

You, the Tzedakah'ist Tzedakah Learning Pod Session 1 – December 2010

OPENING – PLEASE READ ALOUD

In this first Tzedakah Learning Pod session, we want to get to know each other better – to help our group to have more open, fruitful conversations today and over the upcoming months.

We also want to get to know *ourselves* better. Oftentimes, our actions today are driven by our associations from our families and/or assumptions about what a “tzedakah'ist” – someone who gives tzedakah – is or ‘should’ be. We want to explore those associations and assumptions so that we can be more intentional with our giving and so that our giving has more meaning for each of us.

This session is divided into 5 sections, and at the start of each section, there is a recommended amount of time. If we hold to these recommendations, the session will take 1.5 hours. Do we want to assign one person to help us keep the time?

Let's get started!

SECTION 1 – INTROS, “SAFE SPACE,” AND SERIES OVERVIEW **RECOMMENDED TIME – 20 MINUTES**

A. *Getting to Know* – let's spend a few minutes getting to know each other better by briefly answering these questions for each other.

1. Where do you live?
2. How do you spend your time during weekdays?
3. How do you like to spend your time on weekends?
4. What's your favorite book you remember from being a kid?
5. What is one of your favorite organizations to give tzedakah to and why?
6. If there is a tzedakah-related question that you're thinking about or struggling with right now, please share it.
7. What else should we know about you? (personal, professional, avocational, etc.)

B. *Creating Safe Space* – Please read aloud

Money is hard to talk about in our society. It seems to be an even more taboo subject than politics or religion! And here we are in these Pods where most of us don't know each other that well, which makes talking about money even harder. And even harder if we're not able to meet face-to-face.

Although money is hard to talk about, we hope that each of us will be able to set aside the fears and inhibitions we may have, in order to talk openly and honestly. Let's work together to make this a safe space. Through this openness and honesty, the potential can emerge for deep and meaningful conversations – and the potential for each of us to be personally transformed as a result.

In order to help create this safe space, let's agree to follow some groundrules:

- I will use active, open, empathetic listening without negative judgment
- If jealousy arises in me, I'll notice it and set it aside, in order to be the most helpful I can to my fellow pod members
- I will take personal responsibility to encourage pod members who speak less often to speak more often, and be self aware of the need to *tzimtzum* myself (quiet oneself, make oneself smaller) where appropriate.
- I will speak with positive intent and assume that others are doing the same.
- *For those who are meeting via phone:* I will say my name at the start of each of my comments.
- *For those who are meeting via phone:* Since our conference call doesn't allow for non-verbal cues, I will make an extra effort to ask for clarification when I need it and to ensure that we're all engaged and contributing. I will set aside other activities to give my full focus to our conversation.
- What is said here, stays here
 - *Let's take a few minutes to define "what is said here, stays here" for our group:*
 - What things are okay to talk about outside? General themes? People's specific approaches to tzedakah (or questions, or concerns)? With or without naming who said the comment? With or without naming Hekdesh/Dorot? Etc.
 - What things do we never want talked about? (e.g. our names attached to any of these themes, the existence of the pods, specifics of our dilemmas?) Etc.
- Are there other groundrules that we'd like to add?

Can we all agree to these groundrules? Any comments or issues?

C. Tzedakah Learning Pod Series Overview – Please read aloud

Let's get a sense of where we're going! We'll meet each month for 6 months, and each session will have a combination of Jewish sources (broadly defined), personal reflection exercises, and homework. Sessions will include a mix of theoretical, practical and spiritual discussions intended to engage the diverse membership of the Dorot community. The flow of topics for the series is:

1. DECEMBER - You, the Tzedakah'ist
2. JANUARY- Why do I give?
3. FEBRUARY - What and how much do I give?
4. MARCH - How might my giving transform me?
5. APRIL - To whom/where do I give? – Part 1
6. MAY - To whom/where do I give? – Part 2

SECTION 2 – CHANGEMAKERS, INDIVIDUAL IMPACT, AND FAMILY HISTORY **RECOMMENDED TIME – 30 MINUTES**

Intro - Please read aloud

If we understand our history and assumptions about tzedakah, it can help us understand our current motivations, passions and stumbling blocks. Let's see how a leader in the Jewish community has been impacted by her history and assumptions about tzedakah.

Sally Gottesman is president of The Eleemosynary Group, a management consultant group to not-for-profit organizations. Sally is also the co-founder and chair of Moving Traditions, which finds, creates and delivers resources to inspire people to draw on Judaism at key lifecycle moments. Its most widely disseminated program, *Rosh Hodesh: It's A Girl Thing!*, currently has 240 groups throughout the United States. Sally has served on many boards, including American Jewish World Service, The Jewish Women's Archive, The Jewish Funders Network and Storahtelling. She is the author of several articles on women, philanthropy and leadership.

Sally Gottesman: Changemaking¹

Here is the truth: I am discontent with the world the way it is. This is a funny thing to write – I feel so lucky to be alive, to feel the heat from the sun falling on my arm, to look at the flowers sitting on my desk. I have the ability to read, to write, to breathe, to be filled with awe and humility for feeling at one with the Universe in the here and now. And yet, I am discontent. I want there to be peace. I want G'd to be called in *my* image, in Hebrew and in English (and all languages). I want the birth of Jewish girls to be celebrated with equal communal joy as the birth of Jewish boys. I want all children to have food to eat tonight, and every night.

I am a changemaker because I want the world to be a better place for everyone. I am a changemaker because I have identified those issues about which I am most passionate, and I get pleasure from working on them and giving to them. I am a changemaker because I have found partners in my endeavors. And I am a changemaker because I recognize that I can use my brain, my time, and my money to indeed make the world a better place.

Two adages guide my efforts and give me energy as an activist and a donor. The first is by Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” And the second is from the Talmud: “You are not required to complete the task nor are you free to desist from it.”

I choose to concentrate the majority of my efforts for change, in terms of both financial resources and volunteer time, on a variety of organizations. I am inspired by the work of these organizations. I feel a passion for their missions, and to the core of my being, I believe they will help shape a world that is a better place for women and men, girls and boys.

I am blessed to have been raised in a family that values volunteerism and philanthropy. Early impressions guide me: my grandfather's stories of raising money for Palestine in the 1920s on the New York subway; my grandmother making me a life member of Hadassah; with my sisters, organizing a carnival in our backyard to raise money for multiple sclerosis when I was ten. Finally, there was the experience of my advocating for and becoming the first Saturday morning bat mitzvah at my family's Conservative synagogue. All these experiences imbued within me a sense of personal responsibility and proof that I could make a difference.

¹ From *Inspired Philanthropy* by Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner. Jossey-Bass, 2002.

We'll focus on three different areas for discussion:

A. Changemaker

- Reflect on Sally Gottesman's comments about why she is a changemaker. Which, if any, of these reasons resonate with you and why?
- How would you define changemaker?
- Do you consider yourself to be a changemaker? Why or why not? How might that impact your tzedakah?

B. The Big Picture

- How do Margaret Mead's quote ("Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.") and the Talmud quote ("You are not required to complete the task nor are you free to desist from it.") fit with your thoughts about your own tzedakah giving and volunteer work?

C. Family History

Please share your childhood memories of your family giving tzedakah and of your family volunteering for charitable organizations

- Growing up, how were you involved in your family's tzedakah decisions and giving?
- Growing up, how were you involved in volunteering with your family?
- Were tzedakah and volunteering incorporated into holidays and lifecycle events? If so, how?
- What values did you take from what you saw in your family around tzedakah and volunteering?
- How does what you saw, experienced and learned as you were growing up impact your tzedakah and volunteering today?

SECTION 3 – ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES
RECOMMENDED TIME – 30 MINUTES

Intro - Please read aloud

In addition to understanding our family history and the impact it has on our giving, it is also important for us to examine the assumptions we make and the stereotypes we have about those who give.

Let's see how assumptions can impact someone's giving and receiving.

LOOSENING THE STOPPER²

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev's grandchild married the grandchild of the famous rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. "Now that we are related by this marriage," said Rabbi Schneur Zalman, "let us join in performing a good deed. An innocent Jew is being held by the local authorities. Let us take up a collection, to give the officials the sum they demand for his release."

"Excellent idea," said Rabbi Levi Yitzhak. "But I ask one condition. Let us accept whatever donation is offered to us, no matter how small."

² From <http://www.learningtogive.org/materials/folktales/LooseningStopper.asp>

The two men went door to door. Two such distinguished rabbis seldom visited these townspeople together, so most gave generously. At last, the two rabbis came to the home of a wealthy man. He greeted them politely, then reached in his pocket, drawing out a mere half-penny. To Rabbi Schneur Zalman's horror, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak thanked the man warmly, blessed him, and turned to leave.

When Rabbi Schneur Zalman had followed his companion outside, he could contain himself no longer. "Why should we accept that insultingly small amount from one who has so much!"

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak said, as they walked on, "I asked you to accept whatever we were given. Please be patient."

Some time later, the rich man strode up behind them. "I am sorry," he said. "Please accept more from me." He gave them a silver coin, then turned and left. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak called after him, "You are a good and generous man!"

Rabbi Schneur Zalman fumed at Rabbi Levi Yitzhak. "He could afford a hundred times as much! Why must we bless this stinginess?"

"Please bear with me, honored relative." They continued walking.

A short while later, the rich man caught up to them again. Out of breath, he said, "Will you forgive me for how little I gave you?" He held out a sack bulging with a hundred silver coins.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak took the rich man's hand. "Yes, with all my heart," he said. The rich man gave the coins and left, obviously relieved.

Now Levi Yitzhak turned to Rabbi Schneur Zalman. "May I tell you the story of that wealthy man?"

"He has always given generously to those in need. But a week ago, a beggar approached him while he was meeting with a group of businessmen. Reluctant to interrupt the others to get his purse, the wealthy man reached into his pocket and gave the beggar the only coin he found there, a half-penny.

"The beggar was furious. This rich man was famous for giving silver coins. Why had he slighted him? The beggar threw the coin at the rich man, striking him in the face. In his pain, the wealthy man vowed to stop being so generous. From now on, he would give everyone a half-penny—no more!

"It is said that each step downward leads to another, honored relative. He was within his rights to offer the beggar only what he had. But he erred when he treated others the same way. Since that day, every one who approached him has angrily refused his paltry half-penny gifts. He found himself unable to offer more.

"It is also said that each step upward leads to another. Once we accepted his half-penny, we loosened the stopper on his generosity. Each gift he gave made the next one possible. Now, our willingness to receive has restored him to his goodness."

We'll focus on two different areas for discussion:

A. Discussion of the story

- What reactions do you have to the story? Did anything surprise you?
- What assumptions did Rabbi Schneur Zalman make about the rich man? How would have those assumptions driven his actions if Rabbi Levi Yitzhak hadn't been with him? With what results, would you imagine?
- What assumptions did the beggar make about the rich man? Did those assumptions serve him or get in the way? How?
- When the rich man ran after the two rabbis to give them a silver coin, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak called after him, "You are a good and generous man!" What purpose did this comment serve? What do you think of this idea that "each step downward leads to another" and "each step upward leads to another"? How might those ideas impact your own giving, volunteering, or way of being in the world?

B. Our own assumptions and stereotypes of the person giving

Let's take out our journals, notebooks, or papers and, working by ourselves, complete the following sentences³:

- Typical machers are...
- Typical philanthropists are...
- People I know who give are...
- As a giver, I am...

Let's each share our responses.

Please use the following questions for discussion:

- Were the responses among you similar or different? To what do you attribute the similarities or differences?
- How did you react differently or similarly to the terms "macher," "philanthropist," and "giver"?
- How might our assumptions and stereotypes about those who give tzedakah serve us or get in our way? How might the ways in which we think or talk about ourselves or others who give tzedakah serve us or get in our way?
- If you inserted "changemaker" in this exercise, how might your responses be different?

SECTION 4 – CLOSING, HOMEWORK, AND SCHEDULING
RECOMMENDED TIME – 10 MINUTES

A. Closing

Please read out loud.

This brings us to the end of our first Tzedakah Learning Pod session! Let's each share one thing from this session that was a highlight, a surprise, or a challenge.

³ Adapted from *Inspired Philanthropy*

B. Homework

Please read out loud.

In order to keep momentum and maximize what we can do each session, there will be homework assigned each month. This is stating the obvious, but the more effort each of us puts into the homework, the more we'll get out of it. ☺ This month's homework will be the basis for the first part of next month's session and will provide us with information that we'll refer back to in a few upcoming sessions. (See Section 5 for homework assignment.)

We'll start next month's session by discussing our responses to this homework. Can we all commit to doing the homework? Are there ways in which we can help and support each other from now until then to help each other complete the homework?

C. Next month

Please read out loud.

Let's make sure we have our date scheduled for next month. (Please meet after the 8th of January.) And remember – we can be in touch with each other with tzedakah ideas or reflections during the month, as well as sharing ideas with the broader Pod group through TLP2010-22@googlegroups.com

And fyi – an interesting website that the HEKDESH Learning Committee found in preparing these materials is learningtogive.org. Check it out if you're interested.

See you next month!

SECTION 5 - HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: Analysis of Current Giving⁴ **Recommended time: 20-40 minutes**

Please use your Tzedakah Journal for these exercises.

Step 1 – Recent Giving

Write down or type up the organizations you gave to in the 2010, how much to each, and why you gave to each.

Step 2 – Characteristics of the Top 10 Groups you Gave to

Take the 10 organizations you gave the most money to and put them on the attached spreadsheet. Then complete the other columns for each of those 10 organizations

Reflection on the Characteristics: (Please use your Tzedakah Journal to respond to these questions)

1. For each set of characteristics (each column in the spreadsheet), was your giving focused on certain categories, or varied? Were these intentional choices? If they were, what reasons were behind your choices?
2. Were you surprised by the patterns you saw (or lack thereof)? What do you see as the pros and cons of the pattern your giving has taken within each category?
3. Looking at the characteristics of the groups you've funded in 2010, is there anything different you would like to do in the future? What? Why?

⁴ Adapted from *Inspired Philanthropy*

Step 3 – Your Relationship with Groups you Gave to

Look again at the groups you listed in Step 2. Think about the relationships you have with them.

1. With what number of organizations are you a...
 - Recipient of the organization's services, now or in the past
 - Volunteer
 - Member
 - Board member
 - Staff member
 - Other:

2. With how many do you...
 - Know people in the organization
 - Know people who have been affected or helped personally by the organization (or ones like it)
 - Know other donors

3. With how many did you find out about them through...
 - Direct mail
 - Family, friends, community organization, association, or work colleagues
 - Local public foundation
 - Media
 - Other:

4. With how many do you...
 - Want your donation to be completely anonymous
 - Want your donation held in confidence (only one or two people in the recipient organization know)
 - Don't care whether your donation is known
 - Want people in the community to know you made a donation

5. With how many did you stay informed by
 - Reading newsletter or annual reports
 - Attending events
 - Meeting one-in-one with staff or board
 - Other: