

Teaching Kids to Bless



In Christianity, this concept comes from the Greek *agape*, meaning “love”, or the Latin *caritas*, meaning “charity, love.” Though seen as a good thing to do, charity is generally accepted as optional. However, the writers of the Christian Scriptures (aka the New Testament) did showcase the charity work done by the early Christians. In Judaism, the word is *tzedakah*, meaning “righteous giving.” This Hebrew word comes from the same root as *tzedek*, meaning “justice, equity, right.” For the Jew, charity is required, though the amount and the form of giving are according to one’s situation. How then, do we rear our children to do what they can?

Teaching children is the easiest difficult thing you will ever do. They are little learning machines! Which is the source of the difficulty and of how easy it is to teach them. They will learn anything and everything, from experience, from listening to you and others, from watching you and others, from questioning, from testing and tasting. Because their learning is constant, we must be careful of what learning material we give them.

For instance, one day I was telling a story of King David to the daughter of a friend of mine. It was a story of his boyhood, when he was a shepherd watching over his father's flocks in the hillsides. “One day,” I told her, “he was all alone when a lion came looking for dinner! So, he took out a stone and put it in his sling and wound the sling around and around to get some energy in it. Then, he let the stone fly! It hit the lion and scared it away.” I anticipated a breathless joy at the success of the boy David against a greater foe. Instead, the little one said, in perfect imitation of her mother, “Of course that's nonsense. He really called his mom or dad and they scared the lion away with a rifle.” She had previously learned something that prevented her from sharing in the story I told.

You see, our children love and admire us. The adults in their lives are the source of joy, safety, sustenance, comfort, love and much more. Many times, our children pick up good habits from us. Or they sound cute using our grown-up phrasing during their play. I remember hearing the daughter of another friend tell her playmate, “That's copacetic.” Just as her father would have said it. But they also pick up our bad habits, as the skepticism above shows. One of my grandchildren used a phrase of mine just yesterday. “Grandma is so silly sometimes.” I was not the grandma under discussion. I realized that I had taught this five-year-old to make a judgment based on my frustration with someone's behavior. I have a lot of work to do in correcting that.

So, how do we teach our children to bless themselves and others? Here are 3 guidelines to help you get started.

- **Lead by Example** Do what you want them to learn to do. Say please and thank you. Say excuse me. Hold the door open for the person right behind you or the one coming in as you're coming out. These are little things, but what blessings they are in these pressured times. When I go shopping with my grandkids, I take one coin for each of them from my

change purse. When we get to the counter, I give them the coin to put into the jar or box for whatever charity is there. Then, I take out a coin of my own and put it in. We talk about what group or cause we are helping, and why it is good to do so. I generally ask them to say why it is good to help; my job is to agree or guide the answers. Of course, this does not take the place of giving them coins for the ubiquitous vending machines.

- Ask for Help Give the kids in your life a chance to feel important by helping you out. Whether it is carrying in a grocery bag light enough for them, or closing a door behind you, opening a door for you, putting their dishes in the sink after a meal, or any little thing during the course of a day, ask them. They will feel good about being asked, about being responsible and dependable. They will also feel good when you say, "Thank you!"
- Let Them Suggest Kids are really creative, and given the opportunity, quite generous. So, when it comes time to make a donation, or do something for someone, ask the kids. They will come up with things big or small, and generally have a plan in mind to make it work. It may be a wild plan that needs some trimming back, but that's what you're there for. Two examples come to mind.

In my first year of teaching Hebrew School, I had a class of 5th graders. Their project for the year was to feed the hungry. In addition to collecting food, the class wanted to give money. They were divided on whether to have a bake sale or a car wash, until somebody suggested we combine them. I didn't think we could pull it off, after all it was just me and a bunch of 10-year-olds. The school director said we could use the parking lot on a Sunday morning. The kids made flyers; cajoled their parents into baking and buying cookies, cupcakes, brownies and bagels; brought sponges, towels, hoses, buckets, squeegees and window cleaner; and worked hard for 3 hours on the day itself. We raised \$330! It was the most successful fundraiser ever done at that school, including ones run by adults. And I almost didn't let it happen.

The other example is small, but touching. My grandson noticed that one of his other grandma's dolls needs a new foot. He is 8 years old and would never play with dolls. He'd rather die. But, he noticed the foot and asked about a doll hospital. I told him that it would take some time to save enough money to get this antique doll fixed, but that I would work on it. He then took 50¢ out of his pocket and gave it to me, saying, "This is all I have right now, but it's a start."

Check back here monthly for specific ideas and suggestions, projects or causes that children could work on with their parents or a trusted adult. If you have suggestions to contribute, please email them to revtona@blessingcasters.org.

God bless you and protect you!

God deal kindly and graciously with you!

God bestow favor on you and grant you peace!