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**Tzedakah in Your Everyday Life  
The Heart  
Tzedakah Learning Pod - Year 2, Session 3: February/March 2012**

**OPENING – PLEASE READ ALOUD**

In this third Tzedakah Learning Pod session, we're going to talk about our heart's relationship to tzedakah. What does it mean to have a hardened or open heart? How do our hearts interplay with righteousness and generosity? How do our hearts open us up to both giving *and* receiving? How might a daily or weekly "practice" affect our hearts – and our giving?

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 – HOMEWORK DISCUSSION AND "SAFE SPACE"  
RECOMMENDED TIME – 10 MINUTES**

***A. Homework Discussion – Being Moved to Give***

*Please discuss the questions you reflected on as homework:*

As preparation for this Tzedakah Learning Pod session, we each took note throughout the month of each time that we are moved to give tzedakah - what's the setting? What moves us? How does it feel to give?

We also took note of the times that we felt the inclination to give tzedakah, but didn't - what's the setting? What is different here from when we do give tzedakah? How does it feel to not give?

***B. Creating Safe Space – Please read aloud***

In this Pod session, in addition to traditional and contemporary texts, we will be reading some brachot/blessings and doing some meditation – some of which may be new experiences for some of us. Sometimes it's hard to try new things, and within the safe space of this group, let's encourage each other to be as open as possible to the various tzedakah "practices" presented in this session. Through this openness, the potential can emerge for deep and meaningful experiences and conversations – and the potential for each of us to be personally transformed as a result.

*If you think it would be helpful to review the "safe space" items we talked about in Session 1, please do so. Otherwise, please skip to Section 2.*



We've had a good start already in Sessions 1 and 2. Let's take just a few minutes to remember the ground rules that we agreed to in Session 1:

- 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 practice *tzimtzum* (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.
- *Please include any others that your Pod agreed to.*

**SECTION 2 – IN THE BODY: HEART, EYES AND HANDS**  
**RECOMMENDED TIME – 15 MINUTES**

*Intro - Please read aloud*

On Sunday of this past November's Dorot Alumni Retreat, we had a session that focused on G!d's mandate to the Jewish people to remember the stranger because we were strangers in Egypt, and linked that directive to empathy. In the discussion, one participant talked about her heart. She felt that over the past few years – after seeing so many people in need on the streets of New York City and after receiving so many solicitations from worthy organizations – her heart had hardened a bit. She asked, "How can I keep my heart open when I know the reality is that I can't answer the call of every person or animal or environmental concern that is in need?"

Let's talk about the heart.

One of the first places in the Torah where the Israelites are asked to give is in Shemot/Exodus in the context of gathering materials for the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

**Exodus 25:1-2**

Adonai spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and have them take for Me an offering; from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering.

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר  
יְדַבְּנוּ לִבּוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת תְּרוּמָתִי:

*Please discuss:*

- What does it mean for someone's heart to inspire him/her to generosity?
- How do you relate generosity (יִדְבֻנוּ/yidvenu) to tzedakah (from צֶדֶק/tzedek, righteousness)? Does one necessarily come before the other?
- How do generosity and tzedakah relate in your own giving and way of being in the world?
- Thinking back to Pod Sessions 1 and 2, how does your generosity relate to your consumption or relationship to money in general?
- How do you feel about your own heart – is it more open or more closed? How did it get that way? Are you happy with where your heart is now or do you wish it were more or less open or closed?

The Rambam makes a direct connection between the heart and tzedakah.

### **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:2**

And any who sees a poor person begging and hides his eyes and does not give him charity transgresses a negative commandment, as it says (Deuteronomy 15:7), "Do not harden your heart or close your hand from your poor brother."  
[AJWS translation]

וכל הרואה עני מבקש והעלים עיניו ממנו  
ולא נתן לו צדקה עבר בלא תעשה שנאמר  
לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפוץ את ירך  
מאחריך האביון.

*Please discuss:*

- What do you think of the image of "hides his eyes"?
- Are there times that you hide your eyes in the face of need? What causes you to hide your eyes? How does hiding our eyes affect our hearts?
- What would it look like if our eyes were always open, if we never hid our eyes? What would it look like if our hearts were always open, if we never closed our hearts?
- What do you think of the connection between the heart and the hand that Deuteronomy puts forward?
- How do you connect your heart and your hand in your giving? How do you connect your heart and your hand in your consumption?

### **SECTION 3 – RELATIONSHIPS OF CARE AND GIVING AND RECEIVING** **RECOMMENDED TIME – 15 MINUTES**

*Please read aloud:*

Paul Schervish is a Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center on Wealth and Philanthropy at Boston College. In his article, "Receiving and Giving as a Spiritual Exercise,"<sup>1</sup> Schervish first frames up receiving as a precursor to giving.

<sup>1</sup> Schervish, Paul. "Receiving and Giving as a Spiritual Exercise." The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, [www.philanthropy.iupui.edu](http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu), 2008.



In my view, giving as spiritual exercise is connected to the experientially and spiritually prior reality of receiving. Giving, of course, reinforces the grace of receiving. In saying that giving is precipitated by the experience of receiving, I do not contest the case that one might make for the logical or experiential priority of giving, or for the softer case that receiving and giving are coexistent in origin. However, what I have learned and the materials I draw on lead me to speak of receiving as a movement of the soul that sets the recursive dialectic of receiving and giving in motion. This is because, not least of all, I believe that God, Reality, the Universe first provides us with the appropriate faculty such that our most profound “first contact” is the receiving of the gracious gift of life, from God through our parents and others who care for us. (p.4)

*Please discuss:*

- What do you think of Schervish’s argument? How do you relate receiving and giving to each other?
- How are you at receiving? How are you at giving? Is one easier or harder for you?
- How are your receiving and giving related to your heart? How might your adeptness at receiving and giving shape your tzedakah and/or your ability to be generous?
- Would your ability to receive and to give be different if you felt differently about your own level of wealth or consumption?

Schervish also addresses Aristotle’s understanding of *philia* to talk about “relationships of care.”

*Philia* is friendship love by which individuals live out a relationship of mutual nourishment. “A friend is another my self,” says Aristotle. As does [Jules] Toner with his notion of love and care, Aristotle recognizes that individuals extend their friendship love outward to the world in ever-widening concentric circles. For Toner and Aristotle, this requires individuals to regard others as having a value equal to their own... [In philanthropy] the donors consummate the relationship of care or friendship based on their sensitivity to the persons in need, not the medium through which the persons communicate their need. This is what I call responding to *affective* demand – the spiritual, religious, or moral calling to heed the needs of others precisely because they are human beings in need. This is, of course, the way concerned parents respond to the needs of their children; the way we respond to the needs of our family and friends, and the way individual donors and foundations, at their best, respond through philanthropy to the needs of people across the globe. (p.13-14)

*Please discuss:*

- What is your reaction to the idea of *philia* and relationships of care?
- How does *philia* relate to your understanding of tzedakah from the various Pods learning we’ve done? Are there any drawbacks to this idea of *philia* when related to tzedakah?
- How does responding to “affective demand” compare with “not hardening your heart” from Deuteronomy and Rambam’s connection to tzedakah?
- Let’s think beyond tzedakah and giving money. How might this idea of *philia* – and ideas of having a more open heart – relate to having a generosity of spirit (e.g. giving a family member the benefit of the doubt when s/he does something you don’t like) or being generous with your time (e.g. stopping to hold a door open for someone with a stroller)?



**SECTION 4 – OPENING THE HEART - STRENGTHENING GENEROSITY AND  
COMPASSION, AND DEEPENING OUR COMMITMENT TO TZEDAKAH/GENEROSITY  
RECOMMENDED TIME – 45 MINUTES**

*Please read aloud:*

Schervish suggests concrete steps to move towards creating more relationships of care:

The quality of inner life of the donor matters and needs development. In personal relationships of care and formal relationships of philanthropy, so much depends on the donor's sensitivity to the needs of others... The key, therefore, is that donors be attuned to the suffering, anxiety, and pain of others. (p.14-15)

*Please discuss:*

- What do you think of Schervish's recommendation? Is it possible to be *too* attuned to others' suffering?
- Are there things that you have put in place already to develop your inner life and make yourself more attuned to the "suffering, anxiety and pain of others"? Or to make yourself less so? How do you feel about your current "tuning"?

*Please read aloud:*

If our inner lives need development and greater sensitivity to the needs of others in order to deepen our compassion and, therefore, our generosity, what can we do to gain this greater sensitivity and create deeper relationships of care? How can we open our hearts to others?

Having a daily or weekly "tzedakah practice" can help open our hearts to being more generous and compassionate – both with our money and with our non-monetary interactions with people. Here we'll read about four practices that may help us to open our hearts.

**A. Generosity Journal**

*Please read aloud:*

There's a common idea in business that "you get what you reward" or "what gets recognized gets done." If we apply this concept to developing generosity of spirit and generosity of "wallet," just by acknowledging our generosity each day, we may become more generous – our hearts may become more open.

How would we put this idea into action? One way is to keep a Generosity Journal. At the end of each day, write down one or two things you did today that were generous. It could be giving tzedakah. It could be holding a door open for someone with a stroller. It could be smiling at a homeless person on the street. It could be taking time to talk with a friend in need. It could be lending a hand to a colleague who needed extra help. It could be spending 10 extra minutes with all of your attention focused on a child you love. Just by writing these actions in a journal, you're likely to be more focused on generosity – and, perhaps, will thereby, become more generous.



*Please discuss:*

- What are your reactions to this idea?
- Have you ever kept a journal similar to this before? If yes, what affect did it have?

## **B. Prayer for Peace**

Paul Schervish in his article “Receiving and Giving as a Spiritual Exercise” also writes about the *Prayer for Peace*, ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi. “The Prayer for Peace... appears to have been composed in the early 20th century and not by St. Francis. It may be taken up as a practice of receiving and giving for self, and then moving outward in concentric circles as far as the praying emissary envisions.”<sup>2</sup>

### The Prayer for Peace

Lord,  
make me an instrument of Your peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, let me sow pardon;  
where there is discord, let me sow unity,  
where there is error, let me sow truth,  
where there is doubt, let me sow faith;  
where there is despair, let me sow hope;  
where there is darkness, let me sow Your light;  
and where there is sadness, let me sow joy.

O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that one receives,  
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
it is in unlearning (forgetting) that one learns (discovers insight),  
and it is in dying that one rises to Eternal Life.

*Please discuss:*

- What do you think of the idea that “it is in giving that one receives”? How does this relate to Paul Schervish’s idea from Section 3 that “giving is precipitated by the experience of receiving”?
- How might your thinking about tzedakah change or your actual tzedakah change if it was through giving that you received?
- This *Prayer for Peace* could also be used as a daily or weekly “tzedakah practice.” How could you see your sense of generosity or acts of tzedakah changing as a result of saying this *Prayer for Peace* daily or weekly?

<sup>2</sup> Schervish, Paul. “Receiving and Giving as a Spiritual Exercise.” The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, [www.philanthropy.iupui.edu](http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu), 2008. Page 10.

### C. Tonglen

*Please read aloud:*

Schervish writes about *Tonglen*, which is “Tibetan for 'giving and taking' (or sending and receiving), and refers to a meditation practice found in Tibetan Buddhism”<sup>3</sup> and references Pema Chodron, an American Buddhist nun.

Chodron writes:

In order to have compassion for others, we have to have compassion for ourselves.

In particular, to care about other people who are fearful, angry, jealous, overpowered by addictions of all kinds, arrogant, proud, miserly, selfish, mean —you name it— to have compassion and to care for these people, means not to run from the pain of finding these things in ourselves. In fact, one's whole attitude toward pain can change. Instead of fending it off and hiding from it, one could open one's heart and allow oneself to feel that pain, feel it as something that will soften and purify us and make us far more loving and kind.

The tonglen practice is a method for connecting with suffering —ours and that which is all around us— everywhere we go. It is a method for overcoming fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our heart. Primarily it is a method for awakening the compassion that is inherent in all of us, no matter how cruel or cold we might seem to be...

...This is the core of the practice: breathing in other's pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open, and breathing out, sending them relaxation or whatever you feel would bring them relief and happiness. However, we often cannot do this practice because we come face to face with our own fear, our own resistance, anger, or whatever our personal pain, our personal stuckness happens to be at that moment...

...Tonglen can be done for those [or yourself] who are ill, those who are dying or have just died, or for those that are in pain of any kind. It can be done either as a formal meditation practice or right on the spot at any time. For example, if you are out walking and you see someone in pain — right on the spot you can begin to breathe in their pain and send out some relief. Or, more likely, you might see someone in pain and look away because it brings up your fear or anger; it brings up your resistance and confusion.<sup>4</sup>

*Please discuss:*

- What do you think of the idea that “In order to have compassion for others, we have to have compassion for ourselves”?
- How do Chodron’s ideas about “dissolving the tightness of our heart” interplay with our prior discussions about the heart?
- Reflect on the idea that when we see people in pain, we can either try to send them relief or can look away because it brings up our fear or anger. How does that idea relate to your understanding of tzedakah and “the other”?

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tonglen>

<sup>4</sup> Chodron, Pema. <http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/pema/tonglen1.php>

*Please take everything off of your laps and sit in a comfortable position. Ask one Pod member to read the following meditation – with apologies that this person will not have a full experience of the meditation. There are four steps to the tonglen practice.*

*Please read slowly.*

Please close your eyes, and breathe slowly, in and out. In and out. Starting with your head, go down through each part of your body, relaxing each part. Breathing in and out. Your head – the different parts of your face... your neck... down relaxing each arm and your torso... keep relaxing down to your legs and finally your feet.

First, rest your mind for a second or two, in a state of openness or stillness. Feel a sense of space in your mind. Open and Still. Breathing in and out. Slowly. In and out. Open and Still.

Now breathe in very slowly. But this time, the air you breathe in is hot. It's dark. It's heavy. You breathe in a sense of claustrophobia. And you breathe out a feeling of cool. Of bright. Of light. You breathe out a sense of freshness.

Breathe in completely through all the pores in your body this sense of hot, dark, heavy air. And breathe out cool, bright, light air completely, radiating out through all the pores in your body.

Again - breathe in completely through all the pores in your body this sense of hot, dark, heavy air. And breathe out cool, bright, light air completely, radiating out through all the pores in your body.

Now – think of someone you care about whom you wish to help – it could be you, yourself who needs help. Maybe your loved one is feeling inadequate, so you breathe that in for your loved one — and you send out confidence or relief in any form you wish. Maybe your loved one is being hurt by someone, so you breathe in the wish to take away all the pain and fear of that person, and then, as you breathe out, you send the person happiness, joy or whatever would relieve their pain.

Breathe in the thing that your loved one needs help with. Now breathe out the help that your loved needs. Breathe in, again, the same pain. And breathe out one more time, the same help.

Finally make the taking in and sending out larger. Think of the person you are now doing tonglen for, and extend it out to everyone who is in the same situation - make it larger than just one person. Breathe in the pain. Breathe out the relief. Breathe in the pain of everyone in that situation. Breathe out the relief and help for everyone in that situation.

Take a few more deep breaths. As you are ready, I invite you to open your eyes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Pema Chodron's writings - <http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/pema/tonglen1.php> and <http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/pema/tonglen2.php>

*Please discuss:*

- What reactions do you have to the tonglen?

Chodron writes:

As you do the practice, gradually over time, your compassion naturally expands and so does your realization that things are not as solid as you thought. As you do this practice, gradually at your own pace, you will be surprised to find yourself more and more able to be there for others even in what used to seem like impossible situations.<sup>6</sup>

*Please discuss:*

- What do you think it would be like to do tonglen as a daily or weekly practice? Or to do it when you see someone in pain or in need throughout the day? How might you change as a result?

#### **D. Tzedakah Bracha/Blessing**

*Please read aloud:*

During last year's Pods, many of us wrote tzedakah brachot/blessings. What would it be like if we actually said those brachot/blessings daily or weekly? How might our generosity change?

Julie Sissman wrote this tzedakah bracha/blessing last year:

May my tzedakah decisions be thoughtful and intentional. May this tzedakah offering make a positive difference in the world. May I give it with a generosity of spirit and humility. May I find ways, through this tzedakah offering or other activities, to inspire others to also give intentionally and generously. And may my thoughts and actions of tzedakah help me to have more feelings of compassion and loving kindness in all aspects of my life.

*Please discuss:*

- What do you think of the link between giving tzedakah intentionally and having a generosity of spirit?
- This tzedakah bracha/blessing – or the ones we wrote last year – could be used as a daily or weekly “tzedakah practice.” How could you see your sense of generosity or acts of tzedakah changing as a result of saying a tzedakah bracha/blessing daily or weekly?

We've now talked about opening our hearts; about receiving and giving; and about four different possible “tzedakah practices” to help us deepen our tzedakah and senses of generosity.

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<sup>6</sup> Chodron, Pema. <http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/pema/tonglen2.php>



*Please discuss:*

- What would be your intention for a daily or weekly tzedakah practice or ritual? Would you focus your intention on giving tzedakah money or focus your intention more broadly on being more generous?
- What would you hope would change as a result of your practice or ritual?
- What type of tzedakah practice or ritual would be most effective for you?

**SECTION 5 – CLOSING, HOMEWORK, AND SCHEDULING**  
**RECOMMENDED TIME – 5 MINUTES**

**A. Closing**

*Please read out loud.*

This brings us to the end of our third 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.*

So here we go... Let's try out a tzedakah practice for the month and see how it affects our feelings of generosity, attitudes about tzedakah, and how open we feel our hearts are. Please choose one of the tzedakah practices we discussed earlier – writing in a Generosity Journal at the end of each day; reciting the *Prayer for Peace* each day; practicing tonglen each day and when you see someone in need; saying a tzedakah bracha/blessing daily or weekly – or create your own tzedakah practice/ritual.

At our next Pod sessions, we'll discuss which tzedakah practice we chose and reflect on the effect we think it had on our hearts, on our tzedakah, and on our senses of generosity.

**C. Next month**

*Please read out loud.*

Let's make sure we have our date scheduled for next month. (Please meet after March 15th.) 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 [TLP2010-11@googlegroups.com](mailto:TLP2010-11@googlegroups.com).

