

Jewish Texts on Giving

Learning about giving is a lifelong journey, and a several thousand-year journey for the Jewish people. There is wisdom and guidance on giving throughout Jewish texts and traditions.

Directions: Read the following texts alone to start, then discuss the following in your breakout groups:

- Are these ideas that you have seen or heard before?
- Is there one text that sticks out to you the most? What is it and why?
- How might these ideas change the way you think about giving?
- Pick one person from the group to share a little bit about the discussion when we return to the full group.

Selected Jewish Texts on Giving

“The amount one should give to tzedakah: If one can afford it, enough to answer all the needs of the poor people. But if one cannot afford that much, then one should give up to a fifth of one’s possessions. Which is doing the mitzvah in an exceptional fashion—one tenth is an average percentage, and less is considered miserly. And one should not give away more than a fifth, lest he or she ultimately become dependent on others.”

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah 249:1

“Anyone who gives tzedakah to a poor person with a scowl and causes him to be embarrassed, even if he gave him a thousand zuz, has destroyed and lost any merit thereby. Rather, one should give cheerfully, with happiness [to do so] and empathy for his plight, as it is said (in Job 30:25), “Did I not weep for the unfortunate? Did I not grieve for the needy?”

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor, 10:4

“For your God is the God of all and the master of all, the great, mighty and awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Deuteronomy 10:17-19

“And when 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. You 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 Lord am your God.”

Leviticus 19:9-10

“[Hillel] used to say, the more tzedakah the more shalom [peace, fullness].”

Pirkei Avot 2:8

“Justice, justice you shall pursue (Deut. 16:20). For one who pursues the doing of tzedakah and good deeds will find life, prosperity and honor (Prov. 21:21). And one should make sure not to abstain from the half shekel that is required each year. (A person should give) every month even, or every week, each person according to their means. And every day a person should make sure not to abstain from putting a little something in all of the cans (for collecting tzedakah) before prayer. And when the time for tithing arrives one should give.”

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