

Tzedakah

Goals

- 1) Gain understanding about Jewish commitment to the poor and to social justice
- 2) For students to feel connected to those traditions
- 3) Understand the role of Jews to Jews and non-Jews

Objectives

- 1) Recognize the differences between Jewish tradition and basic morality, and Jewish understanding of *tzedakah* vs. meaning of *charity*
- 2) Know the language of *tzedakah*: Hebrew terminology for activities people are going to do after the trip or are already doing and don't know they are Jewish in nature

Lesson plans and texts

Depending on their level of comfort with text study, you might wish to go through several of the texts together as a class before asking them to work on them in *chavrutaya*.

Lesson 1: *Foundations*

Avot 1:2

שמעון הצדיק היה משיירי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר, על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים:

Shimon the Righteous...used to say: The world depends on three things—on Torah study, on the service [of G-d], and on Kind Deeds.

- 1) What structures require three supports to stand?
- 2) What happens to that structure (and thus the world) when it tries to ‘stand’ on only one or two supports?
- 3) What three things hold up the world in your opinion and / or what three things hold you up?

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהם בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא. ואלו הן.
כבוד אב ואם. וגמילות חסדים.
והשכמת בית המדרש. שחרית וערבית.
והכנסת אורחים.
ובקור חולים.
והכנסת כלה.
ולוית המת.
ועיון תפלה.
והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו ובין איש לאשתו.
ותלמוד תורה כנגד כלם:

These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world but whose principal remains intact for him in the World to Come. They are:

the honor due to father and mother,
acts of kindness (*G'milut Chasadim*)
early attendance at the house of study morning and evening,
hospitality to guests,
visiting the sick,
providing for a bride, (who cannot provide financially for her own wedding)
escorting the dead, (the procession and other funeral arrangements due to
poverty) absorption in prayer,
bringing peace between a person and his fellow,
and between a man and his wife—
and the study of Torah is equivalent to them all.

- 1) What similarities do we find between Avot 1:2 and these passages?
- 2) What do these particular examples have in common?

Gemilut Chasadim is the Jewish notion of performing kind acts for others.

B. Sotah 14a

רבי חמא ברבי חנינא מאי דכתיב אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה והלא כבר נאמר כי ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא מה הוא מלביש ערומים דכתיב ויעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם אף אתה הלבש ערומים הקדוש ברוך הוא ביקר חולים דכתיב וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא אף אתה בקר חולים הקדוש ברוך הוא ניחם אבלים דכתיב ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו אף אתה נחם אבלים הקדוש ברוך הוא קבר מתים דכתיב ויקבר אותו בגיא אף אתה קבור מתים:

R. Hama son of R. Hanina said: "After the L-rd your G-d you shall walk" (Deut. 13:5). But is it possible for a man to walk right behind the Presence? Has it not already been said, "The L-rd thy G-d is a devouring fire" (Deut. 4:24)? Yes, but what the verse means is that you are to follow the ways of the Holy One.

Just as [G-d] clothed the naked, as it is written, "The L-rd G-d made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21), so should you clothe the naked.

The Holy One visited the sick: "The L-rd appeared unto him (Abraham) in the terebinths of Mamre (after his self-circumcision)" (Gen. 18:1). So should you visit the sick.

The Holy One comforted mourners: "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham that G-d bestowed blessing upon Isaac his son" (Gen. 25:11). So should you comfort mourners.

The Holy One buried the dead: "He buried [Moses] in the valley" (Deut. 34:6). So should you bury the dead.

- 1) How does it help to consider G-d acting in very human ways?
- 2) The religious concept in Sotah 14a is *'Imitatio Dei'* (the knowledge and emulation of G-d's attributes of actions). How might we modify our actions in light of this text and the Biblical teaching that we are created in the image of G-d (Gen. 1:26)?

Tikkun Olam is the Jewish mystical notion that we partner with G-d to perfect the world.

Midrash Tehillim, Ps. 116

מה אני בורא עולמות ומחיה מתים, אף אתם כן

G-d says to the righteous: 'Just as I create worlds... so too, you [can create worlds and build society].

Genesis 2:3

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּו שַׁבַּת מְכַל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

G-d created the seventh day and sanctified it, for on it [G-d] rested from all [G-d's] work, which G-d created to do.

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

“Everything was created to be improved upon.” (Etz Yosef on the words, “to do”)

Genesis Rabba 11:6

(1) פילוסופוס אחד שאל את רבי הושעיה א"ל אם חביבה היא המילה מפני מה לא נתנה לאדם כל מה שנברא בששת ימי בראשית צריכין עשייה כגון החרדל צריך למתוק התורמוסים צריך למתוק החיטין צריכין להטחן אפילו אדם צריך תיקון:

A Greek philosopher asked Rabbi Hoshaiah, "If circumcision is desirable to G-d, why didn't He create Adam circumcised?" ... Replied Rabbi Hoshiah: "Everything that was created in the six days of creation requires adjustment and improvement by man: the mustard seed must be sweetened, wheat must be milled..." Even Man needs improvement [through circumcision].

- 1) This text suggests that G-d specifically created an unfinished world for man to develop and perfect. What are some of the ways in which the world still appears unfinished?
- 2) How does the idea of partnership with G-d in creating the world compare and contrast with other world religions?
- 3) What is your role in finishing what G-d began?

Final thought:

Although Judaism values belief in and imitation of G-d, when it comes to *Tzedakah*, belief in G-d isn't everything. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin relates the following story:

"Everything in G-d's creation has a purpose," a Hasidic *rebbe* once told his followers.

"In that case," asked a disciple, "what is the purpose of *apikorsus* [heresy], of denying that G-d exists?"

"*Apikorsus* is indeed purposeful," the *rebbe* replied. "For when you are confronted by another who is in need, you should imagine that there is no G-d to help, but that you alone can meet the man's needs."¹

- 1) Why does the *rebbe* argue that we should act as if there is no G-d to help?
- 2) Would it be more powerful to consider ourselves responsible for making real changes in the world *and* also to believe in G-d?

¹ Jewish Literacy, 1991, p. 513

Lesson 2: *Biblical Tzedakah*

1) *G-d's concern for the destitute*

Deuteronomy 16:20

(כ) צָדֵק צְדָק תִּרְדּוּ וְלִמְעַן תַּחְיֶיהָ וּיְרַשְׁתֶּם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נֹתֵן לָכֶם:

²⁰Justice (*Tzedek*), justice shall you pursue, that you may live and occupy the land that the L-RD your G-d is giving you.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19

(יז) כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵלִים וְאֵדֹנֵי הָאָדָמָה הַגְּדוֹל הַגָּבוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר לֹא יֵשָׂא פָנִים וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד:
(יח) עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט יְתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאִבְיָטָל לֹא תִתֵּן לֹא לֶחֶם וְשִׂמְלָה:
(יט) וְאַהֲבַתֶּם אֶת הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

¹⁷For the L-RD your G-d...¹⁸upholds the cause of the orphan and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing.—¹⁹You must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 22:20-26

(כ) וְגֵר לֹא תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: (כא) כָּל אֲלֵמָנָה וְיְתוֹם לֹא תַעֲנוּן:
(כב) אִם עָנָה תַעֲנֶה אִתּוֹ כִּי אִם צַעֲקֵךְ יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמַע אֲשַׁמְעֶנּוּ וְחָרָה אַפִּי וְהִרְגֹתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּחָרֶב וְהָיוּ נְשֵׁיכֶם אֲלֵמָנוֹת וּבְנֵיכֶם יִתְּמוּ: (כג) אִם כֶּסֶף תִּלְוֶה אֶת עַמִּי אֶת הָעֲנִי עִמָּךְ לֹא תִהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנִשָּׂה לֹא תִשְׁיָמוּן עָלָיו נֶשֶׁךְ: (כד) אִם חֵב לִתְחַבֵּל שְׁלַמְתָּ רַעַךְ עַד בֹּיֵא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ תִּשְׁיָבֶנּוּ לוֹ: (כה) כִּי הוּא כְּסוּתָהּ לְבִדְדָהּ הוּא שְׁמֵלְתוֹ לַעֲרוֹ בְמָה יִשְׁכַּב וְהָיָה כִּי יִצְעַק אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי חָנוּן אֲנִי:

²⁰You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

²¹You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. ²²If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, ²³and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

²⁴If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them. ²⁵If you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you must return it to him before the sun sets; ²⁶it is his only clothing, the sole covering for his skin. In what else shall he sleep? Therefore, if he cries out to Me, I will pay heed, for I am compassionate.

- 1) What evidence do we have in these passages that G-d is concerned about the welfare of the destitute?
- 2) Who are the underclasses of the bible? Who are the underclasses of today?
- 3) How do we understand G-d as the protector of the underprivileged? What happens to us if we treat the poor badly?
- 4) Why do you think it is so important for Jews to remember that they “were strangers in the land of Egypt”?
- 5) Why is this text so vengeful? How does vengeance contribute to the text's ideology? What aspects of human nature are being addressed?

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

2) The Specifics

Leviticus 19: 9-10

(ט) וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת קְצִיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאת שְׂדֵךְ לְקַצֹּר וְלִקְט קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט: (י) וְכִרְמֶךָ לֹא תַעֲוִלֵל וּפְרֹט כְּרִמְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֵנִי וְלִגֵּר תַעֲזֹב אֶת אֲנִי יְהוָה אֵל הַיְכָם:

⁹When 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. ¹⁰You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the L-RD am your G-d.

Deuteronomy 24:17-18

(יז) לֹא תִטֶּה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר יְתוֹם וְלֹא תִחַב לִבְגַד אֶלְמָנָה: (יח) וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּפְדֶּךָ יְהוָה אֵל הֵיךָ מִשָּׁם עַל כֵּן אֲנִי כִּי מִצְוֶךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה:

¹⁷You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. ¹⁸Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the L-RD your G-d redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.

Num. R. 5:2

(ב) ד"א אל תכריתו וגו' הה"ד (משלי כב) אל תגזול דל כי דל הוא וגו' אמרו רבותינו במה הכתוב מדבר אם הוא דל מהו גזול לו אלא לא דיבר אלא במתנות עניים שהוא חייב ליתן להם מן התורה לקט שכחה ופאה ומעשר עני

"Rob not the impoverished because he is impoverished" (Prov. 22:22). Our masters said: What is Scripture talking about? If he is impoverished, how can he be robbed? Scripture must be speaking here of gifts to the poor that one is obliged by Torah to give, namely, gleanings, forgotten sheaves, corners of the field, and the poor man's tithe.

והזהיר הקב"ה שלא יגזול אדם מהם מתנות הראויות ליתן להם כי דל הוא די לו עניותו לא די לעשיר שהוא עומד בריוח ועני בצער

The Holy One thus admonishes that one is not to rob the poor of the gifts due them. "Because he is impoverished"--sufficient for him is his poverty. It is not enough for the rich man that he lives in comfort while the poor man is in distress; must he also rob the poor of what the Holy One has allotted to him?

- 1) Why might it be important to give specific commandments about how to treat the poor?
- 2) Are passages like Lev. 19:9-10 applicable to non-agrarian societies? If so, what are some modern day equivalents to corners of fields and gleaning in our society today?

Avot 3:7

(ז) רבי אלעזר איש ברתותא אומר, תן לו משלו, שאתה ושלך שלו. וכן בְּדוּד הוּא אֹמֵר (דבר הימים א כט) כִּי מִמֶּךָ הֵכֵל וּמִיָּדְךָ נִתְּנוּ לָךְ:

R. Eleazar of Bartota said: Give [G-d] of that which is really [G-d]'s, for you and what is yours are [G-d]'s. Thus, we find David saying, "Since all things come from You, we have given You of Yours" (1 Chron. 29:14)

- 1) What does this passage teach about our 'ownership' of money and other 'things' in this world?

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

2) What are the implications of this teaching for us as individuals and in society?

Lesson 3 - Ladder of Tzedakah

Start by reading Maimonides Ladder of *Tzedakah* (10.7 – 10.14) and answer the following questions:

- 1) What differentiates the different levels of *Tzedakah*?
- 2) Is it better to give *Tzedakah* at the lower levels than to not give at all? Can you think of any situations where it would be worse to give *Tzedakah* than not?
- 3) What situations can you think of that exemplify these various levels?
- 4) Would you choose a different order for the rungs of the ladder?

Now read the rest of the chapter.

- 1) Maimonides explains that we must be more careful about giving *tzedakah* than doing any other positive commandments and that even “the throne of Israel cannot be established... except through *Tzedakah*.” Why such forceful statements?
- 2) The Rambam ends by explaining that we should try not to be dependent but neither should we let our pride prevent us from asking when we really need it. How would you define the line between ensuring that one does his best not depend upon others but is also careful to ask when he needs to? How might we be able to help someone in this quandary?

(א) חייבין אנו להזהר במצות צדקה יותר מכל מצות עשה שהצדקה סימן לצדיק זרע אברהם אבינו שנאמר כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו לעשות צדקה ואין כסא ישראל מתכונן ודת האמת עומדת אלא בצדקה שנאמר בצדקה תכונני ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בצדקה שנאמר ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה בצדקה:

(ב) לעולם אין אדם מעני מן הצדקה ואין דבר רע ולא היזק נגלל בשביל הצדקה שנאמר והיה מעשה הצדקה שלום כל המרחם מרחמין עליו שנאמר ונתן לך רחמים ורחמך והרבך וכל מי שהוא אכזרי ואינו מרחם יש לחוש ליחסו שאין האכזריות מצויה אלא בעכו"ם שנאמר אכזרי המה ולא ירחמו וכל ישראל והנלוה עליהם כאחים הם שנאמר בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם ואם לא ירחם האח על האח מי ירחם עליו ולמי עניי ישראל נושאים עיניהן הלעכו"ם ששונאים אותו ורודפים אחריהן הא אין עיניהן תלויות אלא לאחיהן:

(ג) כל המעלים עיניו מן הצדקה הרי זה נקרא בליעל כמו שנקרא עובד עכו"ם בליעל ובעכו"ם הוא אומר יצאו אנשים בני בליעל ובמעלים עיניו מן הצדקה הוא אומר השמר לך פן יהיה דבר עם לבבך בליעל ונקרא רשע שנאמר ורחמי רשעים אכזרי ונקרא חוטא שנאמר וקרא עליך אל ה' והיה בך חטא והקב"ה קרוב לשועת עניים שנאמר שועת עניים אתה תשמע לפיכך צריך להזהר בצעקתם שהרי ברית כרותה להם שנאמר והיה כי יצעק אלי ושמעתי כי חנון אני:

(ד) כל הנותן צדקה לעני בסבר פנים רעות ופניו כבושות בקרקע אפילו נתן לו אלף זהובים אבד זכותו והפסידה אלא נותן לו בסבר פנים יפות ובשמחה ומתאונן עמו על צרתו שנאמר אם לא בכיתי לקשה יום עגמה נפשי לאביון ומדבר לו דברי תחנונים ונחומים שנאמר ולב אלמנה ארנין:

(ה) שאל העני ממך ואין בידך כלום ליתן לו פייסהו בדברים ואסור לגעור בעני או להגביה קולו עליו בצעקה מפני שלבו נשבר ונדכא והרי הוא אומר לב נשבר ונדכה אלהים לא תבזה ואומר להחיות רוח שפלים ולהחיות לב נדכאים ואוי למי שהכלים את העני אוי לו אלא יהיה לו כאב בין ברחמים בין בדברים שנאמר אב אנכי לאביונים:

(ו) הכופה אחרים ליתן צדקה ומעשה אותן שכרו גדול משכר הנותן שנאמר והיה מעשה הצדקה שלום ועל גבאי צדקה וכיוצא בהם אומר ומצדיקי הרבים ככוכבים:

(ז) שמנה מעלות יש בצדקה זו למעלה מזו מעלה גדולה שאין למעלה ממנה זה המחזיק ביד ישראל שמך ונותן לו מתנה או הלואה או עושה עמו שותפות או ממציא לו מלאכה כדי לחזק את ידו עד שלא יצטרך לבריות לשאול ועל זה נאמר והחזקת בו גר ותושב וחי עמך כלומר החזק בו עד שלא יפול ויצטרך:

(ח) פחות מזה הנותן צדקה לעניים ולא ידע למי נתן ולא ידע העני ממי לקח שהרי זו מצוה לשמה כגון לשכת חשאים שהיתה במקדש שהיו הצדיקים נותנין בה בחשאי והעניים בני טובים מתפרנסין ממנה בחשאי וקרוב לזה הנותן לתוך קופה של צדקה ולא יתן אדם לתוך קופה של צדקה אלא אם כן יודע שהממונה נאמן וחכם ויודע להנהיג כשורה כר' חנניה בן תרדיון:

(ט) פחות מזה שידע הנותן למי יתן ולא ידע העני ממי לקח כגון גדולי החכמים שהיו הולכין בסתר ומשליכין המעות בפתחי העניים וכוה ראו לעשות ומעלה טובה היא אם אין הממונין בצדקה נוהגין כשורה:

(י) פחות מזה שידע העני ממי נטל ולא ידע הנותן כגון גדולי החכמים שהיו צוררים המעות בסדיניהן ומפשילין לאחוריהן ובאין העניים ונטלין כדי שלא יהיה להן בושה:

(יא) פחות מזה שיתן לו בידו קודם שישאל:

(יב) פחות מזה שיתן לו אחר שישאל:

(יג) פחות מזה שיתן לו פחות מן הראוי בסבר פנים יפות:

(יד) פחות מזה שיתן לו בעצב:

(טו) גדולי החכמים היו נותנין פרוטה לעני קודם כל תפלה ואחר כך מתפללין שנאמר אני בצדק אחזה פניך:

(טז) הנותן מזונות לבניו ולבנותיו הגדולים שאינו חייב במזונותיהן כדי ללמד הזכרים תורה ולהנהיג הבנות בדרך ישרה ולא יהיו מבזות וכן הנותן מזונות לאביו ולאמו הרי זה בכלל הצדקה וצדקה גדולה היא שהקרוב קודם וכל המאכיל ומשקה עניים ויתומים על שלחנו הרי זה קורא אל ה' ויענהו ומתענג שנאמר אז תקרא וה' יענה:

(יז) צו חכמים שיהיו בני ביתו של אדם עניים ויתומים במקום העבדים מוטב לו להשתמש באלו והיה בני אברהם יצחק ויעקב מנכסיו ולא יהנו בהם זרע חם שכל המרבה עבדים בכל יום ויום מוסיף חטא ועון בעולם ואם יהיו עניים בני ביתו בכל שעה ושעה מוסיף זכויות ומצות:

(יה) לעולם ידחוק אדם עצמו ויתגלגל בצער ואל יצטרך לבריות ואל ישליך עצמו על הצבור וכן צוו חכמים ואמרו עשה שבתך חול ואל תצטרך לבריות ואפילו היה חכם ומכובד והעני יעסוק באומנות ואפילו באומנות מנוולת ולא יצטרך לבריות מוטב לפשוט עור בהמות נבלות ולא יאמר לעם חכם גדול אני כהן אני פרנסוני ובכך צוו חכמים גדולי החכמים היו מהם חוטבי עצים ונושאי הקורות ושואבי מים לגנות ועושי הברזל והפחמים ולא שאלו מן הצבור ולא קיבלו מהם כשנתנו להם:

(יט) כל מי שאינו צריך ליטול ומרמה את העם ונטל אינו מת מן הזקנה עד שיצטרך לבריות והרי הוא בכלל ארור הגבר אשר יבטח באדם וכל מי שצריך ליטול ואינו יכול לחיות אלא אם כן נטל כגון זקן או חולה או בעל יסורין ומגיס דעתו ואינו נטל הרי זה שופך דמים ומתחייב בנפשו ואין לו בצערו אלא חטאות ואשמות וכל מי שצריך ליטול וציער ודחק את השעה וחיה חיי צער כדי שלא יטריח על הצבור אינו מת מן הזקנה עד שיפרנס אחרים משלו ועליו ועל כל כיוצא בזה נאמר ברוך הגבר אשר יבטח בה' סליקו להו הלכות מתנות עניים בס"ד:

CHAPTER X

1. It is our duty to be more careful in the performance of the commandment of *tzedakah* than in that of any other positive commandment, for *tzedakah* is the mark of the righteous man who is of the seed of our father Abraham, as it is said, *For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children, etc., to do righteousness* (Gen. 18:19). The throne of Israel cannot be established, nor true faith made to stand up, except through *tzedakah*, as it is said, *In righteousness shalt thou be established* (Isa. 54:14); nor will Israel be redeemed, except through the practice of *tzedakah*, as it is said, *Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they that return of her with righteousness* (Isa. 1:27).

2. No man is ever impoverished by *tzedakah*, nor does evil or harm befall anyone by reason of it, as it is said, *And the work of righteousness shall be peace* (Isa. 32:17)

He who has compassion upon others, others will have compassion upon him, as it is said, *That the L-rd may . . . show thee mercy, and, have compassion upon thee* (Deut. 13:18)

Whosoever is cruel and merciless lays himself open to suspicion as to his descent, for cruelty is found only among the heathens, as it is said, *They are cruel, and have no compassion* (Jer. 50:42). All Israelites and those that have attached themselves to them are to each other like brothers, as it is said, *Ye are the children of the L-rd your G-d* (Deut. 14:1). If brother will show no compassion to brother, who will? And unto whom shall the poor of Israel raise their eyes? Unto the heathens, who hate them and persecute them? Their eyes are therefore hanging solely upon their brethren.

3. He who turns his eyes away from *tzedakah* is called a base fellow, just as is he who worships idols. Concerning the worship of idols Scripture says, *Certain base fellows are gone out* (Deut. 13:14), and concerning him who turns his eyes away from *tzedakah* it says, *Beware that there be not a base thought in thy heart* (Deut. 15:9). Such a man is also called wicked, as it is said, *The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel* (Prov. 12:120). He is also called a sinner, as it is said, *And he cries unto the L-rd against thee, and it be sin in thee* (Deut. 15:10). The Holy One, blessed He, stands nigh unto the cry of the poor, as it is said, *Thou hearest the cry of the poor*. One should therefore be careful about their cry, for a covenant has been made with them, as it is said, *And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear, for I am gracious* (Exod. 22:26).

4. He who gives *tzedakah* to a poor man with a hostile countenance and with his face averted to the ground, loses his merit and forfeits it, even if he gives as much as a thousand gold coins. He should rather give with a friendly countenance and joyfully. He should commiserate with the recipient in his distress, as it is said, *If I have not wept for him that was in trouble, and if my soul grieved not for the needy?* (Job 30:25). He should also speak to him prayerful and comforting words, as it is said, *And I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy* (Job 29:13).

5. If a poor man asks you for *tzedakah* and you have nothing to give him, comfort him with words. It is forbidden to rebuke a poor man or to raise one's voice in a shout at him, seeing that his heart is broken and crushed, and Scripture says, *A broken and contrite heart, O G-d, Thou wilt not despise* (Ps. 51:19), and again, *To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones* (Isa. 57:15). Woe unto him who shames the poor! Woe unto him! One should rather be unto the poor as a father, with both compassion and words, as it is said, *I was a father to the needy* (Job 29:16).

6. He who presses others to give *tzedakah* and moves them to act thus, his reward is greater than the reward of him who gives *tzedakah* himself, as it is said, *And the work of righteousness shall be peace* (Isa. 32:17). Concerning *tzedakah* collectors and their like Scripture says, *And they that turn the many to righteousness (shall shine) as the stars* (Dan. 12:3).

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

7. **There are eight degrees of *tzedakah*, each one superior to the other.** The highest degree, than which there is none higher, is one who upholds the hand of an Israelite reduced to poverty by handing him a gift or a loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding work for him, in order to strengthen his hand, so that he would have no need to beg from other people. Concerning such a one Scripture says, *Thou shalt uphold him; as a stranger and a settler shall he live with thee* (Lev. 25:35), meaning uphold him, so that he would not lapse into want.
8. Below this is he who gives *tzedakah* to the poor in such a way that he does not know to whom he has given, nor does the poor man know from whom he has received. This constitutes the fulfilling of a religious duty for its own sake, and for such there was a Chamber of Secrets in the Temple, whereunto the righteous would contribute secretly, and where from the poor of good families would draw their sustenance in equal secrecy. Close to such a person is he who contributes directly to the *tzedakah* fund. One should not, however, contribute directly to the *tzedakah* fund unless he knows that the person in charge of it is trustworthy, is a Sage, and knows how to manage it properly, as was the case of Rabbi Hananiah ben Teradion.
9. Below this is he who knows to whom he is giving, while the poor man does not know from whom he is receiving. He is thus like the great among the Sages who were wont to set out secretly and throw the money down at the doors of the poor. This is a proper way of doing it, and a preferable one if those in charge of *tzedakah* are not conducting themselves as they should.
10. Below this is the case where the poor man knows from whom he is receiving, but himself remains unknown to the giver. He is thus like the great among the Sages who used to place the money in the fold of a linen sheet which they would throw over their shoulder, whereupon the poor would come behind them and take the money without being exposed to humiliation.
11. Below this is he who hands the *tzedakah* to the poor man before being asked for them.
12. Below this is he who hands the *tzedakah* to the poor man after the latter has asked for them.
13. Below this is he who gives the poor man less than what is proper, but with a friendly countenance.
14. Below this is he who gives *tzedakah* with a frowning countenance.
15. The great among the Sages used to hand a *perutah* to a poor man before praying, and then proceeded to pray, as it is said, *As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness* (Ps. 17:15)
16. He who provides maintenance for his grown sons and daughters—whom he is not obligated to maintain—in order that the sons might study Torah, and that the daughters might learn to follow the right path and not expose themselves to contempt, and likewise he who provides maintenance for his father and mother, is accounted as performing an act of *tzedakah*. Indeed it is an outstanding act of *tzedakah*, since one's relative has precedence over other people. Whosoever serves food and drink to poor men and orphans at his table, will, when he calls to G-d, receive an answer and find delight in it, as it is said, *Then shalt thou call, and the L-rd will answer* (Isa. 58:9).
17. The Sages have commanded that one should have poor men and orphans as members of his, household rather 'than bondsmen, for it is better for him to employ the former, so that children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob might benefit from his possessions rather than children of Ham, seeing that he who multiplies bondsmen multiplies sin and iniquity every day in the world, whereas if poor people are members of his household, he adds to merits and fulfillment of commandments every hour.
18. One should always restrain himself and submit to privation rather than be dependent upon other people or cast himself upon public charity, for thus have the Sages commanded us, saying, "Make the Sabbath a weekday rather than be dependent upon other people." Even if one is a Sage held in honor, once he becomes impoverished, he should engage in a trade, be it even a loathsome trade, rather than be dependent upon other people. It is better to strip hides off animal carcasses than to say to other people, "I am a great Sage, I am a priest, provide me therefore with maintenance." So did the Sages command us. Among the great Sages there were hewers of wood, carriers of beams, drawers of water to irrigate gardens, and workers in iron and charcoal. They did not ask for public assistance, nor did they accept it when offered to them.

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

19. Whosoever is in no need of *tzedakah* but deceives the public and does not accept them, will not die of old age until he indeed becomes dependent upon other people. He is included among those of whom Scripture says, *Cursed is the man that trusteth in man* (Jer. 17:5). On the other hand, whosoever is in need of *tzedakah* and cannot survive unless he accepts them, such as a person who is of advanced age, or ill, or afflicted with sore trials, but is too proud and refuses to accept them, is the same as a shedder of blood and is held to account for his own soul, and by his suffering he gains nothing but sin and guilt.

Whosoever is in need of *tzedakah* but denies himself, postpones the hour, and lives a life of want in order not to be a burden upon the public, will not die of old age until he shall have provided maintenance for others out of his own wealth. Of him and of those like him it is said, Blessed is the man that trusteth in the L-rd (Jer. 17:7).

Lesson 4 *Halacha* – Jewish Law

TREATISE II

LAWS CONCERNING GIFTS TO THE POOR

Involving Thirteen Commandments,
Seven Positive and Six Negative
To Wit

1. To leave a corner crop;
2. Not to reap the corner wholly;
3. To leave gleanings;
4. Not to gather the gleanings;
5. To leave the defective clusters of the vineyard;
6. Not to gather the defective clusters of the vineyard;
7. To leave the grape gleanings of the vineyard;
8. Not to gather the grape gleanings of the vineyard;
9. To leave the forgotten sheaf;
10. Not to return in order to recover the forgotten sheaf;
11. To set aside the tithe for the poor;
12. To give *tzedakah* according to one's means;
13. Not to harden one's heart against the poor.

An exposition of these commandments is contained in the following chapters.

NOTE

In the list of 613 commandments prefixed to the Code, those dealt with in the present treatise appear in the following order:

Positive commandments:

[1] 120. To leave a corner crop for the poor, as it is said: *And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corner of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of the harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the stranger* (Lev. 19:9-10);

[3] 121. To leave the gleanings for the poor;

[9] 122. To leave the forgotten sheaf for the poor, as it is said: *When thou reapest thy harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go back to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow* (Deut. 24:19);

[5] 123. To leave the defective clusters of the vineyard for the poor, as it is said: *Thou shalt not glean thy vineyard . . . thou shalt leave them for the poor* (Lev. 19:10);

[7] 124. To leave the grape gleanings of the vineyard for the poor, as it is said: *Neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the stranger* (Lev. 19:10);

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

[11] 130. To set aside in the third and sixth years the tithe for the poor, as it is said: *At the end of every three years, even in the same year, thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase* (Deut. 14:28);

[12] 195. To give *tzedakah* to the poor according to one's means, as it is said: *Thou shalt surely open thy hand unto thy poor and needy brother* (Deut. 15:10).

Negative commandments:

[2] 210. Not to reap the field wholly, as it is said: *And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corner of thy field* (Lev. 19:9);

[4] 211. Not to gather the gleanings, as it is said: *Neither shalt thou gather the gleaning of thy harvest* (Lev. 19:9);

[6] 212. Not to gather the defective clusters, as it is said: *And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard* (Lev. 19:10);

[8] 213. Not to gather the grape gleanings, as it is said: *Neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard* (Lev. 19:10);

[10] 214. Not to return in order to recover the forgotten sheaf, as it is said: *Thou shalt not go back to fetch it* (Deut. 24:19);

[13] 232. Not to harden one's heart against the poor, as it is said: *If there be among you a needy man . . . thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy needy brother* (Deut. 15:7).

CHAPTER VII

1. It is a positive commandment to give *tzedakah* to the poor of Israel, according to what is fitting for them, if the giver can afford it, as it is said, *Thou shalt surely open thy hand unto him* (Deut. 15:8), and again, *Then thou shalt uphold him; as a stranger and a settler shall he live with thee that thy brother may live with thee* (Lev. 25:35-36).

2. He who seeing a poor man begging turns his eyes away from him and fails to give him *tzedakah*, transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said, *Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy needy brother* (Deut. 15:7)

3. You are commanded to give the poor man according to what he lacks. If he has no clothing, he should be clothed. If he has no house furnishings, they should be bought for him. If he has no wife, he should be helped to marry. If it is a woman, she should be given in marriage. Even if it had been his wont to ride a horse, with a manservant running in front of him, and he has now become poor and has lost his possessions, one must buy him a horse to ride and a manservant to run before him, as it is said, *Sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth* (Deut. 15:8). You are thus obligated to fill his want; you are not, however, obligated to restore his wealth.

4. If an orphan is about to be wed, one must first rent a house for him, spread a bed for him, and provide all his furnishings, and only then have him marry a wife.

5. If the poor man comes forth and asks for enough to satisfy his want, and if the giver is unable to afford it, the latter may give him as much as he can afford. How much is that? In choice performance of this religious duty,

up to one-fifth of his possessions; in middling performance, up to one-tenth of his possessions; less than this brands him as a person of evil eye. At all times one should not permit himself to give less than one-third of a shekel per year. He who gives less than this has not fulfilled this commandment at all. Even a poor man who lives entirely on *tzedakah* must himself give *tzedakah* to another poor man.

6. If a poor man unknown to anyone comes forth and says, "I am hungry; give me something to eat," he should not be examined as to whether he might be an impostor—he should be fed immediately. If, however, he is naked and says, "Clothe me," he should be examined as to possible fraud. If he is known, he should be clothed immediately according to his dignity, without any further inquiry.

7. One must feed and clothe the heathen poor together with the Israelite poor, for the sake of the ways of peace. In the case of a poor man who goes from door to door, one is not obligated to give him a large gift, but only a small one. It is forbidden, however, to let a poor man who asks for *tzedakah* go empty-handed, just so you give him at least one dry fig, as it is said, *O let not the oppressed turn back in confusion* (Ps. 74:21).

8. A poor man traveling from one place to another must be given not less than one loaf of bread that sells for a *pondion* when the price of wheat is one sela' per four se'ah. We have already explained the value of all measures. If he lodges for the night, he must be given a mattress to sleep on and a pillow to put under his head, as well as oil and pulse for his repast. If he stays over the Sabbath, he must be provided with food for three meals as well as oil, pulse, fish, and vegetables. If he is known, he must be supplied according to his dignity.

9. If a poor man refuses to accept *tzedakah*, one should get around him by making him accept them as a present or a loan. If, on the other hand, a wealthy man starves himself because he is so niggardly with his money that he would not spend of it on food and drink, no attention need be paid to him.

10. He who refuses to give *tzedakah*, or gives less than is proper for him, must be compelled by the court to comply, and must be flogged for disobedience until he gives as much as the court estimates he should give. The court may even seize his property in his presence and take from him what is proper for him to give. One may indeed pawn things in order to give *tzedakah*, even on the eve of the Sabbath.

11. A munificent person who gives *tzedakah* beyond what he can afford, or denies himself in order to give to the collector of *tzedakah* so that he would not be put to shame, should not be asked for contributions to *tzedakah*. Any *tzedakah* collector who humiliates him by demanding *tzedakah* from him will surely be called to account for it, as it is said, *I will punish all that oppress them* (Jer. 30:20)

12. Orphans may not be assessed for *tzedakah*, not even for the ransom of captives, not even if they have much money. But if the judge assesses them in order to have them acquire a good name, he may do so. Collectors of *tzedakah* may accept contributions from women, bondsmen, or children, provided that it is a small amount and not a large one, because the presumption is that a large amount was stolen or extorted from other persons. How much is a small amount in their case? It all depends on the wealth or poverty of their masters.

13. A poor man who is one's relative has priority over all others, the poor of one's own household have priority over the other poor of his city, and the poor of his city have priority over the poor of another city, as it is said, *Unto thy poor and needy brother, in thy land* (Deut. 15:11).

14. One who has gone on business to another city, and is assessed for *tzedakah* by the inhabitants thereof, must contribute to the poor of that city. If a large group of such visitors is assessed by the city for *tzedakah*, they must contribute, but when they return home they must bring the assessment back with them and contribute it to the poor of their own city. If that city has a scholar in charge of alms, they should give it to him, to be distributed as he sees fit.

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

15. If a person says, "Give two hundred denar to the synagogue," or "Give a Scroll of the Torah to the synagogue," these should be given to the synagogue which he regularly attends. If he attends two synagogues, they should be given to both. If one says, "Give two hundred denar for the poor," they should be given to the poor of that city.

- 1) What does the word commandment mean to you?
- 2) Using your definition from the preceding question, what might "positive" and "negative" mean in the context of 7.1 and 7.2?
- 3) Can you think of reasons why to limit *tzedakah* giving to 20%, as 7.5 does?
- 4) Why should "even a poor man...give *tzedakah* to another poor man"? Do you see a similarity between this concept and the ladder of *tzedakah*?
- 5) What might today's equivalents be for "a pondion when the price of wheat is one sela" and other measures found in 7.8. Why is important to have specific measures at all?
- 6) Do you agree with 7.10?
- 7) Do you believe it's more important to attend to the needs of those close to you before other's needs as 7.13 implies?

Final Thought:

Gemilut Chasadim over ritual halacha

Eccles. R. 9:7, #1

"But unto you that fear My Name shall the sun of righteousness shine" (Mal. 3:20). Once, when Abba Tahnah the Pious was entering his city on Sabbath eve at dusk, a bundle slung over his shoulder, he came upon a man afflicted with boils lying [helplessly] at a crossroads. The man said to him, "Master, do an act of kindness for me--carry me into the city."

Abba Tahnah replied, "If I abandon my bundle, how shall I and my household support ourselves? But if I abandon a man afflicted with boils, I will forfeit my life!" What did he do? He let his inclination to good overpower his impulse to evil, [set down his bundle on the road], and carried the afflicted man into the city.

Then he returned for his bundle and reentered the city with the last rays of the sun. Everybody was astonished [at seeing the pious man carrying his bundle when the Sabbath was about to begin] and exclaimed, "Is this really Abba Tahnah the Pious?" He too felt uneasy at heart and said to himself: Is it possible that I have desecrated the Sabbath? At that, the Holy One caused the sun to continue to shine [a while longer, delaying the onset of Sabbath].

- 1) It appears that certain acts of kindness outweigh even the importance of honoring the Sabbath. What other acts can you imagine surpass even the Sabbath in importance?
- 2) Would it be appropriate for a Jew to use this story to justify never performing other *Mitzvot* if he were always engaged in acts of loving-kindness (if he worked in a food pantry on Saturday, for instance)?

Lesson 5 - Jew vs. Non-Jew

Ex. 23:4-5, 9

(ד) כִּי תִפְגַּע שׁוֹר אִיבֵךְ אוֹ חֲמֹר תְּרֹתְעָה הַשֵּׁב תְּשִׁיבֵנּוּ לוֹ: (ה) כִּי תִרְאֶה חֲמֹר שֶׁנֶּאֱכַר רֵבִץ תַּחַת מְשָׁאוֹ וְחִדַּלְתָּ מֵעֲזוֹ בְּ לֹעַז בְּ תַעְזוֹ בְּ עַמּוֹ:
(ט) וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחֹץ וְאַתֶּם יִדְעֶתֶם אֶת נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

⁴When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him.

⁵When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him.

⁹You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

- 1) What equivalents to the ox in 4 can we find in our society today? What about the act of raising the ass? :)
- 2) What does “and would refrain from raising it” mean in v.5? Why might someone be inclined to refrain?
- 3) For v. 9, the Rabbis later interpret “Ger,” “stranger,” as “convert.” However, bible scholars view *ger* as a non-Israelite. How does the translation affect the force of the law? Is there a necessity for both translations? What are the nuances of each interpretation?

B. Gittin 61a

אין ממחין ביד עניי נכרים בלקט בשכחה ובפאה מפני דרכי שלום: תנו רבנן מפרנסים עניי נכרים עם עניי ישראל ומבקרין חולי נכרים עם חולי ישראל וקוברין מתי נכרים עם מתי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום:

For the sake of peace, the poor of the heathens should not be prevented from gathering gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and corners of the field.

Our masters taught: We support the poor of the heathens with the poor of Israel, we visit the sick of the heathens with the sick of Israel, and we bury the dead of the heathens with the dead of Israel for the sake of peace.

- 1) How do you interpret the phrase “for the sake of peace”?
- 2) Do you think a more forceful “for the sake of _____” could be made? How would you fill in the blank?
- 3) Jews are obligated not only to give *tzedakah* to the poor of the other nations, but also *Gemilut Chasadim*. What does this say about G-d's desire for all people to care not only about their own people, but also about the entirety of humanity?
- 4) Could you give *Tzedakah* to another religious group? Even one antagonistic to your own religion?

B. Betz 32b.

ואמר רב נתן בר אבא אמר רב עתירי בבל יורדי גיהנם הם כי הא דשבתאי בר מרינוס אקלע לבבל בעא מנייהו עסקא ולא יהבו ליה מזוני מין נמי לא זינוהו אמר הני מערב רב קא אתו דכתיב ונתן לך רחמים ורחמך כל המרחם על הבריות בידוע שהוא מזרעו של אברהם אבינו וכל מי שאינו מרחם על הבריות בידוע שאינו מזרעו של אברהם אבינו

R. Nathan bar Abba said in the name of Rav: Babylonia's rich men are sure to go down into Gehenna. Thus, when Shabbetai ben Merinus happened to be in Babylonia and asked its rich men for money to help set him up in business, they did not give it to him. [Then he asked] for mere sustenance, but they did not give him even that. So he said: These rich men must be descendants of the mixed multitude [not Hebrews] for Scripture says, "When He endoweth thee with compassion, He will have compassion upon thee and multiply thee as He swore to thy fathers" (Deut. 13:18), proving that he who has compassion on G-d's creatures is assuredly of our father Abraham's progeny, whereas he who has no compassion on G-d's creatures is assuredly not of our father Abraham's progeny.

- 1) This passage implies that there are no members of "Abraham's progeny" who lack compassion. What do you think?
- 2) Can you think of any other cultures that assume their members share certain characteristics? What about groups which require their members to share values and for whom non-conformity to those values means they no longer belong to the group?

B. Baba Batra 10b

תניא אמר להן רבן *יוחנן* בן זכאי לתלמידיו בני מהו שאמר הכתוב צדקה תרומם גוי וחסד לאומים חטאת נענה ר אליעזר ואמר צדקה תרומם גוי אלו ישראל דכתיב ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ וחסד לאומים חטאת כל צדקה וחסד שאומות עובדי כוכבים עושין חטא הוא להן שאינם עושין אלא להתגדל בו כמו שנאמר די להוון מהקרבין ניחוחין לאלהה שמיא ומצליין לחיי מלכא ובנוהי ודעביד הכי לאו צדקה גמורה היא והתניא האומר סלע זה לצדקה בשביל שיחיו בני ובשביל שאזכה לעולם הבא הרי זה צדיק גמור לא קשיא כאן בישראל כאן בעובד כוכבים נענה רבי יהושע ואמר צדקה תרומם גוי אלו ישראל דכתיב ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד וחסד לאומים חטאת כל צדקה וחסד שאומות עובדי כוכבים עושין חטא הוא להן שאין עושין אלא כדי שתמשך מלכותן שנאמר להן מלכא מלכי ישפר עליך וחסר בצדקה פרוק ועיתך במיחן עניין הן תהוי ארכא לשלותיך וגו' נענה רבן גמליאל ואמר צדקה תרומם גוי אלו ישראל דכתיב ומי כעמך ישראל [וגו'] וחסד לאומים חטאת כל צדקה וחסד שעכו"ם עושין חטא הוא להן שאין עושין אלא להתיהר בו וכל המתיהר נופל בגיהנם שנאמר זד יהיר לץ שמו עושה בעברת זדון ואין עברה אלא גיהנם שנאמר יום עברה היום ההוא אמר רבן גמליאל עדיין אנו צריכין למודעי רבי אליעזר המודעי אומר צדקה תרומם גוי אלו ישראל דכתיב ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד וחסד לאומים חטאת כל צדקה וחסד שעכו"ם עושין חטא הוא להן שאין עושין אלא לחרף אותנו בו שנאמר ויבא ויעש ה' כאשר דבר כי חטאתם לה' ולא שמעתם בקולו והיה לכם הדבר הזה נענה רבי נחוניא בן הקנה ואמר צדקה תרומם גוי וחסד לישראל ולאומים חטאת אמר להם רבן יוחנן בן זכאי לתלמידיו נראין דברי רבי נחוניא בן הקנה מדברי ומדבריהם לפי שהוא נותן צדקה וחסד לישראל ולעכו"ם חטאת מכלל דהוא נמי אמר מאי היא דתניא אמר להם רבן יוחנן בן זכאי כשם שהחטאת מכפרת על ישראל כך צדקה מכפרת על אומות העולם:

We have been taught that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai asked his disciples: What is meant by the verse, "Tzedakah exalted the nation, but loving-kindness is a sin for [other] peoples" (Prov. 14:34)?

R. Eliezer spoke up and said: "Tzedakah exalteth the nation," that is, Israel, concerning which it is said, "Who is like Thy people, like Israel, a nation one in the earth" (2 Sam. 7:23); "but loving-kindness is a sin for [other] peoples"--even all the acts of charity and loving-kindness that [heathen] peoples of the world perform are deemed a sin for them, because they perform such acts only to enhance their greatness.

R. Joshua spoke up and said: "Tzedakah exalteth the nation," that is, Israel; "but loving-kindness is a sin for [other] peoples"--even all the acts of charity and loving-kindness that [heathen] peoples of the world perform are deemed a sin for them, because they perform such acts only to boast of them.

Rabban Gamaliel said: We still have to hear the interpretation of the Modiite.

R. Eleazar the Modiite said: "Tzedakah exalteth the nation," that is, Israel; "but loving-kindness is a sin for [other] peoples"--even acts of charity and loving-kindness that [heathen] peoples of the world perform are deemed a sin for them, because they perform such acts only to taunt and reproach us [for our failings—as Nebuzaradan did when he released Jeremiah from his fetters].

R. Nehunia ben ha-Kanah spoke up and read the verse "Tzedakah exalteth the nation, for it is deemed loving-kindness for Israel, but sin for the [heathen] peoples." At that, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to his disciples: I find the interpretation of R. Nehunia ben ha-Kanah more appealing than mine or yours, because he associates the words "tzedakah" and "loving-kindness" in the verse with Israel, and the word "sin" with the [heathen] peoples of the world.

Please treat these texts, which contain sacred names, with respect. Do not discard.

We have been taught that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai interpreted the verse as meaning: Even as a sin offering makes expiation for Israel, so an act of charity [and loving-kindness] makes expiation for [heathen] peoples of the world.

- 1) How would you interpret the verse "*Tzedakah exalted the nation, but loving-kindness is a sin for [other] peoples*" (Prov. 14:34)?
- 2) Which Rabbi's interpretation do you agree with and with whom do you disagree?
- 3) Sections of Talmud often contain several different arguments, but one argument tends to be accepted as correct. With which opinion do you think Judaism agrees?

Lesson 6: *Kavod- Honor*

Genesis 1:26:

(כו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמוֹתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ:

(כז) וַיְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֶת הָאָדָם בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֶת הָאָדָם:

²⁶And G-d said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." ²⁷And G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them.

- 1) What does it mean to be created in the image of G-d? Ignore, for the moment, the reference to G-d in the plural (a lengthy discussion for another time!).
- 2) If all people are created in the image of G-d, are we all equal?
- 3) How does this text help us understand how we should treat one another? Are there any exceptions?

Exodus 20:12

כָּבֵד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יָאֵן תֵּן לָךְ:

"Give *kavod* to your father and your mother; that your days may be long upon the land which *Adonai* your G-d gives you."

- 1) What do you think it means to give *kavod* to your parents?
- 2) Who else would you consider worthy of receiving *kavod* from you?

Pirkei Avot, 4:1

אִיזְהוּ מְכַבֵּד, הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוּאֵל א ב), כִּי מְכַבְּדִי אֶכְבֵּד וּבִזְיָא יִקְלוּ:

Ben Zoma teaches: 'Who is worthy of *kavod*? The one who treats other human beings with *kavod*. As it is said: 'For those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who scorn Me, they shall be cursed.' (1 Sam. 2:30)

- 1) Rabbi Zweiback comments that "by honoring G-d's creatures... we honor G-d and G-d, therefore, will give us honor." Do you agree?
- 2) Ben Zoma implies that we deserve to receive honor if we honor others. If you applied such a standard to your own life, what would you receive?

Read the following story, keeping track of who serves whom and the arguments to justify that service:

Kid. 32a,b

Isaac b. Shila said in R. Mattena's name in the name of R. Hisda: 'If a father renounces his *kavod*, it is renounced; but if a rabbi renounces his *kavod*, it is not renounced.' R. Joseph ruled: 'Even if a rabbi renounces his *kavod*, it is renounced, for it is said: "Adonai went before them by day." [Ex. 13:21—G-d serves as the guide for the Israelites, thus renouncing G-d's own *kavod* by leading the way] "How can you compare [G-d to the rabbi]? There [in the example with G-d], it's G-d's world and G-d's Torah—[in which case] G-d can suspend His *kavod*. Here [in the example of the rabbi], is the Torah his [that he can do as he pleases]?" Later Rava said, 'The Torah is his, as it is written: "And in *his* Torah will he rejoice, day and night.'" [Ps. 1:2]

But that is not so. For Rava was serving drink at his son's wedding, and when he offered a cup to R. Papa and R. Huna son of R. Joshua, they stood up before him [and let him serve them, thereby allowing him to renounce his *kavod* and wait on them] But [when he offered] R. Mari and R. Phineas son of R. Hisda, they did not stand up before him [and thereby did not allow him to renounce his *kavod*]. Thereupon he was offended and exclaimed: 'Are these rabbis and the others not!' [That is, why do these rabbis allow him to suspend his *kavod* while the others do not?]. . .

Ashi said: Even on the view that if a rabbi renounces his *kavod* it is renounced, yet if a *nasi* [president of the Sanhedrin] renounces his *kavod*, his renunciation is invalid. An objection is raised: It once happened that R. Eliezer, R. Joshua and R. Zadok were reclining at a banquet of Rabban Gamaliel's son, while Rabban Gamaliel was standing over them and serving drink. When he offered a cup to R. Eliezer, he did not accept it but when he offered it to R. Joshua, he did. Said R. Eliezer to him, "What is this Joshua? We should sit while Rabban Gamliel the great stands and serves us?" R. Joshua said to him, "We find one greater [than Rabban Gamliel] who served—Abraham was greater and he served [others]. Abraham was the greatest of his generation and it is written about him: 'And he stood over them [serving the three men who happened upon him in the desert]...' (Gen. 18:8) Perhaps you will say that these men appeared to him to be ministering angels [and that is why he served them and thus, did not really suspend his *kavod* since they were greater than he]? No! They looked only like Arabs to him! And [you argue that] the great Rabban Gamliel cannot stand and serve drinks to us?"

Tsadok said to them: "How long are you all going to renounce the *kavod* of G-d while busying yourself with *kevod habriyot*? [i.e. Here you are bringing Abraham in as an example of one who suspends his honor by serving an inferior when you could have used G-d for proof!] If the Holy One of Blessing causes the winds to blow and the clouds to form and brings forth rain and causes the earth to bloom and arranges a table before each and every person, cannot the great Rabban Gamliel stand and serve drinks to us?

- 1) Do you think that there are some people who deserve more honor and respect than others? If so, who are they and what makes them deserving?
- 2) What do you think it means for one to "suspend" his *Kavod*?
- 3) Based on this text, would you conclude that all people could suspend their *kavod* in order to sever another human being?

Final thought:

Meg. 3b

Kevod habriyot [the *kavod*—honor—due to every human-being] is so great that it suspends a negative precept in the Torah.

- 1) Think back to our discussions of RaMBaM's *Hilchot Matanot L'aniyim*. What is a negative precept?
- 2) Is this a powerful statement? Why? Why not?

Lesson 7: Synthesis, How to continue giving, Challenges

Deuteronomy 15: 7-11

(ז) כי יהיה בך אביון מאחד אחיך בארץ אשר יהוה אל ה' נתן לך לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפץ את ירך מאחיר האביון: (ח) כי פתח תפתח את ירך לו והעבט תעביטנו די מחסרו אשר יחסר לו:
(ט) השמר לך פן יהיה דבר עם לבבך בליעל לאמר קרבה שנת השבע שנת השמטה ורעה עינך באחיר האביון ולא תתן לו וקרא עליך אל יהוה והיה בך חטא: (י) נתון נתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך יהוה אל ה' בכול מעשך ובכל משלח ירך: (יא) כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ על כן אנכי מצוך לאמר פתח תפתח את ירך לאחיר לעניך ולאבי נך בארץ:

⁷If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the L-RD your G-d is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. ⁸Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. ⁹Beware lest you harbor the base thought, "The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching," so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing. He will cry out to the L-RD against you, and you will incur guilt. ¹⁰Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the L-RD your G-d will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. ¹¹For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

- 1) How do you think G-d might 'bless people in their work' for giving to the poor?
- 2) Why are we told, "there will never cease to be needy ones in your land"?
- 3) If we can never truly overcome the problem of poverty, then what is the point in working on it?

Sif Lev., ed. Weiss, p. 109b

"If thy brother be waxen poor, and his means fail with thee; then thou shalt uphold him" (Lev. 25:35). Don't allow him to fall into utter poverty. The injunction may be explained by analogy with a load on a donkey: as long as he is standing up, one may grab him [to keep from falling] and keep him standing upright. Once he has fallen, five men cannot make him stand up again.

- 1) What modern equivalents can you think for the load on a donkey?
- 2) Why is it important to prevent the donkey from falling over in the first place?
- 3) How can we prevent today's donkeys from toppling over?

Exodus Rabbah 31:14

אין לך מדה קשה מן העניות שכל מי שהוא מדוקדק בעניות כאלו דבוקין בו כל יסורים שבעולם וכאלו באו עליו כל הקללות שבמשנה תורה ואמר רבותינו אלו נתקבצו כל יסורין לצד אחד והעניות לצד אחד העניות מכרעת לכולן

There is nothing in the world harder to bear than poverty, for one who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world and like one for whom all the curses [found in the book of

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Deuteronomy] cling. Our Rabbis said: If all the sufferings and pain in the world were gathered on one side of a scale, and poverty was on the other side, poverty would outweigh them all.

- 1) How would you imagine this scale?
- 2) What might you place on the other side of the scale, in the category of sufferings and pain?
- 3) Can you still imagine poverty outweighing them all? Why or why not?

Final Thought

B. BB 9a

א"ר אלעזר גדול המעשה יותר מן העושה שנאמר והיה מעשה הצדקה שלום

R. Eleazar said: He who causes others to do good is greater than he who himself does good, for it is said, "He who causes the giving of tzedakah confers peace" (Isa. 32:17)

Isaiah 32:17

For the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, calm and confidence forever.

- 1) How can we spread the message of *Tzedakah* to our friends, families, and others?
- 2) How can you personally integrate into your life what you have learned in Uruguay? Think of different personal and group activities that will allow you to continue to help others, both projects and everyday habits.
- 3) Do you have any ideas for service activities that this ASB group can do together after we arrive in the United States?

Stories and Halacha:

1. Sukkah 49b

R. Eleazar said: Greater is he who does tzedakah than he who offers all the sacrifices, for it is said, "To do tzedakah and justice is more acceptable to the L-rd than sacrifice" (Prov. 21:3)

2. Bava Bathra 10a

We have been taught that R. Judah said: Great is tzedakah, for it brings near Israel's deliverance, as is said, "Keep ye justice, and practice tzedakah, then My deliverance will be near to come" (Isa. 56:1)

3. B. Sot 21b; P. Sot 3:4, 19a.

A man sees a child struggling in the river and says, "As soon as I remove my tefillin, I will save him." And even as he is removing them, the child's life gives out. Or he sees a woman drowning in the river and says, "It is improper for me to look at her while I rescue her." Each of these is a foolish pietist.

4. B. BB 10a

We have been taught that R. Eleazar son of R. Yose said: All acts of tzedakah and loving-kindness that Israel performs in this world bring great peace and effective advocates between Israel and their Father in heaven. On the other hand, "for lack of tzedakah and compassion, I have taken away from them, saith the L-rd, My [advocates of] peace" (Jer. 16:5).

5. Hag 5b

"If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry" (Isa. 58:10). This means, said R. Levi, if you have nothing to give him, comfort him with words. Say to him, "My soul goes out to you, because I have nothing else to give you."

6. B. Suk 49b

R. Eleazar said: Loving-kindness is greater than tzedakah, for it is said, "Sow for yourselves according to tzedakah, but reap according to your loving-kindness" (Hos. 10:12). When a man sows, it is in doubt whether he will or will not eat the harvest; but when a man reaps, he will surely eat it.

R. Eleazar said further: The reward for tzedakah depends entirely upon the measure of loving-kindness in the act, as is said, "Sow for yourselves according to your tzedakah, but reap according to your loving-kindness."⁹

7. B. BB 11a.

We have been taught the following incident concerning Benjamin the Righteous, who was supervisor of the tzedakah fund. One day, during a year of scarcity, a woman came to him and said, "Master, provide sustenance for me." He replied, "By the Temple worship, there is no money left in the tzedakah fund." She said, "Master, if you do not provide for me, a woman and her seven children will perish." So he provided for her out of his own pocket.

Sometime afterward, he became so ill that he was on the point of death. Then the ministering angels said to the Holy One, "Master of the universe, You have said that he who saves the life of one soul in Israel is considered as if he had saved the entire world. Shall Benjamin the Righteous, who saved the lives of a woman and her seven children, die after so few years of life?" His sentence of death was immediately torn up.

The sages taught that twenty-two years were added to his life.

8. ARN 3

There is a story of a certain pious man who was in the habit of giving tzedakah. Once, while traveling on a ship, a storm arose and the ship sank into the sea. R. Akiva, who saw what happened, came before the court to testify on behalf of the pious man's wife, so that she might be declared free to remarry. Before the time came for R. Akiva to stand up, the pious man entered and stationed himself before him. R. Akiva asked, "Are you not the one who was drowned at sea?" The pious man: "Yes, I am." R. Akiva: "And who brought you up from the sea?" The pious man: "The tzedakah I dispensed--it brought me up from the sea." R. Akiva: "How do you know that?" The pious man: "When I went down to the nethermost depths, I heard a mighty roaring among the waves, one wave calling out to another, 'We must rush to bring this man up from the sea, because he dispensed tzedakah all his days.' " At this, R. Akiva began to say, "Blessed be G-d, the G-d of Israel, who has chosen the words of Torah and the sayings of the sages, for the words of Torah and the sayings of the sages endure forever and ever and ever, as it says, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days' [Eccles. 11:1]. And it is also written, 'Tzedakah delivereth from death' " (Prov. 10:2)

9. B. Shab 156b

R. Akiva had a daughter. When astrologers told him, "On the day she is to enter the bridal chamber, a snake will bite her, and she will die," he was extremely distressed about this prediction. On the day [of her marriage], she happened to be holding a long ornamental pin, which she stuck into the opening of a wall. By chance, the pin penetrated the eye of a snake [coiled behind the wall] and remained stuck there. The next morning, when she took out the pin, the dead snake was pulled out with it. Her father asked, "Did you do anything unusual?" She replied, "Last evening a poor man came to the door. Everybody was busy with the banquet, and no one heard him. So I took the gift you had given me and gave it to the poor man." "You have acted in a meritorious manner," he said to her. And then R. Akiva went out and lectured: "Tzedakah delivereth from death" (Prov. 10:2)--not [merely] from an unnatural death, but from death, whatever the cause.

10. P. Shab 6:9, 8d

R. Hanina had two disciples who went out to chop wood. When an astrologer saw them, he said, "These two will go out and not come back." As they went forth, an old man encountered them and said, "Give me tzedakah--it is three days since I tasted anything." They had only one loaf of bread, but they broke off half of it and gave it to the old man. After he ate, he prayed in their behalf and then said to them, "Even as you have preserved my life this day, so may your life be preserved this day." The two disciples came back as safely as they had gone out. Some men who happened to hear what the astrologer had said asked him, "Did you not say, 'These two will go out and not come back'? We have here," they continued, "a liar, whose astrology is a lie." Nevertheless, they went off, made a search, and found a dead snake, half of it in one bundle of wood and the other half in another bundle [The snake was cut in two]. They asked the disciples, "What good deed did you do today?" The disciples told them what had happened. The astrologer said, "What am I to do if the G-d of the Jews is willing to be seduced by half a loaf?"

11. B. Ber 18b

There is the story of how R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, and R. Akiva went to a suburb of Antioch to make a collection for [the support of] the sages. In that suburb there was one, Abba Yudan by name, who used to give tzedakah with much goodwill, but by that time he had become impoverished. At the sight of our masters, his face turned the

color of saffron, and he went home. His wife asked him, "Why is your face sickly?" He replied, "Our masters are here, and I do not know what to do." His wife, who was even more pious than he, said to him, "We have only one field left. Go, sell half of it, and give them [the proceeds]." He went and did so. At that, our masters prayed in his behalf and then said to him, "Abba Yudan, may He who is everywhere make up what you lack." After a while, he went out to plow the half-field that remained his. As he plowed, the ground opened up underneath him, so that his heifer dropped into the hole and its leg was broken. When he went down to bring it up, the Holy One provided light for his eyes, so that he noticed a buried treasure under his heifer. He said, "It was for my sake that my heifer's leg broke."

When our masters came back to the same place, they inquired after him, saying, "How is Abba Yudan doing?" People told them, "Abba Yudan--who can have the privilege of actually seeing his distinguished visage? He is Abba Yudan the possessor of servants, Abba Yudan possessor of goats, Abba Yudan possessor of donkeys, Abba Yudan possessor of camels, Abba Yudan possessor of oxen!" When Abba Yudan heard [of the masters' arrival], he went out to meet them. They asked him, "How is Abba Yudan doing?" He replied, "Your prayer has produced fruit, and fruit from fruit." They said, "As you live, even though others gave more than you did, we wrote you down at the head [of the list]." Then they took him and seated him with themselves, applying to him the verse "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16)

12. ARN 38

It is related that a certain [widow] lived in the vicinity of a landowner, and when her two sons went into his field to glean, he refused them permission. Their mother kept saying, "When my sons return from the field, perhaps I will find something to eat in their hands"; at the same time, the sons were saying, "When shall we return to our mother? Perhaps she has gotten her hands on something to eat." In the end, she got nothing to eat from them, and they got no food with her. So they put their heads between their mother's knees, and all three died the same day. Thereupon the Holy One said to such landowners, "You exact from them nothing less than their lives; as surely as you live, I will exact your lives from you." For it is stated, "Rob not the weak, because he is weak, neither crush the poor in the gate; for the L-rd will plead their cause, and despoil of life those that despoil them" (Prov. 22:22)

13. ARN 4; ARNB 8

Once, as R. Yohanan was walking out of Jerusalem, R. Joshua followed him, and, upon seeing the Temple in ruins, he said:

Woe unto us that this place is in ruins, the place where atonement was made for Israel's iniquities! R. Yohanan: My son, do not grieve--we have another means of atonement which is as effective. What is it? It is deeds of loving-kindness, concerning which Scripture says, "I desire loving-kindness and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6).

14. Avot 1:15; ARN 13

Shammai said: Receive all men with a cheerful countenance. What does this mean? It means that if a man presents the most precious gifts in the world to his fellow, but with a sullen and downcast countenance, Scripture regards that man as though he presented nothing at all to his fellow. On the other hand, he who receives his fellow with a cheerful countenance, even if he gives him nothing--Scripture accounts it to him as though he had presented his fellow with the most precious gifts in the world.

15. B. Suk 49b

Our masters taught: Loving-kindness is greater than tzedakah in three ways. Tzedakah is done with one's money, while loving-kindness may be done with one's money or with one's person. Tzedakah is given only to the poor, while loving-kindness may be given both to the poor and to the rich. Tzedakah is given only to the living, while loving-kindness may be shown to both the living and the dead.

R. Eleazar said further: He who executes tzedakah and justice is as though he had filled the entire world, all of it, with loving kindness, as is said, "When one loveth tzedakah and justice, the earth is full of the loving-kindness of the L-rd" (Ps. 33:5). Should you suppose that one may achieve this easily,¹⁰ Scripture says, "How rare is Thy loving-kindness, O G-d" (Ps. 36:8). Should you suppose that difficulty in executing tzedakah and justice is also true of one who fears Heaven, Scripture says, "But the loving-kindness of the L-rd is from everlasting to everlasting with those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:17)

16. B. BB 10a

R. Judah used to say: Ten strong things have been created in the world. The [rock of the] mountain is hard, but iron cleaves it. Iron is hard, but fire softens it. Fire is powerful, but water quenches it. Water is heavy, but clouds bear it. Clouds are thick, but wind scatters them. Wind is strong, but a body resists it. The body is strong, but fear crushes it. Fear is powerful but wine banishes it. Wine is strong, but sleep works it off. Death is stronger than all, yet tzedakah delivers from death, as is written, "Tzedakah delivereth from death" (Prov. 10:2).¹

17. Sotah 3b

Better to give a little each day than one large sum occasionally, sense of reward in doing a mitzvah.