

## *Judaism and Beggars*

Arthur Kurzweil wrote an outstanding essay on this subject (you can find it in Danny Siegel's book, *Gym Shoes and Irises*). Kurzweil felt extremely uncomfortable about his reactions to people on the street who ask him for money. He identified fifteen questions that he struggles to answer (e.g. "What if they are fakes or frauds?" and "What if I have no money on me, or no spare change?").

Looking for guidance, he searched through the *Talmud* to determine how Jewish law would answer these questions. In the broadest sense, his journey is a remarkable application of Jewish law to a contemporary social policy problem. For the specific purpose of *Tzedakah in Action*, it presents a great source for discussion about panhandling and *tzedakah*. (It's an especially nice match for the Chinese Food Take-Out *Tzedakah* Box art project mentioned on p.33.) In addition to simply reading and discussing the essay, older students might want to use it to craft a "recommended policy" or brochure for the community on Jewish responses to beggars.

You could also design a survey based on the questions Kurzweil raises and have students consider them individually before exploring the Talmudic perspectives.



## PHILANTHROPY

BECAUSE *TZEDAKAH IN ACTION* blends Jewish teaching on *tzedakah* with modern philanthropic practice, students need to be exposed to the world of philanthropy. These activities will help them translate their knowledge of *tzedakah* into the foundation context.

### PHILANTHROPY IS...

Ask students to brainstorm definitions for "philanthropy." Try to create a working definition for class. Feel free to throw in a dictionary definition or Bob Payton's definition, "private action for the public good" (see p.73).

Based on your definition, ask students to list some philanthropic organizations. Encourage them to think broadly about the different kinds of organizations that fall under this rubric. Once you've generated a large list, divide into small groups and ask each group to develop a taxonomy of philanthropic organizations. What categories can we use to organize all of these organizations? Size? Mission (e.g. education, direct service, organizing, advocacy, etc.)? Geographic area of operation (e.g. local, regional, national, international)? Project focus (e.g. environmental, health, education, poverty, etc.)? Ultimately, the class should collectively develop a language and a set of questions they can use to help them define and understand the work of any particular philanthropic organization.

Ask students to think about the needs present in their community: Are there