



MADDIE THE MITZVAH CLOWN

Written by Karen Rostoker-Gruber

Illustrated by Christine Grove

Maddie wants to do a mitzvah (good deed), but she's very shy. Dressing up as a clown makes her feel a lot more confident, though, and clowns can do a special mitzvah – cheering people up at her grandma's senior center!

JEWISH CONCEPTS

“What a mitzvah!” Have you ever heard someone use these words to describe a good deed? *Mitzvah* is a Hebrew word that literally means “commandment,” but it is also used to describe acts of loving-kindness. The Torah (first five books of the Bible) contains 613 *mitzvot* (plural of mitzvah)! These commandments create a road map for living a life rich with acts of love and service.

Mitzvot and an attitude of humility go hand in hand. It can certainly be tempting to do something kind for another person because it will make us look good in front of others or showcase our talents; however, the mitzvah loses something if done for one’s own benefit, rather than looking solely to the needs of another. Maddie in *Maddie the Mitzvah Clown* is a beautiful example of humility. Her motivation for learning to become a mitzvah clown is not to show off or make people admire her abilities; ultimately, it provides her with a way to talk to her grandmother’s friends and make them happy. That Maddie is able, in time, to deal with her own reticence is an added benefit.

Giggles the Clown shows another way to do a mitzvah: he gives of his time to teach Maddie. His generosity enables Maddie to then help others. Teaching can have an exponential impact, as students pass valuable knowledge along to others in an ever-widening circle.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

It can be easy to think that mitzvot need to be big, grand acts of goodness; however, the most special mitzvot often come simply from being who you are, as Maddie shows when she takes off her clown costume and talks with Grandma’s friends as herself. Talk with your children about their own unique qualities and personalities. Point out and encourage the mitzvot that come naturally to them; this might include sharing, listening, comforting, making people laugh, etc. Helping your children to recognize the good things they do every day will encourage them to do even more.

Similarly, children can use the activities they naturally enjoy to benefit others. Do they like to draw? Perhaps a sick friend would appreciate a homemade card. What about baking? Make cookies together for a new neighbor. Any singers in your family? Record them singing some cheerful songs and send to a relative who lives far away. Are your children into board games? Maybe they’d like to invite a new classmate over for an afternoon of fun. Your entire family can enjoy looking for ways to turn their favorite activities into mitzvot that help others!