



# HANUKKAH COOKIES WITH SPRINKLES

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*Sara and her family are getting ready for Hanukkah – which means delicious foods, including cookies! But then she notices one man who doesn't seem to eat much at all, let alone Hanukkah treats. Sara decides to try and help.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

In Hebrew, taking action to help those less fortunate is called *tzedakah*, a word that in common usage means “charity.” In Judaism, however, the concept means much more. *Tzedakah* means “righteousness,” “fairness,” or “justice,” and taking part in *tzedakah* is a responsibility we all share.

The little girl in *Hanukkah Cookies with Sprinkles* sees a need and takes it upon herself to act. Sara is helped and encouraged by her family, her teacher, and her classmates. Sharing resources with those in need fosters a sense of compassion and fairness in youngsters. Families who regularly take part in acts of *tzedakah* report increased levels of self-esteem in their children. And because every act, no matter how small, makes a difference, even very young children feel empowered by participating in acts of *tzedakah* and come to understand that they can effect positive change in the world.

The 12th century Jewish sage Maimonides spoke about levels of *tzedakah*. The Rambam, as he was known, taught that there are eight levels of giving – beginning with assistance that is offered grudgingly and progressing to the highest form, which not only helps the recipient but allows the person to become independent. No one is exempt from taking part in *tzedakah*: even the needy are required to give to others, since there are always people in greater need than oneself. Such giving also allows the donor to experience the joy and fulfillment that comes from helping others.

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

This book offers countless opportunities for family discussion. Consider the following questions with your children:

- How do you think Mr. Berger felt when he had to search for food in the box of discarded items?
- Sara found ways to help. What other things might she and her family have done to help?
- Why do you think Sara seemed surprised to see Mr. Berger at the synagogue on Friday evening?
- Though he needed help, Mr. Berger had a lot to offer others. Do you think that's true of all people?
- What ways to help others can you find in your community?

While *Hanukkah Cookies with Sprinkles* is set around the holiday of Hanukkah, it could really take place at any time of the year. Holidays are popular times for donating to worthy causes and offering help to those less fortunate, but consider making a plan that keeps your family involved all year long. Together, search for “*tzedakah* opportunities” in your community and mark a calendar with events such as fundraisers for local charities and clothing drives – activities that take place throughout the seasons.