

## **TZEDAKAH LESSON PLAN**

The following lesson plan was written by Rabbi Shelley Kniaz and originally appeared in Tov L'Horot Newsletter of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. It was adapted by MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger.

### **JUDAISM AND THE ART OF LIVING WITH OTHERS**

## **שקולה צדקה כנגד כל המצוות**

*Tzedakah* outweighs all other commandments.  
-- *Talmud Baba Barra 9a*

Clearly, giving *tzedakah* is considered very important in Judaism. But what does it mean to give *tzedakah*? How much should we give? How should we give it? See what you know about *tzedakah* by answering the questions below.

1. Giving money for *tzedakah* is voluntary/obligatory. (Circle one.)
2. The root of the word *tzedakah* is \_\_\_\_\_ which means \_\_\_\_\_.
3. In Judaism, the feelings of the \_\_\_\_\_ are more important than those of the \_\_\_\_\_. (Write "giver" in one space and "receiver" in the other.)
4. True or False: You should give only what you feel like giving.
5. True or False: You should give only when you feel like giving.
6. Should you give *tzedakah* if you don't have a lot of money? Yes/No
7. Should you give only to Jewish *tzedakah* funds? Yes/No Why?

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8. At what age must a person begin to give *tzedakah*? \_\_\_\_\_

Now let's find out what the Torah and our Rabbis teach

### **IT SAYS IN THE TORAH**

You shall not close your hand for your fellow man who is poor.  
*Deuteronomy 15:7*

### **THE RABBIS SAY**

All Jews are responsible for one another.  
*Talmud Shavuot 39a*

### **MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM) SAYS**

It is a positive command to give *tzedakah* to poor people according to their needs if the giver is able.  
*Mishneh Torah  
Hilhot Matanot La'ani'im 7:1*

Now let's answer the questions listed on Page 1

1. According to these sources, is *tzedakah* voluntary or obligatory? Why? Is this different than you thought?

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2. “We are obligated to be more careful to fulfill the commandment of *tzedakah* than any other commandment because it is the sign of the righteous person, the descendant of Abraham our forefather, of whom G-d said: ‘I know him...he will command his children...to do *tzedakah*.’” (*Genesis 18:19*)

“ – that is, what is just.” (*Mishneh Torah, Zeraim 10:1*)

What does the word *tzedakah* mean in addition to “giving money to the poor”?

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3. Read the following quotes. Whose feelings are more important in giving *tzedakah*, the giver or the receiver?

Who gives *tzedakah* in secret is greater than Moses our teacher.  
*Talmud Baba Baira 9b*

Woe to him who shames the poor person.  
*Mishneh Torah Zeraim 10:5*

The highest degree of *tzedakah* is helping a person find a job so they can support themselves.  
*Mishneh Torah Zeraim 10:7*

Why do you think helping someone find a job is better than just giving him/her money?

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4. Read the following quote. Do we only give as much *tzedakah* as we want?

A person should give up to 1/5 (20%) of his possessions. That is praiseworthy. One-tenth (10%) is average.  
*Shulhan Aruh, Yoreh Deah 249:7*

To figure out the 10% required for *tzedakah*, move the decimal point one space to the left. For example, for 10% of \$8.00, we get \$0.80, or 80 cents. To find 20%, simply multiply our answer by 2. So if 10% of \$8.00 is 80 cents, 20% of \$8.00 is \$1.60.

5. Read the following quote. Should we give *tzedakah* only when we feel like it?

If a person doesn't want to give *tzedakah* or gives less than is required, the (Jewish) court requires him to give ... or takes what he is required to give from his possessions.  
*Mishneh Torah, Hilhot Matanot La'anim 7:10*

Why do you think this is so? \_\_\_\_\_

How often should we give? We give:

Whenever we are asked or if we see someone in need

On all Jewish holidays

Every week before *Shabbat*

Whenever we celebrate a *simcha* (happy event)

In honor of a special person or in memory of a special person

Whenever we are fortunate enough to receive money, whether a payment or a gift

6. Read the following quote. Do we still give *tzedakah* even if we don't have much money?

Even a poor person who receives *tzedakah* must give *tzedakah*.

*Talmud Gittin 7b*

Why do you think this is so? \_\_\_\_\_

What does this do for the poor person? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Read the following quote. Do we give only to Jewish *tzedakah* funds?

Support the non-Jewish poor as you do the Jewish poor for the sake of peace.

*Talmud Gittin 61a*

What does helping non-Jewish poor people have to do with peace?

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8. When must we begin to give *tzedakah*?

When we become 13 years old, we are a *bar* or *bat mitzvah*. That means we are responsible for keeping the *mitzvot*. Of course, it is a good idea to begin to keep this *mitzvah* when you are much younger, both so you can get into the *tzedakah* habit and also because what you do makes a difference.

## **TZEDAKAH & HUNGER**

Now that we've learned about the importance of giving *tzedakah*, we must decide how to prioritize our support. One important cause is the struggle to end hunger.

Did you know that 800 million people around the world live with hunger every day? Or that 35 million of them, including 13 million children, live right here in the United States?

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger works to change this. MAZON gathers contributions from the Jewish community and distributes them to *all* hungry people, without regard to race or religion. Since it was founded in 1985, MAZON has spent over \$31 million to fight hunger in the United States and abroad.