

GIVING WITH DIGNITY

The question of giving with dignity is critical to the success of the program. The following activities help students come to grips with its many dimensions.

Text Study

Give students the following quotations and either discuss them as a class or have them consider the discussion questions in 2-3 person *chevrutah* study groups.

I. Quotations

“There was a secret chamber in the Temple in Jerusalem where people would leave money. But the poor, those in need, could come into the same chamber and take money. No one ever knew who gave – or who took.” (*Mishneh Shekalim 5:6*)¹³

“Rabbi Yannai once saw a person giving money to a poor man in public. He said: ‘It would have been better for you to give him nothing, than giving as you did. You caused him embarrassment.’” (*Chagigah 5a*)¹⁴

2. Discussion Questions

- What are some words/ideas we might associate with each of the quotations?
- What values do you think each of these quotations is trying to teach? Why are these values important?
- What are the problems that arise when you consider the meaning and relevance of each of the quotations?

Film Clips

Many movies represent interactions between the rich and the poor. Selecting clips from some of the following can provoke interesting discussions among students: *Trading Places* (1983), *My Man Godfrey* (1936), *The Fisher King* (1991), *Groundhog Day* (1993), *The Saint of Fort Washington* (1993), and *With Honors* (1994).

Real-Life Kavod

In this exercise, students get a chance to apply the principle of giving with dignity using the concepts of *kavod* (honor) and *bushah* (dishonor). On p.54 you’ll find a worksheet that students can complete and then discuss. Be sure to acknowledge that the initial *kavod-bushah* scoring is fairly subjective and students should be encouraged to debate.



TZEDAKAH GUIDELINES

Rambam’s Ladder

Maimonides encapsulated *tzedakah* principles in an eight-rung ladder rich with pedagogical opportunities. The ladder creates a hierarchy ranking *tzedakah* actions from least honorable to most honorable.

The person who gives reluctantly and with regret.

The person who gives graciously, but less than one should.

The person who gives what one should, but only after being asked.

The person who gives before being asked.

The person who gives without knowing to whom one gives, although the recipient knows the identity of the donor.

The person who gives without making his/her identity known.

The person who gives without knowing to whom he/she gives. The recipient does not know from whom he/she receives.

The person who helps another to support himself/herself by a gift or a loan or by finding employment for that person, thus helping that person to become self-sufficient.

Ordering

Put all eight of the rungs on separate notecards and have students work in small groups to put them in order. Be sure groups can explain their rationale for the order they've chosen. After groups present, lay out the correct order and ask students to reflect on Rambam's choices. (One interesting discussion topic is that there seems to be great value placed on anonymity in Rambam's giving equation. How does that gel with the value of personal connection between giver and recipient that adds so much to the dignity of *tzedakah*?)

Build a Ladder

This is a bit more labor intensive, but it also produces a permanent sculpture that can serve as a focal point for the foundation's activities – you can bring the ladder into the room in which the Board will be meeting in order to symbolically transform the space into a place where *tzedakah* work is done. The easiest way to build the ladder is to divide into eight small groups and give each a piece of wood (whitewashed 1x4) and the text of one of Rambam's steps and have them paint or decorate their "rung" to represent that step. Then attach the rungs to two longer boards to create a ladder.

Donor Ranking

In this exercise, students get to use what they've learned about Rambam's ladder to evaluate different kinds of giving. Give each student (or small group) a copy of the Donor List and the Donor Scorecard (see pp.56-57 for copyable worksheets). Ask them to read through the profiles and come to consensus on where each donor falls on Rambam's ladder.

Role Play

Divide students into small groups and assign each group a rung from Rambam's ladder. Have each group prepare a short skit that encapsulates the theme of each rung and have the rest of the class try to identify which rung is being portrayed.

DONOR LIST

“Mark Millionaire”

Mark has lots of money. He picks out people who he thinks both need and deserve help. Then he changes their lives. He finds them a job, makes a gift of money or in some way sees to it that these people can begin to build a new life for themselves. Mark never lets the individuals he helps know that he was involved. But he keeps a scrapbook of the people he has helped and how their lives have been changed. Outside of these private projects, Mark gives only minor amounts of money to other causes.

“Buddy Blindsight”

Buddy has lots of money, too, but he doesn't want to have anything to do with *tzedakah* (or with most other people). Every year, he takes 10% of his earnings and gives them to his lawyer. The lawyer is instructed to use her own discretion in giving the money away. If someone asks Buddy for a donation or for help, he simply tells them to call his lawyer. This even goes for his family members who have, on occasion, come upon hard times.

“Goody Kaufman”

Goody Kaufman is a housewife. She spends one day a week doing good deeds. Part of the day she works at a soup kitchen; the rest of the day she goes to the hospital and visits people who might have no other visitors. She collects toys and clothes and makes lots of phone calls. She will do anything to help people. But she doesn't like it when people ask

her for money. She won't give a penny to a beggar or to a solicitor or in response to a mail request.

“Tammy Telethon”

Tammy is a successful young accountant. Every time she goes to a store, she puts her spare change into the donation can at the register. She gives a quarter to every beggar who asks. She sends \$10-\$25 in response to every solicitation she receives in the mail, and will call and make the same kind of pledge to every charity telethon. Tammy is always glad to give. In total, these donations amount to less than 2% of her income.

“Nasty Norman”

Norman hates it when people ask him for money. Here's a typical example of the way he operates: The person from the Jewish Campaign calls and asks him if he would like to give the same pledge he made last year. Norman yells into the phone, “You people are always bothering me! I'm sick of the phone calls and the bleeding heart stories.” Just when the caller is ready to hang up, Norman tells him, “Don't go – you made me feel guilty. I had a good year – increase my pledge by 10%.”

“Sammy Supermarket”

Sammy runs a chain of supermarkets. Many of his markets are in the poor sections of town. In these stores, his prices are often 15%

or 20% higher than in the better parts of town because he knows the people near the stores usually don't have cars and so can't get to any other stores. Sammy sponsors Little League and soccer teams. He is one of the few big business people who work with the local schools to give minority teenagers jobs in his stores. He also started a work-study program for his employees to help them work their way through college.

"Sylvia Scholarship"

Sylvia is an aging widow from a rich and well-known Jewish family. She set up a scholarship fund at a local university. A large amount of money is given annually from this fund in her family name. She knows nothing of the students who receive the money, but each of the

students must do some research into her family's history. This (not need or academic ability) is the single condition of the scholarship. Sylvia wants her family's history preserved.

"Abe and Ruth Chevrah"

Abe and Ruth are a young couple. Abe is a dental hygienist and Ruth is a construction engineer. They belong to their local synagogue and are active in a *chavurah*. Each year the members of the *chavurah* pool all their charitable donations into one fund. The members each give 12% of their income (before taxes) to the fund. Together, the *chavurah* members research various charities and people in need, then meet to allocate their *tzedakah* funds. Abe and Ruth are very active in the group and feel that their participation is their "fair share."

DONOR SCORE GRID

Based on your reading of the Donor List and your understanding of Rambam's ladder of tzedakah, rank the donors in the following categories.

| | EFFECTIVENESS | FAIRNESS | KAVOD | FINAL RANK |
|--------------------|---------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Mark Millionaire | | | | |
| Buddy Blindsight | | | | |
| Goody Kaufman | | | | |
| Tammy Telethon | | | | |
| Nasty Norman | | | | |
| Sammy Supermarket | | | | |
| Sylvia Scholarship | | | | |
| Abe & Ruth Chevrah | | | | |

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