

JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 4 – TZEDEK, TZEDAKAH, & CHESED* LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET

LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET (1 hr)

Goals

For students to:

- consider the differences between giving that benefits the giver and giving that benefits the recipient.
- understand the difference between giving out of obligation and giving when you are moved.
- learn Rambam's levels of Tzedakah
- think about the difference between addressing immediate needs and the root causes of those needs.
- be familiar with the words *Tzedek, tzedakah, & hesed*

Materials

- Drama Script (3 copies)
- Maimonides' levels of tzedakah, cut into strips. One copy per pair of people
- Text #2 (Sukkot 49b)

Procedure

1) Framing Exercise – The Drama (5 minutes)

- a) Ask for 3 volunteers and assign them the following parts:
- Poor person
 - Wealthy person A
 - Wealthy person B
- b) Have them act out the following scenario:

DRAMA SCRIPT

Poor person

Excuse me sir, I don't normally do this, but I am in desperate need of your help. You see, I was working as a mover and I hurt my back. I can't work while I recover & I have 3 kids at home. We are struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table. I'm supposed to get a workman's compensation check, but it hasn't come yet. I don't know how we're going to pay our rent. Can you please help?

JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 4 – TZEDEK, TZEDAKAH, & CHESED* LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET

Wealthy person A

Patiently listens. (You are visibly shaken & moved to tears). I am so sorry for what you and your family are going through. (Reach deep into your pocket, pull out \$5 and press it compassionately into the palm of the poor person. If you are moved, give a hug.

Wealthy person B

Impatiently listens. You hear just enough to get the picture & politely, but firmly cut off the man's story. Give him \$100. Tell him "good luck" and rush off. It's important not to be mean or rude, just quick.

2) Processing Activity (15 mins)

- a) Divide students into small groups.
Read question #1 aloud & give them 2 minutes to discuss:
Question 1:
Which person did the better thing?
- b) Ask for show of hands for each answer from the whole class.
- c) Read question #2 aloud & give them 2 minutes to discuss:
Question 2:
Put yourself in the place of the person who needed the money. Which would you prefer?
- d) Take another poll.
- e) Read question #3 to the whole class. Don't allow discussion at this point.
Question 3:
Does your answer to #2 affect how you answer #1?

3) Text study (30 mins)

- a) Break students into *chavrutot*. Explain that *chavruta* study is learning in pairs or small groups. One student should read the text out loud. Together they will analyze the text and consider different possible interpretations. They will proceed by discussing the questions together. Explain that the text is a medieval text written by Maimonides (meaning son of Maimon), also known as the Rambam (an acronym for Moshe ben Maimon). The text is from the book of "Gifts to the Poor" or "*Matanot LeAniyim*" in

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Hebrew, which is a volume in Rambam's voluminous, comprehensive work of halacha (Jewish Law) called the Mishneh Torah written in the 12th century.

- b) Hand out strips of paper with Maimonides' levels of tzedakah. (copy from the appendix)
- c) Ask each chavruta to place their strips according to what they think the proper order should be – from lowest to highest. (10 – 15 mins)
- d) When students have finished, ask them if they can define *tzedek* and *tzedakah*.
 - a) Read the following paragraph aloud:

Tzedakah can be defined as a gift given to ameliorate an immediate need while *tzedek* is a strategy designed to uproot the inequities or obstacles that cause need. Both are necessary in a living community. *Tzedakah* is short-term and *tzedek* is long-term. *Tzedakah* gives to the individual directly (or to the organization that serves the individual directly), and *tzedek* works to redesign the structures of society.

- f) Write the distinction on the board.
- g) Ask students to take the text strips & divide them into two piles: *Tzedakah* and *Tzedek*. (5 mins)
 - a) Regroup.
 - b) Processing (10 minutes)
Lead a group discussion on the order and the categories of the strips. Was there a correlation between their categorization of higher & lower levels and their sorting of *Tzedakah* vs. *Tzedek*

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JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 4 – TZEDEK, TZEDAKAH, & CHESED* LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET

Conclusion (10 minutes)

a) Return to the original scenario. Ask if students have any new insights or perspectives on the scene. End with the following comments:

Consider the following: 70 percent to 90 percent of the teenagers to whom this scenario was presented asserted that the person who gave the five dollars from his heart did the better deed. Ask students:

- What do you think this response says about the society that we live in?
- b) You can add that: this response suggests that in secular society, even charity is becoming a somewhat selfish act. Many people care less about the good their money is doing than about how they feel giving it.
- c) You may also want to share with the group Dennis Prager's articulation of the issue:

"Judaism would love you to give 10 percent of your income each year from your heart. It suspects, however, that in a large majority of cases, were we to wait for people's hearts to prompt them to give a tenth of their money away, we would be waiting a very long time. Ergo, Judaism says, Give ten percent-and if your heart catches up, terrific. In the meantime, good has been done."

JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 4 – TZEDEK, TZEDAKAH, & CHESED* LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET

If you have extra time:

- Re-divide students into new pairs or in groups of 3-4.
- Hand out copies of text #3 (Sukkot 49b)
- Have them read text to each other & discuss the questions following the text.

TEXT #3: In the following text, the rabbis teach us that *tzedekah* is a sub-set of the greater category of *chesed*.

וא"ר אלעזר גדולה גמילות חסדים יותר מן הצדקה שנאמר זרעו לכם לצדקה וקצרו לפי חסד אם אדם זורע ספק אוכל ספק אינו אוכל אדם קוצר ודאי אוכל וא"ר אלעזר אין צדקה משתלמת אלא לפי חסד שבה שנאמר זרעו לכם לצדקה וקצרו לפי חסד ת"ר בשלשה דברים גדולה גמילות חסדים יותר מן הצדקה צדקה בממונו גמילות חסדים בין בגופו בין בממונו צדקה לעניים גמילות חסדים בין לעניים בין לעשירים צדקה לחיים גמילות חסדים בין לחיים בין למתים

Deeds of lovingkindness [*gemilut chesed*]," taught the Talmud's Rabbi Eliezer, "are greater even than *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* can be done only towards the poor; but lovingkindness can be directed towards the rich and poor alike. *Tzedakah* is done with money; *chesed* with time or money. *Tzedakah* is only for the living; *chesed* can be shown to the living or the dead."
Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkot*, 49b

Chavruta Questions:

What does the text suggest are the benefits and limitations of *chesed* and *tzedakah*?

What does Rabbi Eliezer mean when he says that *chesed* can be done with one's time, toward the rich and toward the dead? Name some cases where this is true.

Which is easier for us to do – *tzedekah* or *chesed*? If *tzedekah* is often easier, why should we bother with *chesed*? If *chesed* is easier, why should we bother with *tzedekah*? How should we choose which one to do?

If we are rich enough, can we (should we) hire someone to do the works of *chesed* for us?

- Bring back to a group discussion. If they had trouble understanding the text itself, include the following points:

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JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 4 – TZEDEK, TZEDAKAH, & CHESED* LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET

There are some ways of giving that transcend even tzedakah. These are known as acts of chesed, lovingkindness. The most unique elements of chesed are that they are done with one's time and not one's money; that they connect people one on one; that they often cannot be reciprocated; and that they can be performed by anyone, regardless of their wealth or social standing.

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JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 4 – TZEDEK, TZEDAKAH, & CHESED* LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET

Appendix

Providing a poor person with a gift or a loan, or by entering into a partnership with him, or helping him find work; in a word, by putting him in a position where he does not need other people's aid.

Giving without knowing to whom he is giving, while the recipient does not know who the donor is.

When the donor knows to whom he is giving, but the recipient does not know who the donor is.

When the recipient knows who the donor is, but the donor does not know the identity of the recipient.

Giving *tzedakah* personally, hand-to-hand, without needing to be asked.

Giving after being asked.

Giving less than is appropriate, but giving graciously.

Giving resentfully.

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JCI CURRICULUM: *UNIT 1: CHAPTER 4 – TZEDEK, TZEDAKAH, & CHESED* LESSON 1: THE MAN IN THE STREET

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