him or her to not become dependent on others. (For a printable ladder, see pjlibrary.org/ladder.)

Storytelling techniques

1. *(Materials needed: one small decorative pumpkin per student)*
Prior to reading the story, make a pumpkin patch in a grassy area, using as many small pumpkins as there are students in your class. Invite the students to each find a pumpkin and then hold it as you read the story. If the story is read near or in a *sukkah*, ask the students leave their pumpkins as decorations. They may also take them home.
2. *(Materials needed: a pumpkin, a knife, and a large plate. If you have no cooking plans, please choose a decorative pumpkin.)*
When the pumpkin is opened in the story, cut open a pumpkin and look inside. What part of the pumpkin is used to make soup, like the kind mentioned in the story? How many seeds do your students think are in there and could potentially yield future pumpkins? Notice that everything inside the pumpkin is connected through stringy threads. How might they apply to the ideas of *tzedakah* and thinking of others in the community?



DISCUSS

Jewish values with one another

After you read

Micah carefully chooses several pumpkins in the story, including the pumpkins that he knows he will be giving away. Why do you think he chooses so carefully?

Where do you regularly give or do acts of tzedakah, and who receives your tzedakah?

What organization or group should receive our classroom tzedakah money and why?

Why is giving tzedakah a part of how we celebrate many Jewish holidays, such as Shabbat, Purim, and Pesach?



IMAGINE

how values will come to life

Draw it out

Tzedakah can be given in the form of money, items, and actions. Have every student draw an example of each of these forms of tzedakah. Alternately, play Tzedakah Charades and have students act out different types of tzedakah.



Ladder challenge

Print the *unnumbered* Maimonides' Ladder of Tzedakah found here: pjlibrary.org/ladder. Cut apart into the eight sections and give one set each to pairs or small groups of students. Challenge students to put the types of tzedakah in order from lowest to highest level. Regroup as a class to discuss and debate the order.



ENGAGE FAMILIES

in conversations about values

Support a local soup kitchen, shelter, or meal program by creating soups in a cup, sandwiches, or other simple meals. (These organizations will direct you as to what their needs and requirements are.) Make the event more festive by decorating the serving containers and playing PJ Library Radio (pjlibraryradio.com) in the background! Perhaps families will choose to visit the organization and lend a hand.

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

PJ LIBRARY BOOKS

Bagels from Benny by Aubrey Davis

Hanukkah Cookies with Sprinkles
by David Adler

