

WHERE TO GIVE Tzedakah Learning Pod Session 5 – April/May 2011

OPENING – PLEASE READ ALOUD

In this fifth Tzedakah Learning Pod session, we want to explore how we make decisions about where to give our tzedakah money. Faced with the reality of limited resources, how do we decide what causes and what populations to support?

This session is divided into 6 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 – TZEDAKAH AS SELF EXPRESSION – 15 MINUTES

1. *Please read aloud and discuss:*

One way to make decisions about where to give tzedakah is to view tzedakah as an opportunity to express our values and support the things that are important to us. Share your responses to Exercise 2.3 “What I Value” and Exercise 4.1 “Your Mission Statement,” and please discuss:

- a. What similarities and differences do you notice amongst the members of your pod?
- b. What, if anything, was challenging for you about doing these exercises?

• *Please read aloud:*

Inspired Philanthropy by Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner includes some statements about philanthropy that are very focused on self expression and personal values: Philanthropist Harriet Barlow describes the feeling she gets from giving this way: “Giving well requires that I listen to my inner self and make more conscious who I am and what I want to express in the world. That’s why giving is almost always satisfying to me—whether or not the projects I fund are successful.”¹

• Some beliefs about inspired philanthropy²

- Philanthropy is a creative expression of that part of yourself that cares about and believes in the potential for change.
- The most effective philanthropy joins your interests and experiences with the current needs in your community and seeks desired outcomes.
- Thoughtful, planned giving gives you a chance to express yourself and your passion as well as your goals and reasons for giving.

¹ Gary, Tracy and Melissa Kohner, *Inspired Philanthropy: Your Step-by-Step Guide to Creating a Giving Plan*, 2nd ed. New York: Jossey-Bass, 2002. p. 20.

² *Inspired Philanthropy*, p. xxxv.

Please discuss:

1. To what extent do you experience tzedakah as a creative expression of yourself and your values?
2. How would experiencing tzedakah as a creative expression of yourself affect how you make decisions about where to give?

SECTION 2 – TZEDAKAH AS OBLIGATION TO CARE FOR OTHERS – 10 MINUTES

Another way to make decisions about where to give tzedakah is to view tzedakah as an obligation to take care of those in need. One may experience this obligation as deriving from Jewish law or from moral philosophy, but either way, the sense of obligation to care for others, as opposed to using money as a form of self expression, is the key factor.

Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, the author of the Tur, a fourteenth-century code of Jewish law, expresses this perspective:

<p>Tur, Yoreh Deah, Laws of Tzedakah, 247</p> <p>It is a positive commandment to give tzedakah according to one's capacity. And one must be exceedingly careful with tzedakah, more so than with any other positive commandment, because it's possible to spill blood if the poor person begging will die if one does not give immediately. And a person should imagine that just like he always asks God to provide for him and asks God to hear his cries, so he should listen to cries of the poor. And he shouldn't ask, "How can I spare my money to give to poor people?" Because he should know that the money is not his but rather a deposit with which to do the will of the depositor which is to distribute some of it to the poor . . .</p>	<p>טור יורה דעה הלכות צדקה סימן רמז</p> <p>מצות עשה ליתן צדקה כפי השגת ידו ומאד מאד צריך אדם ליזהר בה יותר מכל מצות עשה כי איפשר שיבא לידי שפיכות דמים שימות העני המבקש אם לא יתן לו מיד . . . ויש לאדם ליתן אל לבו שכמו שמבקש בכל שעה מהקב"ה שיזמין לו פרנסתו וכמו שמבקש מהקב"ה שישמע שועתו כך צריך שישמע שועת העניים . . . ואל יעלה בלבו עצה לומר איך אחסר ממוני ליתנו לעניים כי יש לו לדעת שאין הממון שלו אלא פקדון לעשות בו רצון המפקיד וזה רצונו שיחלק לעניים ממנו . . .</p>
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Please read aloud:

It may be helpful at this point to look back at the motivational values cards and to remember some of the texts from Session 2 which argued that God may ultimately be the "Owner" of our possessions. With all of this in mind, please discuss the following questions:

1. How does the Yoreh Deah text differ from the *Inspired Philanthropy* text in Section 1? Which text resonates more with your experience of tzedakah? In what ways does each text challenge you?
2. To what extent do you experience tzedakah as focused almost exclusively on addressing poverty?

3. To what extent do you experience tzedakah as a command or obligation whose parameters are either dictated or influenced by Jewish law?
4. How would experiencing tzedakah in either or both of these ways affect how you make decisions about where to give?

SECTION 3 – SYNTHESIZING AND PRIORITIZING – 15 MINUTES

Please read aloud:

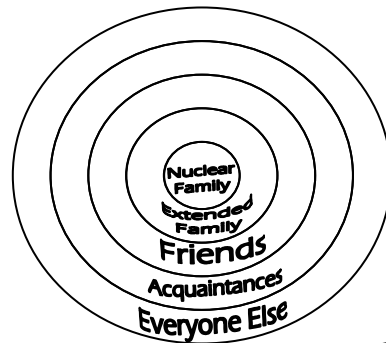
It's possible that pieces of both the Inspired Philanthropy approach and the obligation approach influence our tzedakah practices. We may want our tzedakah to be an expression of our values and so we seek out organizations that are working to create the kind of world we want to live in. At the same time, we likely feel some sense of responsibility or obligation to care for those in need and experience tzedakah as an obligation to help the poorest among us.

Both of these approaches are likely in play when we are making decisions about what causes to support and what populations to donate to.

To further complicate matters, there are many ways of prioritizing where to give our tzedakah. One useful model is to represent our priorities as concentric circles in which the inner circle represents the group we feel most obligated to, and the outer circle represents the group we feel least obligated to. If the language of obligation doesn't work for you, you can also think about the inner circle representing the group you feel most strongly connected to or inclined to support and the outer circle representing the group you feel least connected to or inclined to support.

Here are a few examples of how some people may choose to prioritize:

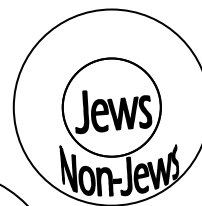
Model #1 – Prioritizing based on relationship



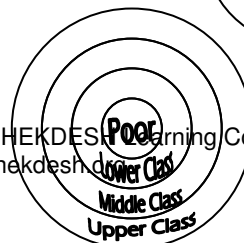
Model #2 – Prioritizing based on geography



Model #3 – Prioritizing based on religious affiliation



Model #4 – Prioritizing based on need



Obviously, we never embrace one of these models exclusively. And there are other models. We arrive at our priorities in ever-shifting, dynamic ways. For example, if my brother who lives in Scotland were to lose his job and call me up to ask for some help paying his rent, I probably wouldn't say, "Wait, I prioritize my giving according to geography. I need to take care of all of the homeless people in my neighborhood before I can help you." Conversely, if a homeless person approached me on the street and asked for money, I probably wouldn't first call my parents to make sure they didn't need any money before giving the homeless person a dollar. So both relationship and geographic considerations come into play and exist in dynamic tension with each other.

Please discuss:

1. Would you assign priority to one concentric circle model? If so, which one and why?
2. How do these different concentric circle models interact in your own giving?
3. Take a minute to draw a concentric circle model of your tzedakah values

Please read aloud:

So where does that leave us? We've expressed a lot of the factors that come into play when we are deciding about where to give: personal values, Jewish law, relationship to the recipient, geography, religious affiliation, level of need. We may have also talked about issues such as impact of our donation, merit of the recipient, collective decision-making, immediate vs. long-term solutions, etc.

If you're waiting for a clear cut answer about how to navigate these overlapping priorities and make decisions about where to give, you can go home. ☺ Instead, the next part of this session will present a few texts that address different aspects of the question "Where to Give," to enrich, and probably further complicate, your thinking about this topic.

SECTION 4 – PERSPECTIVES ON WHERE TO GIVE – 30 MINUTES

Please read aloud:

Section 4 presents four different perspectives on where to give. Please look at each topic (a. the most important issue/cause; b. universalism vs. particularism; c. geography/relationship vs. need; and d. geography and scope) and choose two (2) for your group to discuss. You may, of course, discuss all four, but you will not be able to finish in the 1.5 hour overall timeframe. After you choose the two for discussion, please read on!

1. The Most Important Issue/Cause

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 8:10	רמבם משנה תורה הלכות מתנות לעניים ח:י
Redeeming captives takes precedence over providing	

<p>food and clothing for the poor. There is no greater mitzvah than redeeming captives, for the captive is in the category of the starving, the thirsting, and the naked, indeed in danger of losing his own life. One who remains indifferent to his redemption transgresses [many Torah obligations].</p>	<p>פדיון שבויים קודם לפרנסת עניים ולכסותן, ואין לך מצוה גדולה כפדיון שבויים שהשבוי הרי הוא בכלל הרעבים והצמאים והערומים ועומד בסכנת נפשות, והמעלים עיניו מפדיונו הרי זה עובר על...</p>
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Please discuss:

1. According to this text, what is the highest priority for giving tzedakah?
2. How might you operationalize this priority in your own giving? Are you inclined to do so? Why or why not?
 - a. Note: While the Rambam was likely referring to Jews who had been kidnapped, Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled that Jewish prisoners (incarcerated through the criminal justice system) in countries like the United States and England qualify to be considered in the category of redeeming captives.³ How does the definition of captive affect your inclination to operationalize this priority in your own giving?
3. How might you expand the logic of this text to arrive at a set of guidelines for prioritizing where you give your tzedakah?

2. Universalism vs. Particularism

<p>A. Babylonian Talmud Gittin 61a</p> <p>Our Rabbis taught: We sustain the non-Jewish poor with⁴ the Jewish poor, visit the non-Jewish sick with the Jewish sick, and bury the non-Jewish dead with the Jewish dead, for the sake of peace.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי גיטין סא:א</p> <p>ת"ר מפרנסים עניים נכרים עם עניים ישראל ומבקרים חולי נכרים עם חולי ישראל וקוברין מתי נכרים עם מתי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום.</p>
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Please discuss:

1. What might "for the sake of peace" mean?
2. Do you think this text is suggesting that we give equally to Jews and non-Jews or that we include non-Jews in our giving and not give exclusively to Jews?
3. How would (or do) you operationalize this approach in your own giving? Are you inclined to do so? Why or why not?

B. Giving Priority to the Jewish People⁵ by Jack Wertheimer⁶

³ Domb, Cyril. *Maaser Kesafim*. Feldheim Publishers: New York, 1980, p.25 in the Hebrew section.

⁴ The word "with" in this text is ambiguous and open to interpretation. It could mean that we sustain and care for non-Jews together with Jews; in other words, at the same time and place, and in the same manner. Or, it could mean that we provide the care and sustenance separately but do so for both groups of people. The fact that Jewish law mandates the burial of Jews and non-Jews in separate cemeteries supports the reading that "with" means that we provide for both groups but in different ways or in separate places and times.

⁵ <http://eewishphilanthropy.com/giving-priority-to-the-jewish-people/>

⁶ Jack Wertheimer is a Professor of American Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He has written and edited many books and articles on modern Jewish history, Jewish education and Jewish life.

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Before they invest even more funding and direct still more volunteers to nonsectarian causes, Jewish philanthropists should consider a different path. Think of what they could do for the cause of Jewish literacy by creating a Jewish Teach for America. Such a program would serve the dual purpose of deepening the Judaic knowledge of volunteers, while simultaneously directing much needed personnel to the understaffed field of Jewish education. Philanthropists could also create a Jewish Service Corps with the mission of sending volunteers to Jewish communities in the United States and around the world where poverty, inadequate Jewish education, and social problems exist. Imagine what several thousand dedicated volunteers serving in Jewish educational and social-service institutions for two years might do to lessen the two-fold crises of affordability faced by families and understaffing afflicting most major agencies.

New initiatives might also strive self-consciously to teach Jews what they need to know, not only what they want to hear. They could begin by explaining that Jews, too, suffer from poverty and illiteracy. Remarkably, this obvious point is not widely understood. After working in a service program aiding Jews in the former Soviet Union, a volunteer expressed amazement that in all her years in a Jewish day school, she had never heard about poor Jews who require help...

Please discuss:

1. How would you operationalize this approach in your own giving? Are you inclined to do so? Why or why not?
2. How big of a factor is "religious affiliation" in your own giving?

3. Geography/Relationship vs. Need

Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh Deah 251:5

A large portion of the tzedakah that you give should go to your relatives and the poor of your town. You are also obligated to give a little also to those who live far away, and to the poor of another city. Because if you do not, a city of poor people will diminish in a famine, God forbid.

ערוך השולחן, יורה דעה רנא:ה

וחלק גדול מהצדקה יתן לקרוביו ועניי עירו ומעט מחוייב ליתן גם לרחוקים ועניי עיר אחרת דאלייכ עיר של עניים יגועו ברעב ח"ו.

Please discuss:

1. What values guide the way that the Aruch HaShulchan outlines our obligation to support others, both relatives and strangers?
2. How does the Aruch HaShulchan prioritize different concentric circle models?
3. How would you operationalize this approach in your own giving? Are you inclined to do so? Why or why not?

4. Geography and Scope

Please assign one person in your Pod to play the role of Mr. Fantom and one to play the role of Mr. Goodman. Dramatic reading is encouraged. ☺

True and False Philanthropy⁷

⁷ Text and some reflection questions from <http://learningtogive.org/resources/stories/>.

by William H. McGuffey

From McGuffey's Newly Revised Eclectic Reader (1844).

Through his Eclectic Readers, American educator and preacher William Holmes McGuffey (1800-1873) had a profound effect on education in the United States, particularly in the areas of teacher training and curriculum materials. In the selection below, excerpted from McGuffey's Newly Revised Eclectic Reader (published in 1844), Mr. Fantom and Mr. Goodman have a rather heated conversation about how and where philanthropic effort ought to be applied.

Introduction by Amy Kass

Mr. Fantom: I despise a narrow field. O, for the reign of universal benevolence! I want to make all mankind good and happy.

Mr. Goodman: Dear me! Sure that must be a wholesale sort of job: had you not better try your hand at a *town or neighborhood* first?

Mr. Fantom: Sir, I have a plan in my head for relieving the miseries of the whole world. Every thing is bad as it is now stands. I would alter all the laws, and put an end to all the wars in the world. I would put an end to all punishments; I would not leave a single prisoner on the face of the globe. *This* is what I call doing things on a grand scale.

Mr. Goodman: A scale with a vengeance!

...

Mr. Goodman: Sir, I have no projects. Projects are, in general, the offspring of restlessness, vanity, and idleness. I am too busy for projects, too contented for theories, and I hope, have too much honesty and humility for a philosopher. The utmost extent of my ambition at present is to redress the wrongs of a poor apprentice, who has been cruelly used by his master indeed. I have another little scheme, which is to persecute a fellow who has suffered a poor wretch in the poor house of which he has the care, to perish through neglect, and you must assist me.

Mr. Fantom: Let the town do that. You must not apply to me for the redress of such petty grievances. It is provinces, empires, continents that the benevolence of the philosopher embraces; every one can do a little paltry good to his next neighbor.

...

Mr. Goodman: Well, Mr. Fantom, you are a wonderful man, to keep up such a stock of benevolence, at so small an expense; to love mankind so dearly, and yet avoid all opportunities of doing them good; to have such a noble zeal for the *millions*, and to feel so little compassion for the units; to long to feed *empires* and enlighten *kingdoms*, and deny instruction to your own *village* and comfort your own *family*. Surely, none but a *philosopher* could indulge so much *philanthropy* and so much *frugality* at the same time. But come, do assist me in a partition I am making in our poorhouse, between *the* old, whom I want to have better *fed*, and the *young* whom I want to have more *worked*.

Mr. Fantom: Sir, my mind is so engrossed with the partition of Poland, that I cannot bring it down to an object of such significance. I despise the man, whose benevolence is swallowed up in the

narrow concerns of his own family, or village, or country.

...

Mr. Fantom: ... A man of large views will be on the watch for great occasions to prove his benevolence.

Mr. Goodman: Yes, sir; but if they are so distant that he cannot reach them, or so vast that he cannot grasp them, he may let a thousand little, snug, kind, good actions slip through his fingers in the meanwhile: and so, the great thing that he *cannot* do, and the little ones that he *will not* do, life passes, and *nothing* will be done.

Please discuss:

1. Do you find yourself gravitating toward the attitudes/beliefs concerning philanthropy of either one of these characters? If so, which character best represents your present attitudes/beliefs? In what way might the character who least represents your present attitudes/beliefs about philanthropy still be correct in his thinking?
2. How would you operationalize each character's approach in your own giving? Are you inclined to do so? Why or why not?
3. How does this text relate to the self-expression/values vs. obligation discussion from earlier in the session?

SECTION 5 – SYNTHESIZING AGAIN – 15 MINUTES

Please read aloud:

We've raised lots of questions and perspectives about where to give, ranging from whether we are motivated by self-expression or obligation; which causes or issues to prioritize; and how to balance different priorities based on need, geography, relationship and religious affiliation. We are probably now feeling more confused than when we started, so let's take the last 15 minutes to share the questions that are most compelling to us in this moment or revisit any earlier piece of our conversation. Here are a few to get you started:

1. What is my current thinking on how I will decide where to give my tzedakah?
2. What is still confusing or challenging? What is now clear?
3. How is my thinking right now different or similar to what my thinking was before this session?
4. What do I need to do to gain clarity and know how I'll decide where to give my tzedakah money and time?

SECTION 6 – CLOSING, HOMEWORK, AND SCHEDULING – 5 MINUTES

A. Closing

Please read out loud.

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

B. Homework

Please read out loud.

We've done a great job thus far of doing the homework in advance of each session. Let's give ourselves pats on the back! ☺ The homework from this session is below in section 7.

C. Next month

Please read out loud.

Let's make sure we have our date scheduled for next month. (Please meet after the 14th of May.) 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 the listserv.

See you next month!

SECTION 7 - HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Recommended time: 60-90 minutes

Please complete the homework in your Tzedakah Journal.

1. Have a conversation with 2 or 3 of your friends or relatives about tzedakah, discussing some of the themes and ideas that our Pod sessions have focused on thus far, such as:
 - What part does tzedakah play in their lives? (How) do they see themselves as “tzedakah’ists”?
 - What motivates them to give? Does their motivation come from Jewish and/or non-Jewish sources?
 - How do they decide how much money to give? If they use a percentage, is it pre- or post-tax? Why? How do they decide how much time to give? What factors play into this decision?
 - Give some examples of how tzedakah can be used to help transform our experiences of tragedy and conflict, help us do tshuva, and serve our other spiritual needs. Have your friends/relatives used tzedakah for these purposes? What do they think about using tzedakah for personal or relationship transformation?
 - How do they decide where to give their money?
 - How do they feel about their tzedakah and tzedakah process?

2. Our next session will be an opportunity to refine and critique our tzedakah plans. In order to prepare for that, please spend no more than 30 minutes drafting an initial plan for your tzedakah-giving for this coming year. The goal of this exercise is not to complete a final plan, but rather to begin making decisions and to identify what your big questions and challenges are so that we can address them in the next session. Please address the following questions:
 - a. How much money do you plan to give away? How did you arrive at this number?
 - b. Where will you give your tzedakah? You can respond with issue areas (hunger, education, environment, etc.), populations (poor people in my city, Jews around the world, etc.), specific organizations, or some combination. Why did you choose these issues/populations/organizations?
 - c. What will be your method for giving tzedakah? Will you donate weekly, monthly, when you're asked, all at one specific time during the year? Why? Will you ritualize the act of giving? If so, how?
 - d. What effect do you hope your tzedakah will have in the world?
 - e. What effect do you hope your tzedakah will have on yourself?
 - f. How much time do you plan to donate as a volunteer? How did you arrive at this number?