

A Child's Guide to Maimonides' Ladder of Tzedakah

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This group of stories and activities is an introduction to Jewish concepts of tzedakah, using the eight steps of tzedakah as categorized by Maimonides. The book is appropriate for grades 2-4. It was developed by Regina Greenspun and Janice Newman and used for more than 30 years with 3rd graders at the Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington, D.C.

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Introduction

Tzedakah

What is tzedakah? It is a Hebrew word that means “justice”. Life in our world is not always fair. People do not always have what they need. Some people might have plenty of food while others do not have enough to eat. Some children might live with loving parents but others don't. Some people are healthy but others are sick. Is that fair? Is that just?

As Jews, we believe that it is our responsibility to help make things more fair or just. It is a very important part of being Jewish. We are commanded to do mitzvot, (good deeds) to make the world a better place. God created the world but the world is not finished. It our job to work with God as partners, to help continue that work. We do not believe that we can leave that work for others. We must do our part and take responsibility for fixing the world.

Giving tzedakah is a way to fix the world by helping others. Even children have opportunities every day to reach out and help others, although we don't always know how to help. Many students bring money to religious school so that it will be used to help others. When you do things that make the world more fair, you are doing something very important. You are doing Tzedakah.

Moses Maimonides

Eight hundred years ago, there was a very wise man named Moses Maimonides. He and his family lived in Spain where there was a large Jewish community. Let's learn how to say his name: My-Mawn-i-deez.

Maimonides traveled and lived in other places as he grew older. He studied medicine, the Bible and the writings of the great Rabbis. He settled in Egypt where he worked as a doctor for the Egyptian ruler. He became the most important Jewish thinker, writer, and scholar in the world. During the 12th Century, Jews from many lands traveled to see Moses Maimonides. They wanted to talk to him and study with him. He was famous because of his interesting ideas. He taught about being Jewish.

Maimonides was interested in tzedakah. He tried to explain how important it is for us to give tzedakah. He came up with the idea of different levels of giving. You can look at a ladder to understand this idea.

Maimonides said that there are eight steps or levels to giving tzedakah. The steps go from not very good to better to best.

The lowest level is like stepping on the first step on a ladder. You are close to the ground, but you are going in the right direction.

Giving tzedakah at higher levels is like climbing on higher steps on the ladder. The highest level is the best because it does the most to help another person have a fair share of the world.

We still use Maimonides' ideas to understand and explain how to give tzedakah. In this book, you will learn about each level of tzedakah. For each step, there is a new story to teach the meaning of that step. There are eight stories, one for each of the eight steps of tzedakah.

After each story, we will take a step up the ladder. We will discuss the way tzedakah was given. For example, how did the people in the story feel about the tzedakah? Was the person giving help, (the giver) willing to help someone else? Was the person receiving help (the receiver) pleased or happy with what happened? Just as Maimonides discussed these steps with his students hundreds of years ago, you can learn about them now.

Story 1: The Big Contract

Today was the day Mr. Allen was going to hear about the big contract. He was trying to get a contract to set up computers for a big government office. This contract was very important to him because it would give his business a lot of work and he would earn a lot of money. Getting the contract would be great news for him and everyone who worked for him.

Mr. Allen was both nervous and excited to find out today if he would get the contract. The phone rang. He thought it was the call he was waiting for. Even though he was nervous, he tried to sound calm when he answered the phone.

“Mr. Allen, I am calling about the contract. I would like you to know that we reviewed all the proposals and decided that yours was the best. We would like to offer the computer contract to you and your company,”

This was the good news he was hoping for. He got the job! He spoke to the person on the phone, still sounding calm outside, but inside he was so excited to hear the news. They made arrangements to have a meeting to work on the details of the job. Then they thanked each other, and Mr. Allen hung up the phone.

“Hooray,” he shouted. “We got the contract!” He told everyone in the office the good news. Everyone was so happy.

Then he called his wife to let her know what happened. “That’s great!” she responded. “Now we can take that trip to Disney World.”

Mr. Allen said they should go out and celebrate. “Why don’t we go out for dinner this weekend?” he suggested. She mentioned that she had seen a really nice dress at the mall that morning, and had not bought it because it was so expensive. It cost \$200.

Mr. Allen told her she should go back to the mall, and buy that dress that she liked so much. “You don’t have to worry so much about what it cost, because now that I have this contract we will have a lot more money. You can wear the dress when we go out to dinner to celebrate.” Mrs. Allen said that sounded like a great idea. They were both very excited.

When Mr. Allen got off the phone, he told his secretary that he had to leave for his weekly tennis game with Joe, his best friend,. He and Joe met every week to get exercise and to share news about what they were doing.

As soon as Mr. Allen saw his friend, he immediately noticed that Joe had a worried look. Mr. Allen wanted to share his good news, but first needed to know what was troubling Joe.

“Joe,” he said, “I have great news to share, but first tell me what’s bothering you.” Joe explained that he had been on the phone all morning trying to raise money for the Mitzvah Federation. It was Joe’s job to help groups of Jewish people who were moving into the area from other countries. These people wanted to find freedom and a better life in the United States. Joe’s organization welcomed new Jewish families to the area who sometimes arrived without money, food, or a place to stay. Sometimes they spoke very little English. When Joe raised the money, it was used to help these people get started with their new lives. Joe’s office provided the people with food, furniture and places to

stay while they were getting settled, looking for jobs and getting used to living in our country.

Joe explained, “There is a new family coming to our area later this week and I’m having trouble raising the few thousand dollars we need to help them out. You know how expensive it is just to get them food.” Joe continued, “I don’t want to spoil your day with my problems. Why don’t you tell me your good news.”

So Mr. Allen told him about getting the contract and how much it was going to increase his business. He was happy telling Joe all about it, and about how he would take his family to Disney World.

Joe congratulated him, “That contract is great news for you. And maybe now you can help me with my fund raising, since you are going to have more money. Could you write me a check today to help the family I was telling you about?”

Mr. Allen hesitated. “I don’t think so,”

“Why not?” Joe asked.

Mr. Allen paused, “Um, I really should call my accountant first.”

“Oh, come on,” persisted Joe. “It doesn’t have to be a lot of money. Any amount would really be appreciated.”

“But,” said Mr. Allen, “my accountant wants me to call him before I make any contributions. I’ll get back to you in a day or so.”

“That will be too late,” Joe continued, “Why don’t you just write a small check? I’m sure your accountant will understand.”

“Oh, I guess it’s okay,” agreed Mr. Allen. He took out his checkbook. He wrote a check for \$25 and handed it to Joe. Then they went ahead and played tennis. They had a great game. And Joe had at least a little bit more money for the new immigrant family.

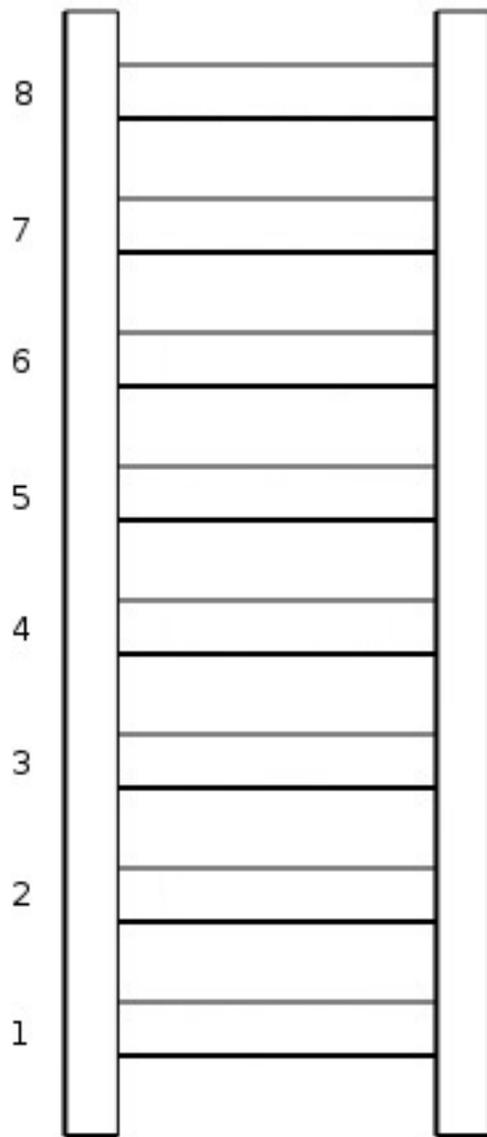
That is the end of the first story!

Discussion

1. Is there an example of someone giving tzedakah in the story?
2. Who was the giver?
3. Who receives the tzedakah?
4. Was the tzedakah enough?
5. Was it given willingly?
6. Is Mr. Allen a generous person?

This story was about the first step on the ladder of tzedakah:

“Gives too little unwillingly.”



Gives too little, unwillingly.

Story 2: The Earthquake Children

This story tells how two children from Mexico came to live in my neighborhood. There was an earthquake that caused great damage in Mexico. Buildings collapsed, power and water service were interrupted, and people were hurt. It was going to take a long time to restore their lives to normal.

My neighbor has a best friend from medical school who lived in the earthquake zone. Their wives were friends and so were their children. The children from Mexico were the same age as my neighbor's children, 7 and 10 years old. The families enjoyed being together for vacations every year.

When my neighbor heard about the earthquake, he was worried. Was his friend all right, he wondered? Earthquakes can be scary. Then he got a phone call from Mexico. "Are you ok?" my neighbor asked. "We have been so worried about you."

"We are all fine," said his friend. "But my wife and I are working very long hours in the hospital. There is so much damage here. Our house isn't livable. I have a favor to ask. Can you take care of the kids for a while until things settle down and we can find a new place to live? I can put them on a plane tomorrow. They would love to be with your family and it would be such a help to us."

My neighbor said it would be no problem. They made plans to have the children fly all by themselves from Mexico. My neighbor picked them up at the airport the next day, and that is how two children from Mexico came to live on my street.

When the children arrived, they were very happy to be here. They were glad to visit with my neighbor's family and were looking forward to attending the neighborhood school while they were here.

The Mexican children were very lucky that they were not hurt in the earthquake. Unfortunately they had lost most of their belongings when their house was damaged. They arrived in my neighborhood with little more than the clothes they were wearing.

Some of the other neighbors decided to have a party to welcome the children. If someone volunteered to bring something to the party, they were encouraged to bring clothing that the children could use.

It was a wonderful party. One person brought the children new t-shirts. Another brought two sweaters. I brought socks and underwear. Other people brought jackets and pajamas. There was good food to eat and the children played in the house while the adults visited.

There was one noisy neighbor who made a lot of commotion about how sorry she felt for the 'poor, poor' children. She said she would come back the next day and bring a lot of things for them that they could use. She said she was going to clean out her children's closets.

The next day, the noisy neighbor drove over to drop off two bags of clothes. She rang the doorbell and talked quickly to the mother there. She explained, "I can't wait to show you all the things I brought for those poor children. But I can only stay a minute. I told my daughter I would take her to the shopping mall for some new things. I don't know why she wants something new. She has so much in her closet that she doesn't even wear. Anyway, she is waiting there in the car for me, so I have to leave."

She opened one of the bags. First she picked up a shirt. It had a big stain on the front “This is for the boy. It should fit him just fine. I tried to get that stain out, but no luck. He should be able to wear it under a sweater.” Then she picked up a jacket. “This is a great jacket. The zipper doesn’t always work, but he can just hold it closed, or wear it open if it’s not too cold out.”

Then she reached into the other bag. “These things are for the girl,” she explained. “This sweater is really nice, but every time my daughter wore it, it left bits of fuzz on everything. Oh and this shirt is great, but I think it has a hole in the sleeve.”

Everything she had brought had something wrong with it, but she cheerfully left the items and hurried to go shopping.

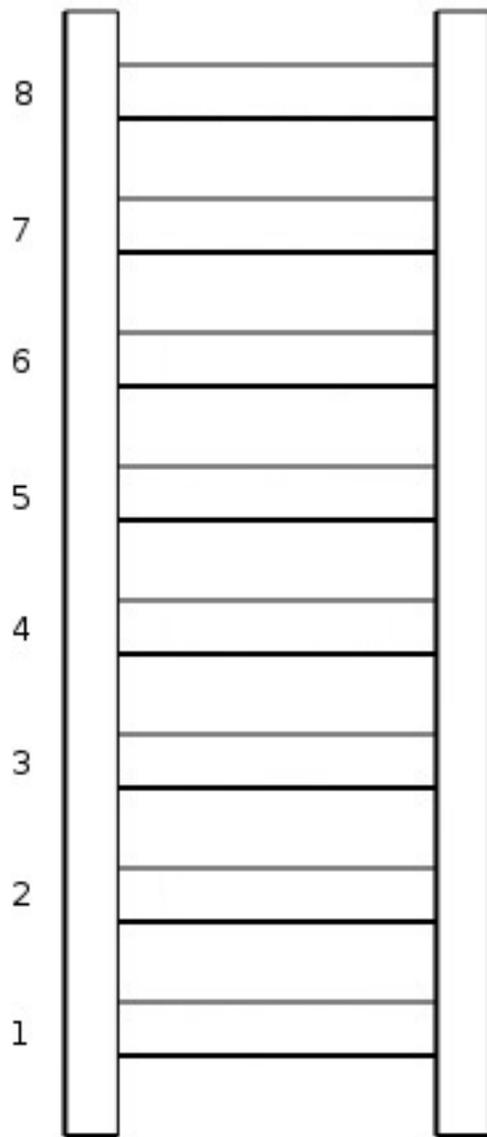
The End

Discussion

1. What were the examples of tzedakah in the story?
2. How would you describe the way the noisy neighbor gave tzedakah?
3. Do you think she was generous?
4. How do you think the Mexican children were going to feel when they received the clothes?
5. What evidence is in the story that the noisy neighbor could have given more?
6. How do you think the children of the neighborhood could have helped?
7. How can you help others when you have clothes, toys or other things you no longer use?

This story was about the second step on the ladder of tzedakah:

“Gives too little, willingly.”



Gives too little, **willingly**.

Gives too little, **unwillingly**.

Story 3: The Bullies

Every day at the same time, the school bus stopped at the end of the street and let off two children. Caroline lagged behind, as usual. She walked slowly, taking her time, pretending not to notice Jimmy, an older boy from her school. Even though they lived near each other and knew each other, they were not friends and did not usually speak to each other.

Jimmy walked ahead as he usually did. He paid no attention to Caroline and seemed unaware of her existence. Suddenly Caroline noticed something unusual where Jimmy was walking, a couple of houses ahead of her. Three boys seemed to appear from nowhere. They must have been waiting for Jimmy to walk by so they could surprise him. They jumped out from behind some bushes and knocked Jimmy down. She could see Jimmy lying on the sidewalk. One of the boys was hitting him. Another boy took the backpack right off Jimmy's back and threw it in the bushes. There were books and papers tumbling out of the backpack, flying everywhere.

Caroline tried to see if she could recognize the boys, but there were things in the way. She didn't have a chance to get a good look at them. Almost as soon as the attack started, it was over. The strange boys ran away quickly and she could not see where they went. They had disappeared from sight.

Caroline didn't even have time to be frightened. She hurried over to Jimmy to see if she could help him. She looked around to see if any grown-ups were coming to help, but saw no one. Jimmy was still on the ground. His nose was bleeding.

"Who were those bullies?" asked Caroline. "Why did they beat you up?"

Jimmy could hardly speak. He didn't seem to be able to use his right arm. Caroline saw how upset he was and she became worried about him. She didn't know what to do.

"Please," he said to Caroline. "Get someone to call my mom."

"Oh! Sure." Caroline was relieved to have a task to do. She ran to the closest place she could find. There was a store at the corner, a barbershop. Usually, she was afraid to talk to adults she didn't know, but this was an emergency. She knew she had to get some help for Jimmy. She bravely opened the door of the barbershop and spoke to the men inside.

"There's a boy down the street who is hurt. He needs help. Could someone come out and call his mother?"

One of the men got out of the barber's chair and ran with Caroline to the corner. He helped Jimmy stand up and he took out his cell phone.

"You ought to call her yourself, son," the man said. "She might panic if she hears me telling her that you've been hurt." Then he took some tissues from his pocket and handed them to Jimmy. "Here, hold these to your nose to stop the bleeding."

Jimmy did as the man suggested and it seemed to help. Then he used the cell phone to call his mom. He asked her to come and get him. He told her that his arm hurt a lot.

The man asked Caroline if she could stay with Jimmy until his mother arrived. He went back to the barbershop to finish with his haircut.

Jimmy was not crying so much now. He looked around and saw that his schoolwork was scattered all over the sidewalk and some of the papers were starting to be blown about by the wind. He noticed his backpack was in the bushes.

"Please, would you get my backpack for me?" he asked.

”Sure,” said Caroline. She was glad to have more responsibility and was happy to be able to help. She went to the bushes to find the backpack. It wasn’t hard to reach, so she was able to grab it from between two bushes and pull it out. She brought it to Jimmy.

“Would you pick up my things?” he asked. “My arm hurts too much.”

Caroline gathered up everything. She collected the papers before the wind had a chance to blow any of them into the street. She picked up the books, the pencils and pens, some baseball cards and a candy bar. She was helping to get everything into the backpack when Jimmy’s mother arrived in her car.

Jimmy seemed relieved to see his mother. She got out of the car and helped him into the front seat. “Could you bring my backpack?” he asked Caroline.

Caroline put the backpack in the back seat. “I saw three boys knock him down,” she explained to Jimmy’s mother. “But I don’t know who they were.”

“Thank you so much, dear,” she responded. “You were very nice to help Jimmy. I’m so glad you were here when he needed someone to help him. I think I’d better get him to the doctor now.”

Caroline was worried about Jimmy. She hoped he would be all right. As Caroline watched the car drive off, she waved to them both and felt very proud of herself for being able to help when it was really needed.

Discussion

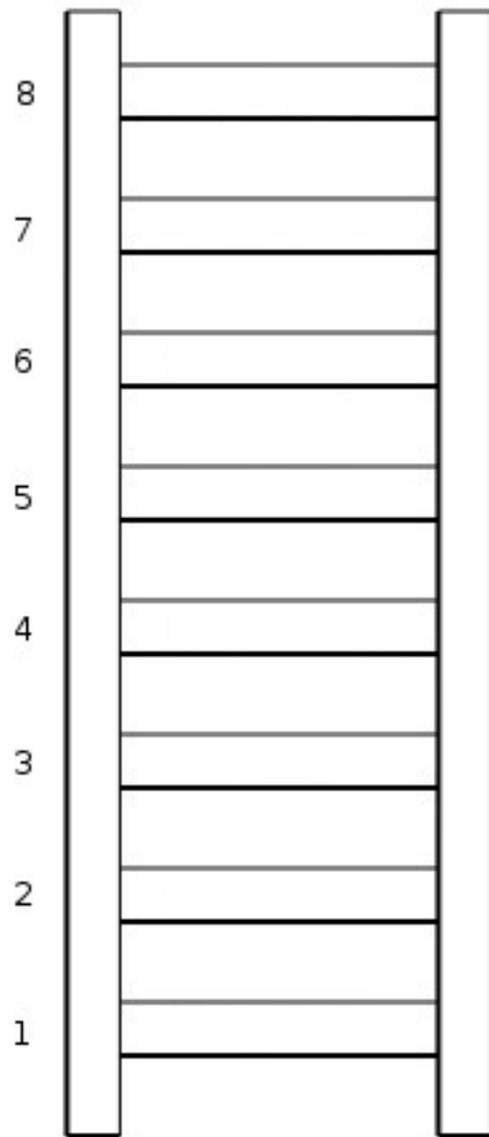
1. Who performed the acts of tzedakah in this story?
2. What did Caroline do when she saw Jimmy being attacked?
3. Was she willing to help him?

4. Did she do what was needed immediately, or did Jimmy have to ask her for help”
5. What do you think would have happened if Jimmy hadn’t asked Caroline for help?
6. What about the man? Was he willing to help? Immediately? Did he do what was needed?

This story was the third step on the Ladder of Tzedakah.

“Do what is needed, willingly, but only after being asked.”

The third step is the most common form of tzedakah. In many cases, people are very willing to help but don’t know what to do. They help out when they are asked to do something. Can you tell us how you helped someone after being asked?



*** Do what is needed, but only after being asked.**

Gives too little, willingly.

Gives too little, unwillingly.

Lunchtime Tzedakah: A One-act Play

(Use this after the first three stories have been completed)

Cast: The Teacher

Joe

Martha

John

Ronnie

Becca

Props: Four lunch bags, each labelled with a child's name and containing simple food shapes cut from construction paper.

Bag 1: "Martha" sandwich, apple, carrot sticks

Bag 2: "John" sandwich, cookie, banana

Bag 3: "Ronnie" sandwich cut in half, apple slices,
brownie

Bag 4: "Becca" sandwich, cookie, bag labelled "peanuts"

Book: Ronnie should have a book to read

Stage Set: A shelf or table for the lunch bags; Two or three desks or tables, five chairs.

(Five students are seated at tables or desks. Ronnie is by himself, with a book in front of him. Martha and Becca sit near each other, as do Joe and John. The teacher is standing.)

Teacher: "Time now for lunch, everyone. Get your lunch bags and go back to your seats to eat."

(The students go over to pick up their lunches. Four of them go back to their places and take their food out of the bags. Ronnie leaves his lunch in the bag, opens his book and begins to read. Joe looks very sad when he sees that all the lunches are taken.)

Teacher: "Where is your lunch, Joe?"

Joe: "I forgot it." (He looks as if he is going to cry.) "I don't have anything to eat and I'm hungry."

John: "I know just how you feel, Joe. I forgot my lunch last week and some of the kids shared with me. Don't panic! We won't let you starve. Here's some of my banana." (He tears off a very small piece and gives it to Joe.)

Teacher: "Don't worry, Joe. This class is very generous. I'm sure that everyone will share with you." (She goes up to Martha and Becca.)

"You know how important it is for us to share with others, girls. Joe doesn't have his lunch today. Will you give him some of yours?"

Martha: "I'd rather not. My mother didn't give me very much today, and I'm hungry. I didn't eat much breakfast this morning."

Teacher: "Joe is very hungry, too. And he has nothing to eat except some banana that John shared with him."

Martha: "Oh, okay. Here." (She breaks off a small corner of her sandwich and gives it to Joe)

(The teacher is looking at Becca now)

Becca: "I can't give away any of my food. I need it all."

Teacher: "I'm disappointed that you don't want to share anything, Becca." (Becca looks down and says nothing.)

Teacher: "What about you, Ronnie? I know you've been concentrating on your book. Have you heard that Joe has no lunch today? Would you be willing to share some of yours?"

Ronnie: (He puts down the book and takes his food out of the bag.)

"Here, Joe, have half a sandwich and some apple slices. And I can give you some of my brownie."

(Joe sits down near Ronnie and eats.)

The End

Discussion

1. Did the children share with Joey in more than one way?
2. How did each way fit the Tzedakah ladder?
3. Was there anyone who did not deserve a place on the ladder?

Story 4: The Camping Trip

This story is about the adventure of the Davis family. They loved to go on camping vacations in the National Parks. Every year they spent a lot of time choosing a place to go. This year, they were going to a very remote location, where they would be by themselves in the wilderness. There would be no store, no park ranger station, no toilets and showers. They would be “low impact” campers, taking their supplies in with them and leaving nothing behind. That way they wouldn’t disrupt the natural environment.

A lot of planning was needed for this kind of camping. Mrs. Davis figured how much food they would need for their two weeks in the park. Mr. Davis and the children aired out the tents and the sleeping bags, packed up the axe and shovel, the metal food containers, the raft, the binoculars, and all the other things that they would need.

Soon after the school year ended, the Davis family set out. It took several days to drive to the park. Early one morning they left their van at the entrance, registered at the ranger station, and began their all-day hike to the campsite. They carried all their food and equipment in backpacks. Jenny and Mike were nine and twelve years old and the first day was not easy for them, but they didn’t mind. They were excited about the challenge.

They arrived at the campsite late in the afternoon and set up their tents on the shore of a small lake. They were all alone with the forest behind them and the clear blue water of the lake in front of them.

The next day the family had a lot of fun. They set up their raft and started exploring the area around the lake. They dug a fire pit and gathered dead wood in the forest. Mr. Davis managed to hang their food boxes from a big tree limb so that animals wouldn’t be

able to reach them. After every meal, Jenny and Mike washed things in the lake and made sure they left no traces of their food.

The children felt like pioneers. “Let’s stay here for the whole summer,” they urged. Their mom reminded them that their camping permit was for just two weeks and their supplies would not last any longer than that.

At night, after dark, they told stories and looked at the stars. When they got into their sleeping bags, they listened to the sounds of the forest, the barks and hoots, the rustling leaves and the lapping of the water.

They had been there for just a few days when Mrs. Davis saw two people on the other side of the lake. She took out the binoculars to look at them. “A young couple is setting up a campsite across the lake,” she told the family.

“That stinks!” said Mike. “We were supposed to be alone.”

“Well, what can we do about it?” responded his mom. “They are probably just as unhappy to see us as we are to see them. We should just carry on with our plans and pretend they are not there.”

Later, in the middle of the night, the Davis family was awakened by loud growling sounds coming from across the lake. “It sounds like a fight,” said Jenny. Mike looked out of their tent. It was too dark to see anything. “There’s no fire across the way!” he exclaimed.

“We can’t do anything until sunrise,” said their mom. “I sure hope those folks are all right.” She was too worried about the young couple to go back to sleep. When the sky began to lighten up, she took out the binoculars to see what happened. She saw that the

tent was still up. The couple was near the water, picking up things that were scattered about the campsite. “Well,” she thought, “at least they seem to be unharmed.”

When the rest of the family woke up, Mr. and Mrs. Davis decided they should take the raft across the lake and see how they could help.

Mike protested. “You said we were going to act as if we were alone here. Like they weren’t even there.”

“Well, yes, we were,” answered her mom. “But this is different. They might need help”

When they got there, they found the couple cleaning up their campsite. The family introduced themselves, and said they hoped they did not mind their coming over to check on them.

“Oh, not at all,” the young man responded. “I’m Jim and this is my wife Sally. Thank you for coming over. I feel so stupid. I know I should not have let the fire go out. I don’t know how I let that happen. The bear was so busy getting our food, it left us alone. We are really lucky we weren’t hurt. I guess I learned not to ever let that happen again. It is pretty disappointing, though. We were really looking forward to this vacation and now we have to leave without even enough food to get back to our car.”

Mrs. Davis suggested a family meeting over by the raft. They gathered there so that they could talk without the young man and woman hearing them. Mrs. Davis asked, “Do you think we should help them?”

Mr. Davis said that sounded like a very nice thing to do. Jenny said she didn’t know how they could, since they had planned their camping trip so carefully. Mike grumbled, “But we were supposed to pretend that they weren’t even here!”

Mrs. Davis suggested two ways they could help. “We could give them some of our food so they can hike safely back to their car. Or we can share our food for a few days, so everyone can have their vacations, even though we would have to leave a few days earlier than we had planned.”

After some more discussion, the family decided to try the second plan. When they suggested it to Sally and Jim, they were so pleased and grateful that everyone, even Mike, felt it was the right thing to do.

They carefully planned how to make the food last for almost the whole vacation. Sally enjoyed taking the children to a berry patch she found. They were able to pick a lot of delicious blueberries. Jim taught them how to fish and every day they ate wonderful fresh fish.

They enjoyed being together. Jim was a great storyteller and Sally was an artist. She painted every day, and when they finally had to pack up and leave, she gave the Davis family a painting of the lake at sunset, with all six of them sitting around the fire pit.

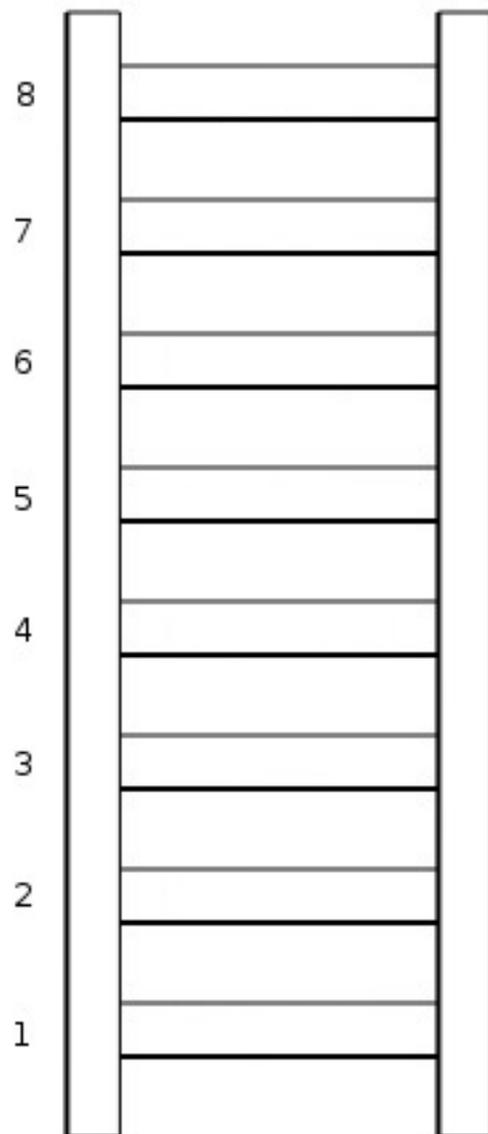
They all became good friends and had such a wonderful time that they decided to camp together the following year.

Discussion

1. Describe the tzedakah in this story?
2. Was it enough?
3. Were the givers willing to give?
4. What if the family had waited to be asked?

This is the fourth step on the Ladder of Tzedakah:

“Doing what is needed before being asked.”



Do what is needed before being asked.

* Do what is needed, but only after being asked.

Gives too little, willingly.

Gives too little, unwillingly.

Story 5: The Street Children

This story is about a girl named Sarah. Every week, one student in Sarah's third grade class was assigned the task of reporting on a current event. The student's job was to choose an article from the newspaper and present it to the class.

When Sarah saw her dad reading the newspaper, she remembered that it was her turn to do the current events report. She asked if her dad would help her find an interesting article. Together, they started looking through the paper.

Her dad asked, "How about this article on the economy?"

"No," she answered. "Someone did that last week."

He tried again, "How about this article on what the Supreme Court is doing?"

"No," she said. "Too boring."

"Ok, let's see. Here's an article about homeless children in Brazil."

"Really?" she asked. "There are kids by themselves who are homeless? "

Sarah and her dad read the article. It was about children in Rio de Janeiro who are abandoned by families that are too poor to care for them. They often end up living on the street, earning small amounts of money by selling newspapers, washing cars and begging. Many of them become criminals, learning to shoplift, pick pockets or break into shops and houses.

"That's terrible," Sarah said. "Children need homes. They need grownups to take care of them. Maybe we could do something to help, Dad."

Her father told her he could call up the Brazilian Embassy to ask if there were any organizations working on this problem.

The next day, Sarah gave her report at school. She told the class that she wanted to help the street children in Rio de Janeiro and that she would make another report when her father learned what they could do. “Maybe we could have a class project to send help,” she suggested. The children were very interested in helping.

That night, Sarah's dad told her there was a way they could help. He had received some very good information when he called the Brazilian Embassy. He learned that there are a few special orphanages in Rio where some of these street children get the chance to be properly cared for. The orphanages are like boarding schools or summer camps combined with school. The children live there until they finish high school. They are taught a trade so that they can get jobs when they leave. Some of them go to college. There aren't enough of these places, and it is hard for them to raise enough money to expand the programs, but the work they are doing is helping some of the street children.

The lady at the Embassy had given Sarah's dad the address of an orphanage in Rio. She said that the orphanage accepted donations of money and that she was sure it would be put to very good use.

Sarah and her dad decided to donate some money and Sarah would find out if any of her classmates also wanted to help the orphanage.

The next day, Sarah asked her teacher if the class could participate in this project. She told her classmates about the orphanage and they told their parents. Everyone was very interested in contributing to the orphanage. That is how they were able to collect almost \$200. Sarah and her dad sent the money to Rio de Janeiro. Sarah enclosed a class picture and wrote a letter explaining that the money was a gift from the class.

After some time had passed, a letter came from the orphanage, thanking Sarah and her class for their support. The letter was written in both English and Portuguese. It explained that the orphanage had used some of the money to provide food for the children and some to buy books for their library. It also included pictures showing smiling children looking at books.

Sarah and her classmates were very excited when she read them the letter. Her teacher put the letter and pictures up on the bulletin board and told the class that she was very proud of them. She said that they had done a wonderful thing for these children that they didn't even know.

Sarah asked if they wanted to do something else to help. They had a class discussion and decided to do another, bigger fundraiser for the orphanage. Sarah's class had a school-wide bake sale and took donations from neighbors, too. This time they collected over \$500. When the orphanage received the money, it was used to buy an old bus. Now they could take the homeless children on day trips out of the city. They could go to farms where the children could learn useful skills and decide if they wanted to be farm workers when they grew up.

And all this happened because it was Sarah's turn to make a current events report.

Discussion

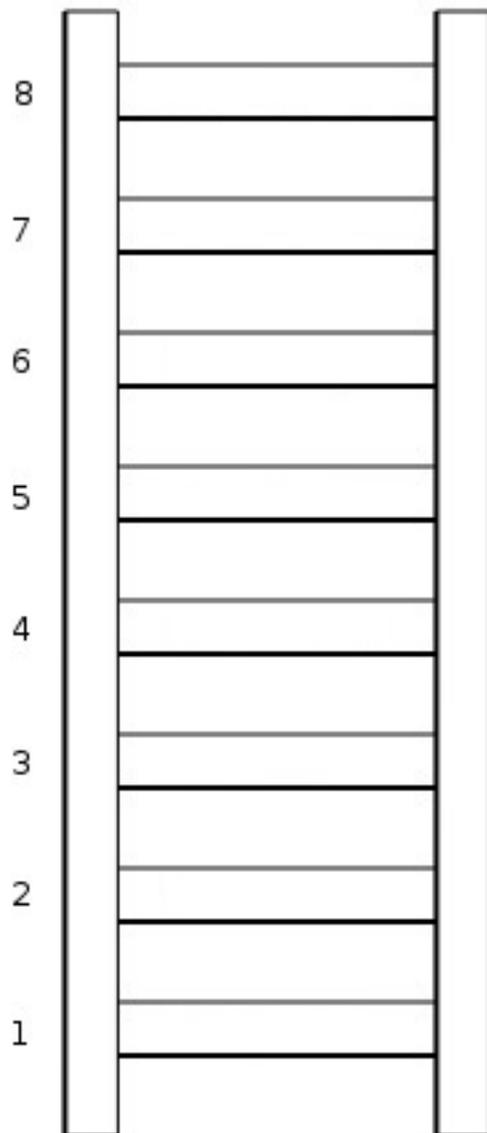
1. Who did an act of tzedakah?
2. What was it?
3. How would you describe it?
4. Was it enough?

5. Was the person willing?

This is the fifth step on the Ladder of Tzedakah:

“Do what is needed, before being asked, for an unknown needy person.”

Why is this a higher level than tzedakah for a known needy person? (It is easier to ignore someone you don't know).



Do what is needed before being asked to an unknown needy person.

Do what is needed before being asked.

* Do what is needed, but only after being asked.

Gives too little, willingly.

Gives too little, unwillingly.

Story 6: The Accident

Everyone in the Jacobs family was very busy. Mr. Jacobs worked as an accountant in an office in the city. Mrs. Jacobs was a nursery school teacher and a member of the synagogue's religious school committee. They had two children who worked hard in school and had lots of other activities. Their eight-year-old son loved sports and music, and his twelve-year-old sister was a dancer who would soon become a Bat Mitzvah.

One day, a terrible thing happened to Mr. Jacobs. He was walking downtown at lunchtime. As he crossed the street, a car that he could not see turned the corner and hit him. People who saw what happened called "911" and an ambulance took Mr. Jacobs to the hospital. At first, the doctors didn't even know if he would survive. The emergency room doctor called Mrs. Jacobs to tell her what had happened. She asked a neighbor to watch the children when they arrived home from school. Then she rushed to the hospital to see her husband.

For each person in the Jacobs family, life was now very different. The children were upset and worried about their father. They tried to keep up with schoolwork and activities. Whenever they had a chance, they visited with their father in the hospital.

Mr. Jacobs had suffered some brain damage and several broken bones. The doctors told Mrs. Jacobs that it would take a very long time for him to get better.

Mrs. Jacobs took a leave of absence from her teaching so that she could spend every day at the hospital. She was busy talking to doctors and nurses and trying to be as helpful as she could.

When she got home from the hospital she was very tired and hungry, but something very nice happened. Every day there would be a box on the front porch with food ready to eat or put in the refrigerator. There usually was a hot casserole, vegetables, fruit and dessert for dinner. There were snacks for the children and some breakfast things, too.

These gift boxes came from friends and neighbors who wanted to help the Jacobs family. The Jacobs never saw the boxes being delivered. They had no way of knowing who had made the casseroles and desserts or who had shopped for their breakfast and lunch supplies.

At Mr. Jacobs's accounting office, his secretary explained to his clients that Mr. Jacobs had been in an accident. For a while, the clients waited patiently for someone to help them with their accounting. But then they said they couldn't wait any more. Mr. Jacobs's secretary called Account-Temps for help. She explained the situation to them.

The next day something surprising happened. Three accountants showed up at Mr. Jacobs' office. "We are from OLA's Mitzvah Corp, ready to go to work."

"What is that?" asked the secretary.

"Why, it's the Organization of Licensed Accountants. Account-Temps called us, because Mr. Jacobs is one of our members. We always help our members when they are in trouble, so now it is our turn to help him. Just show us the accounts that need work, and we'll get started."

The accountants worked all day. They called up Mr. Jacobs' clients and made appointments to do the work that was needed. Then at the end of the day, the secretary asked them to leave their names and phone numbers.

“We want to be able to pay you for your work,” she said.

“Oh, no,” one of them said. “We are from the Mitzvah Corps. We can’t leave our names. We are working here anonymously. We are doing this as a good deed. And we don’t want Mr. Jacobs to know who we are. The Mitzvah Corps does its work anonymously so he shouldn’t feel any obligation to pay us back. But here is a number to call when you need any other help.” Then they were gone for the day.

Every day for many weeks, at least one of the Mitzvah Corp accountants came to the office. They made sure that Mr. Jacob’s work was done, and that his clients were taken care of.

After three months, Mr. Jacobs was well enough to leave the hospital. He stayed home for a few more weeks and was busy working with physical and speech therapists. He needed to learn to walk and talk again. At last, he was able to go to work for a few hours a day. The accountants from the OLA Mitzvah Corps stopped coming because they were no longer needed. Mr. Jacobs clients were happy to have their regular accountant doing their work again.

Soon it was time for the Jacobs' daughter to become a Bat Mitzvah. Mrs. Jacobs went to meet with the Rabbi at the synagogue. She explained that their family had been through a very difficult time. Luckily, Mr. Jacobs was getting better and would be able to come to the Bat Mitzvah service, but he would be in a wheelchair. The family had many medical bills to pay and Mr. Jacobs was only working part-time, so they would have to plan a very simple party.

The Rabbi said she shouldn’t worry. He asked if she would allow the ladies of the Temple Sisterhood to organize the luncheon for the Bat Mitzvah. If Mrs. Jacobs

would just make a list of the people who should be invited, the Sisterhood would make the food and decorate the party room. Mrs. Jacobs agreed. She was very grateful and thanked the Rabbi.

It was a wonderful day. All their friends and relatives were there. The Bat Mitzvah girl did a great job chanting her Torah portion. She gave a speech about how much the family appreciated the help which so many people had given to them, and how lucky they were to have their father at home again. She said she had learned how important it is to give and receive help when people are in need. The beautiful service was followed by a delicious lunch, provided by the Sisterhood.

It was a turning point for the family. Life was returning to normal for the children. Mrs. Jacobs was returning to her teaching job. And, best of all, Mr. Jacobs was getting better.

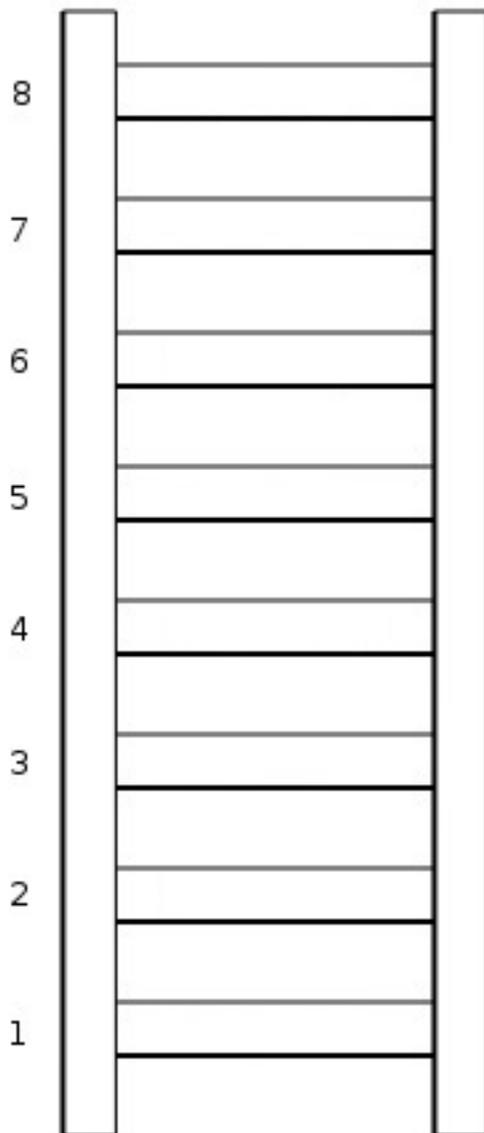
Discussion

1. Who gave tzedakah?
2. How would you describe the tzedakah?
3. Was it enough?
4. Were the givers asked to help?

This is the sixth step on the Ladder of Tzedakah:

“Give what is needed, before being asked, anonymously, to a known needy person.”

What does "anonymously" mean? Why is it a higher level to act anonymously?



Gives what is needed before being asked
ANONYMOUSLY to a known needed person.

Do what is needed before being asked
to an unknown needy person.

Do what is needed before being asked.

* Do what is needed, but only after being asked.

Gives too little, willingly.

Gives too little, unwillingly.

Story 7: Lishkat Ha-shayim, Hall of Charity

This story is about a secret place where people can find just what they need at just the right time. It is a two-part story. The first part takes place long ago, in ancient Jerusalem.

Over two thousand years ago, all Jews prayed at one Temple. (It was also a place for giving tzedakah.) The Temple was surrounded by strong stone walls. The areas around it were full of paths between the stone walls for travelers to walk on. The paths twisted and turned so that it was possible for people to lose their way and get lost. It was said that there was a secret place on one of those paths, a place for giving and receiving tzedakah. It was the “Lishkat Ha-shayim”. The words are Hebrew and they mean “Hall of Charity.” A doorway would magically appear to people so that they could enter the room to leave a gift or to find what they were looking for. When they left the room to return to the path, the entrance to the room would disappear.

Many years ago, an old shoemaker of Jerusalem died. He had no family. The neighbors made a funeral for him and cleaned up his small house so that a new family could come to live in it. The front room of the house was the shoemaker’s shop. It was full of tools, wooden shapes and pieces of leather.

“What should we do with all these things?” the neighbors asked. They told everyone they knew that there was shoemaking equipment in the little house, but no one was interested. So they took the tools, the wood and the leather with them and started looking for the Lishkat Ha-shayim. When the air around them became foggy and a big door appeared in front of them, they knew that they had found the right place.

They pushed open the door, and there they saw an enormous room filled with furniture, piles of food, stacks of clothing, jars of oil, and everything you could imagine. The neighbors found a place near the wall for all the shoemaker's things. They covered everything carefully with the biggest piece of leather, made a sign, which read "shoemaking equipment", and put the sign on top of all the materials.

Many months went by and the tools stayed in the pile next to the wall. Finally there was a time when someone badly needed the shoemaker's things.

There was a mother of seven children whose husband died. There was very little money and she needed to buy food for her family. She didn't know what she was going to do. She went to the Rabbi and asked for advice. He told her to take Aaron, her oldest child to the market place and ask the owners of the shops if anyone would be willing to teach him a trade.

They stopped first at the butcher's shop, but the butcher was not interested in Aaron. He had two sons who were learning to work in his shop. He didn't need another helper.

The tailor didn't need anyone, either.

The blacksmith had just started to train a boy and he did not want to have another helper.

When they came to the shoemaker's shop, they were welcomed.

"A fine boy like your son is just what I need," said the shoemaker. "I have no one to help me and your Aaron is twelve years old, just the right age for a boy to learn how to repair shoes and make new ones. But there is one problem. I don't have any extra tools. Aaron will have to bring his own set of tools."

The mother wanted her son to learn how to make shoes. He would be good at it. She thought the shoemaker would be a good and kind teacher. She didn't know what to do about the tools. She didn't have the money to buy them. The next day she went to walk on a path near the Temple. She noticed a doorway that she had not seen before. She had trouble seeing what was in the doorway, so she decided to walk in and take a look. When she entered the big room she saw many things at first. Then she noticed the pile of leather with a sign reading "shoemaking equipment". Under the leather, there was a box. When she opened the box she was amazed to see a complete set of shoemaking tools, just what Aaron needed. At that moment, she knew that she was in the room she had heard about, the "Lishkat Ha-shayim".

That is how the mother brought her son a set of shoemaker tools so that he could become a shoemaker. He learned quickly and did so well, that the family never had to be without food.

The second part of this story takes place in the United States, about a hundred years ago. There was a young girl, Kate, who lived near the ocean. Her father owned a shipping business. His boats carried all sorts of goods to places around the world. She loved to watch the boats leave the harbor. They were huge, but as she watched them sail away, they looked smaller and smaller until she could not see them anymore.

Kate noticed that sometimes the boats returned carrying people. She asked her father "Why do the people looked so poor and sad?"

Kate's father explained, "They are poor refugees immigrating to the United States. They come to this country for many reasons. Some come because they can not find work in their own countries, some because there are wars that make life too dangerous for them

and their families, others because the governments in their countries are treating them unfairly.”

Kate wanted to help them. She had heard a story about the “Lishkat Ha-shayim” and thought she could make one for the immigrants. When she talked to her father about this, they came up with an idea. From time to time, his warehouses were empty. When his shipments went out, and before the new goods were delivered, they could turn the warehouses into “Lishkat Ha-shayim.” Kate put up flyers inviting people to bring all sorts of things to the empty warehouse to donate to the immigrants. The news about the Lishkat Ha-shayim spread quickly. People began to come to the warehouse with their donations. They brought clothing, furniture, strollers, pianos, towels, blankets, and toys. There were bicycles, cans of food, and even sewing machines.

Then Kate put up flyers telling the refugees to come to the warehouse to take what they needed. Many people arrived right off the boats, and although they walked into the warehouse looking sad and poor, they left the warehouse a little richer, and with faces that were not so sad, anymore. They were so grateful for what they were given. Kate was so excited to be able to help them, and make a real difference.

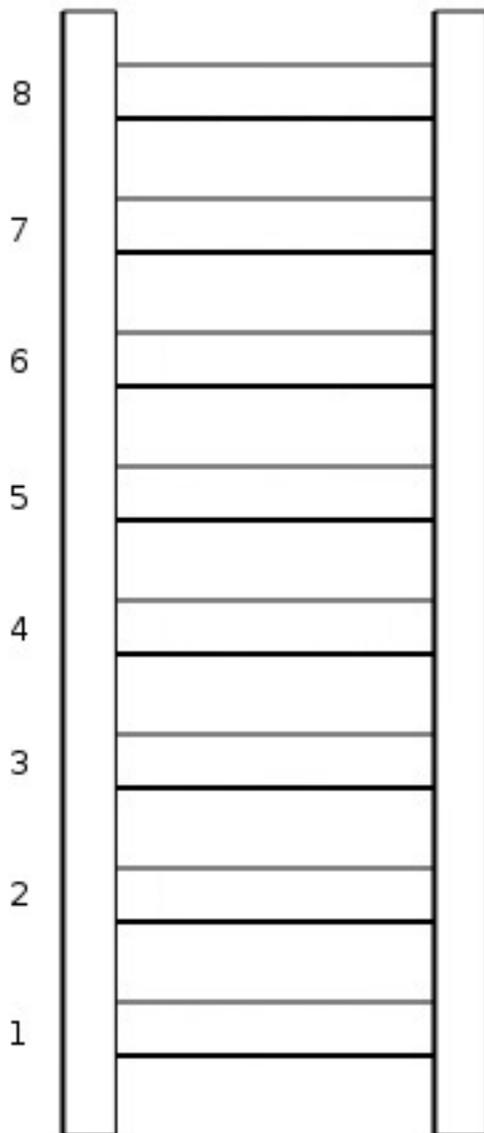
Discussion

1. Who gave tzedakah in each part of the story?
2. How was it given?
3. Why is it necessary to have someone in the middle helping the giver and the receiver?
4. Can you think of other examples today, of places that work this way?

5. What can you do to help these organizations?

This is the seventh step on the Ladder of Tzedakah:

“Giving is done anonymously. The giver doesn’t know the receiver and the receiver doesn’t know the giver.”



8 Giving is done anonymously.

7 Gives what is needed before being asked
ANONYMOUSLY to a known needed person.

6 Do what is needed before being asked
to an unknown needy person.

5 Do what is needed before being asked.

4 * Do what is needed, but only after being asked.

3 Gives too little, willingly.

2 Gives too little, unwillingly.

1

Story 8: The Handymen

(Before starting the last story, ask students if they have ever heard the old saying: Give a person a fish; you feed them for a day. Teach a person to fish; you feed them for a lifetime.)

Two handymen were working on a vacation house in a wooded area. As they walked up to the house one morning, they were thinking about the hard work ahead of them for the day. They were getting ready to begin to work on the inside of the house, and needed to bring in the drywall to make the walls. It would be hard to carry all the materials, and would be a lot of work for them. Then, Matt, the older builder looked at the house and said, “I told you to close the windows before we left yesterday. Why didn’t you do it?”

Jake, the younger builder said, “But I remember I did close them.” They could both see that a window was open, so they approached the house cautiously.

“Hello,” called Matt.

As he opened the door, they were surprised to see a man standing inside the house. He was young and wearing very worn out clothes.

“Sorry, sorry. I don’t mean any harm,” the man said. “I don’t mean to startle you. I don’t want to cause any trouble, either. It’s just that it started to rain. I was living in the woods for a couple of weeks. I saw how you two went back and forth every day, and when it got rainy and cold yesterday, I didn’t want to sleep outside again. I didn’t think anyone would mind.”

The handymen realized that the man was homeless. Matt spoke first, "Well, we do mind. You can't stay here, you know. You are not allowed to be here. The owner would get awfully angry if he knew about it. I hope we don't have to call the police."

The man stared started to leave. "I guess I'd better be going. But first, I see you have some food." The handymen had a bag of doughnuts and a thermos of hot coffee. "I haven't eaten anything in two days. Would you give me some?"

Jake was about to open the bag to share their food when Matt stopped him. Matt had an idea. "You know," he said to the homeless man, "we have a lot of work to do today and maybe we could work something out. You look like a strong enough man. You could help us carry materials from the truck to the house. If you don't mind helping us, we don't mind sharing our food."

The homeless man looked surprised, but agreed to help.

Before starting the work, the men had the doughnuts and coffee. They learned that the homeless man was named Simon. He seemed to be a nice person. Simon felt much better after eating, and then they were ready to get to work unloading the truck. The job was much easier with three people working.

After that was done, Simon asked if there was anything else he could do. Matt said he could stay for the rest of the day. He put Simon to work sanding all the woodwork in the kitchen and dining room to get it ready for painting.

When the men stopped for lunch, they shared it with their new helper. Jake asked him to paint the woodwork. He taught Simon how to hold the brush so that the paint didn't get on the wall. He showed him how to make sure that he put the paint on very evenly in a thin coat.

“We’ll be stopping at five o’clock,” Matt said to Simon. “If you want to work again tomorrow, we’ll be glad to pay you. But you can’t stay here. If you want dinner and a place to stay tonight, you can come home with me. I can offer you a place to stay. We have a room over our garage where you can stay. Only there’s one condition.”

“Sure,” said Simon. “What is it?”

“You’ll have to take a shower! Or my wife wouldn’t hear of it.”

The arrangement worked out well. The next day the men continued their work on the house. Simon put a second coat of paint on the woodwork. He helped measure and cut the wallboard and he nailed it into place. Max paid Simon, and he was able to buy his own food and pay Matt a small amount of rent. He was saving some money and also learning a lot about working as a handyman.

As the men worked together, they got to know Simon better. They learned that he had been having a lot of problems with school, drugs and money. He didn’t know what to do with his life.

Now Simon was able to turn his life around. He liked working with his hands and was a careful worker. He had learned so much about house repair from Matt and Jake. He knew how to replace windows, nail down roof shingles, install new sinks and toilets, hang kitchen cabinets and clean out chimneys. He had become a very good painter. He was very proud of himself and thankful that Matt and Jake had taught him so many things.

Simon stayed on the job until Matt and Jake had finished their work on the project. When the house was nearly finished, Matt told Simon that they were getting ready to take

on another job. Simon told them he had plans of his own. He had always wanted to travel west and see the Rocky Mountains. He was now ready to go.

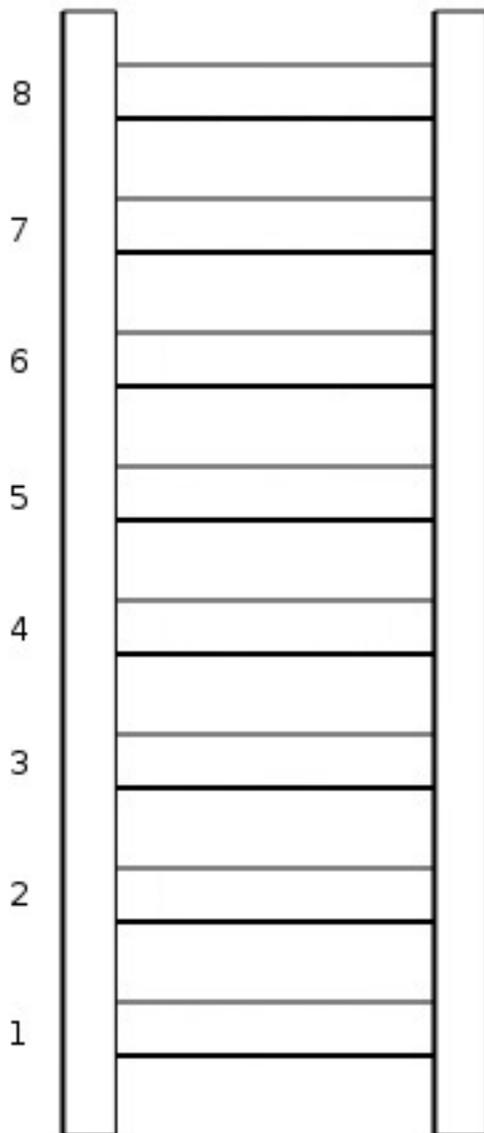
“I’m really grateful to you guys,” Simon said before he left. “I’ve got money in my pocket and an account at the bank, thanks to you. And I know that I’ll never again have to go hungry because I can always find work as a handyman.

Discussion:

1. What was the tzedakah?
2. Were the givers willing?
3. Did they give enough?
4. Why was this a higher level than just giving what was needed at the time?
5. What was the most important thing that Simon got from Matt and Jake?

This was the eighth step on the Ladder of Tzedakah:

“Help a needy person to become independent.”



Help a needy person to become independent.

Giving is done anonymously.

Gives what is needed before being asked
ANONYMOUSLY to a known needed person.

Do what is needed before being asked
to an unknown needy person.

Do what is needed before being asked.

* Do what is needed, but only after being asked.

Gives too little, willingly.

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