

Shabbat Shalom,

A few months ago I had the opportunity to go to the downtown east side with my classmates and grade seven students from a local christian school and a muslim school. We spent the morning giving out sandwiches and hot coffee to homeless people living on the streets. I had never done anything like this before. Seeing the line of people in need going around the corner inspired me to consider what it must be like to not have enough money even to eat.

The experience helped me see the need to consider the circumstance of others. I now know that there is always someone with less and you can never give them too much. My trip to the downtown east side helped me apply what I've learned in school to my own life. The need for helping others is clear in this week's Torah portion.

In this week's Torah portion, Parashat Emor we learn about a series of Jewish holidays that we still celebrate today. Among them is the holiday of Sukot. Sukot is one of the shalosh regalim — the three festivals in which Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Today we celebrate Sukot by eating and even

sleeping in the Sukah — which is a booth with schach — a roof made out of branches so you can see the sun and experience rain when it's not nice out.

The Rambam says that the main purpose of a Sukah is to remember that even though you are enjoying the holiday with good food, friends and family, you are still vulnerable to the elements. Realizing this helps us be more empathetic towards those in need, and is a good reminder that we should give to the poor.

The portion tells us “and when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I, the lord, am your god.”

In the Etz Haim chumash it explains that the Sifra comments on this verse and says that it may be because when one shares their bounty with the poor it is as if it were offered on god's altar.

This is all very nice in theory but the question is how do we make this a reality. One of the ways we take care of those who are less fortunate here in our community is through the Jewish Food Bank.

The Jewish Food Bank provides people with food that they might not otherwise have, such as honey, cereal, canned goods, toiletries and essential items for children's lunch boxes.

Here at Beth Israel we have a basket on the first parking lot level for people to put food donations in — and once a month Debbie Fenson organizes a group to bake challah for their families and for donations to the Jewish food bank.

In grade 7 at Talmud Torah, each student chooses a charitable organization that we then fundraise for. I chose The Bloom Group, an organization with many shelters for different causes. My group is focusing on the women's shelter which provides housing and support to women and children in need. This organization is a perfect example of how much other people need our help. This program has also shown us that doing good feels good, too.

The other thing I have learned is that the downtown east side is not the only place where people are struggling to feed their families. Even at Talmud Torah where I go to school there are families who struggle every day. And that is why the school has a special fund to help make sure that every child in the school is able to afford hot meals and even sometimes pay for uniforms

and shoes. One of the ways that we can help those with less is by donating to the VTT hot lunch fund. It's not just money that we can give. For all of these organizations and other worthy endeavours we should give from our hearts, love and time.

I think we should each give as much as we can to those who are less fortunate and we all know that you can never give too much. But there will always be people in need; people who are hungry and people who are struggling and the task may seem daunting.

But as we learn from the rabbis in pirkei avot we are not obligated to finish the task but we are not allowed to simply cease from trying.

This week's torah portion teaches that Judaism's laws and holidays are meant to remind us to have empathy for those in need.