

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair and glasses, smiling broadly and hugging someone. The person being hugged is wearing a red headscarf. The woman has a yellow and black striped headband and is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. The background is blurred, showing other people and what appears to be a screen.

# *The Gift of Giving*

*Chesed and Tzedakah, Loving-  
Kindness and Generous Giving –  
Shavuot*

*“Extending your hand opens your heart.”*

-Adrienne Gold Davis, Momentum Trip Leader





## A QUALITY THAT BUILDS WORLDS

*“When I was young, I used to admire intelligent people; as I grow older, I admire kind people.”*

Abraham Joshua Heschel

If you had to identify a key quality that is central to creating and sustaining a family, an organization, a community, or the world, what quality would you pick?

Jewish teachings maintain that God created and sustains our world through *chesed*. What does the Hebrew word *chesed* mean? It is typically translated as loving-kindness. It is love as deed. On the Momentum trip, we learn that in Hebrew the word for love, *ahavah*, comes from the word *hav* – to give. *Chesed* goes beyond “being nice.” It is love that is woven through faithful gestures of understanding, generosity, and support, coming from kindness and no other motive. ***Chesed* is one of the pillars that sustains the world.**

When we learn how to become givers – through acts of *chesed* and generous giving (*tzedakah*) – we help others and we transform ourselves. We

look at the world with fresh eyes, open to the needs of those around us and eager to use our powers to make the world a better place.

### Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- *How can I better understand the needs of others?*
- *Where in my life have I seen giving that is also receiving and receiving that is also giving?*
- *Where in my life do I see kindness and generosity being contagious?*
- *What stories of generosity inspire me?*
- *Knowing that givers are happier people, how might I grow my generosity and share it with my children?*

## THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF ACTS OF KINDNESS



Watch one of the following inspirational videos:

1. “Sara Tucholsky Home Run/ESPN Sportsmanship Moment” video on YouTube
2. “A Soldier’s Gift: An Amazing True Story” video on YouTube. This is a story from Israel about God acting through human *chesed*.

- *What effect did the story have on you?*
- *How do you develop the ability to see someone’s need and to effectively pivot to take action?*
- *According to the Talmud, the broken pieces of the first tablets that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai, which Moses had broken, were placed in the holy ark side by side with the second, whole tablets. The broken and the whole, side by side. What does carrying broken and whole side by side have to do with *chesed*? Where in the video do you see this? How do you carry both the broken and the whole, and for whom?*

**Rabbi Yeruchem HaLevi Levovitz**  
(1873–1936)

The seismograph has taught us that a tremor in any part of the world can be

felt by a sufficiently sensitive instrument everywhere in the world. The same is true of a person’s deeds. One should not think that one’s actions do not affect others. Everything one does in some way affects everyone else in the world.

- *If you knew that your actions had significant impact beyond your surroundings, what advice would you give yourself?*
- *What are some reminders you could set or routines you could implement to do acts of loving-kindness regularly?*
- *On airplanes, we are told to put our own oxygen mask on first. This reminds us that when we care for ourselves, we are better able to care for others. In what ways do you show *chesed*, kindness, to yourself?*
- *In your own life, how do you do *chesed* with your body? How do you do *chesed* with your money? Which one is easier for you?*

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GIVERS

We are so busy and over-scheduled. Can we afford the time and resources to give?

The holiday of Shavuot marks the giving and receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Why is it the day of both Matan (giving) Torah and Kabbalat (receiving) Torah? Because giving and receiving are actually more connected than they may seem.

Tal Ben Shachar, an Israeli and American professor who created a course on Positive Psychology that became the most highly rated course in Harvard's history, notes that, "In Hebrew, 'to give' is *natan*. It's a palindrome, which is very fitting because when I give, I also receive. Today we have the research to back up this linguistic wisdom."

Professor Ben Shachar recalls an experiment in which researchers gave people a nice sum of money and told them to spend it on themselves. (By the way, where can we sign up for this research?!) Not surprisingly, their levels of happiness increased. Professor Ben Shachar laughs, saying, "It's the first time in recorded history that we have evidence for the claim that 'buying shoes makes you happy.' However, this shoppers' high lasted one day at most. One day later, the effect was all gone. A second group of people got a similar amount and was told to spend it on *someone else*. They too experienced a 'high.' However, the significant difference was that it lasted much longer. The impact was still measurable a week later!" The givers were measurably happier.

Adrienne Gold Davis describes it this way: "Just as a candle can light many other candles without losing any of its own light, generosity is a trait

that can illuminate the lives of others without diminishing its own power! We are often afraid to 'share our light' because we worry that we will not have 'enough left for ourselves.' Yet, the more we give, the more we have! The more we share our light – our resources, our time, and our energy – the brighter we shine as well!"

Givers are not only happy people. According to psychologist, Wharton Business School professor, and author Adam Grant, givers are also successful people. In his book, *Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success*, he presents scores of research studies and stories that suggest the benefits of an attitude of extreme giving at work: "Givers are the rare breed of people who contribute to others without expecting anything in return. Although some givers get exploited and burn out, the rest achieve extraordinary results across a wide range of industries."

### **Beginning with a Small Step Can Become a Practice**

Identify someone you love, or for whom you would like to build a deeper affection. Direct your attention toward understanding that person's needs – look, listen, and consider how you could help them. What is one *small* thing you could do? Perhaps you could offer them a meal, a ride, an opportunity to exercise or learn together, a gift, your company. Focus on your yearning to love and to be generous, and set aside the time to do it.

Remember that musicians begin with tuning their instrument. Consider tender self-care as part of your practice.

## SPREADING KINDNESS IS CONTAGIOUS

Two Stories by Susan Kramer



Susan Kramer

By performing random acts of kindness, we really can change the world.

I decided to incorporate acts of kindness into my Starbucks habit at my neighborhood drive-through. About once a week, I ask the barista what the bill is for the car behind me. When it's less than \$5, I cover it and ask the barista to tell the person to have a blessed day.

This weekly ritual brings me much joy. I imagine how it must feel to get this unexpected gift – especially at 7:30 in the morning.

To my surprise, the barista also began giving me random gifts of coffee. He told me, “You are such a kind person. This one is on me.”

I gave without expecting anything in return. But what goes around comes around. Spreading kindness is contagious.

**Try it: Spread kindness and watch how the world gives you kindness, too.**

### You Never Know

I was heading to Israel to join my whole family to celebrate my mom's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. But my flight out of Denver was postponed for four hours – and that was just the beginning!

What's a woman to do with a four-hour delay? Buy a round of drinks for all of the young people at the gate!

Finally our plane took off, but I still missed my international connection. A young adult named Noah, whom I'd bought a drink for earlier, was also supposed to be on that flight. He was traveling alone with no money and with his charger in his checked bag. He also had family waiting for him in Israel.

During our twenty-four-hour delay, I took care of Noah, making sure that he had both food and a charged phone. When we finally boarded our plane to Israel, my name was called over the intercom. I was told to remove my belongings from the plane and to leave. My seat had been double booked.

Well, after missing an international flight and waiting twenty-four hours for the next one, I was not about to leave the plane. The air marshal approached me and “encouraged” me to gather my belongings and leave the plane.

It was at that moment that Noah stood up from his seat and said, “Leave her on the plane. I’ll get off.”

I had thought that our chance meeting was about what I could give Noah and how I could do acts of kindness for him. But ultimately, that was not the case.

Noah did this gigantic *mitzvah* for me, allowing me to get to Israel and to be with my family.

Months later, I invited Noah to our home for Shabbat dinner and learned that he made it onto the next flight and reunited with his family, too.

- *When in your life have you seen that spreading kindness is contagious?*
- *What examples have you witnessed or experienced where acts of kindness led to happiness or other non-material rewards?*
- *What stories about kindness and generosity inspire you? How might you share that inspiration with your children to help them grow as givers?*
- *Consider doing an act of generous giving that is totally anonymous. Reflect on what you learn from the experience.*

## LOVING-KINDNESS IN THE BOOK OF RUTH



The holiday of Shavuot commemorates the giving and receiving of the Torah, a grand public spectacle!

The book of Ruth, which is the special scroll – *megillah* – that we read on Shavuot, focuses on acts of kindness between individuals. In the *megillah*, a widowed Moabite woman named Ruth chooses to accompany her impoverished Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi, back to the Land of Israel – despite the fact that there are no realistic prospects for her there. As the story unfolds, she meets a man named Boaz who, in turn, acts with great kindness, *chesed*, toward Ruth and Naomi, leading to restoration and redemption for the family.

### Ruth, chapter 1<sup>1</sup>

In the days when the judges judged, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion – Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there.

Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. Both of them married Moabite women, one named Orpah

and the other Ruth, and they lived there about ten years. Then those two – Mahlon and Chilion – also died; so the woman was left bereaved of her two sons and without her husband.

She started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that the Lord had taken note of His people and given them food [in the land of Judah]. Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have shown the dead and me! May the Lord grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!" And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping and said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

But Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me,



even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! Your presence is very bitter for me now, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me.”

They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. So [Naomi] said, “See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law.” But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you.” Naomi saw how determined Ruth was to go with her, and she ceased to argue with her; and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, “Can this be Naomi?” “Do not call me Naomi, [from the Hebrew term for “pleasant”]” she replied. “Call me Mara (bitter), for God has made my lot very bitter. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has dealt harshly with me; God has brought misfortune upon me!” This is how Naomi returned from the country of Moab.

Despite the seeming impossibility of a happy ending, Ruth ends up marrying Naomi’s relative Boaz, has a son, and her great-grandson is King David!

- Do you know anyone like Ruth, whose love and care for others overwhelms logical, “realistic” arguments? What gives them the strength to proceed?
- What about this story might be a gift for you? What of this story might you share with another person, at home or elsewhere?

#### רות א

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם שֶׁפֶט הַשְּׁפָטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם  
יְהוּדָה לְגוֹר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו. וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ  
אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נָעֲמִי וּשְׁמָם שְׁנֵי בָנָיו מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים  
מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה וּבָאוּ שָׂדֵי מוֹאָב וַיְהִיו שָׁם. וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ  
אִישׁ נָעֲמִי וַתִּשָּׂאֵר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ. וַיִּשָּׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִמָּאֲבִיּוֹת  
שָׁם הָאֲחֻת עֶרְפָּה וְשֵׁם הַשְּׁנִית רות וַיָּשֻׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים.  
וַיָּמָתוּ גַם שְׁנֵיהֶם מַחֲלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן וַתִּשָּׂאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ  
וּמֵאִשָּׁה. וַתָּקָם הִיא וּבְלִיתָהּ וַתֵּשֶׁב מִשְׁדֵּי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמָעָה  
בְּשָׂדֵה מוֹאָב כִּי פָקַד ה' אֶת עַמּוֹ לָתֵת לָהֶם לָחֶם. וַתֵּצֵא מִן  
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה שָׁמָּה וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּלִיתָהּ עִמָּה וַתִּלְכְּנָה בְּדֶרֶךְ  
לְשׁוֹב אֶל אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה. וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֲמִי לְשִׁתִּי כְלִיתָהּ לִכְנָה שִׁכְנָה  
אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּה יְעִישָׁה (יְעִשָׁה) ה' עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כְּאִשֶּׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם  
עִם הַמּוֹתִים וְעַמּוֹדִי. יְתֵן ה' לָכֶם וּמִצָּאן מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִשָּׁה  
וַתִּשָּׁק לָהֶן וַתִּשָּׂאנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּינָה. וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה לָּהּ כִּי אַתָּה נָשׁוּב  
לְעַמֶּךָ. וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֲמִי שִׁכְנָה בְּנֹתִי לָמָּה תִּלְכְּנָה עִמִּי הַעוֹד לִי  
בָּיִם בְּמַעַי וַיְהִי לָכֶם לְאִנָּשִׁים. שִׁכְנָה בְּנֹתִי לָכֵן כִּי זָקְנָתִי מֵהַיּוֹת  
לְאִישׁ כִּי אִמּוֹתַי יֵשׁ לִי תִקְוָה גַם הַיִּיתִי הַלֵּילָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם  
יְלָדַתִי בָּיִם. הֲלֹהֵן תִּשְׁבְּרֶנָּה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ הֲלֹהֵן תַּעֲגֹגָה לְבִלְתִּי  
הָיוֹת לְאִישׁ אֶל בְּנֹתִי כִּי מִר לִי מֵאֵד מִכֶּם כִּי יֵצֵאָה בִּי דָ' ה'.

וַתִּשָּׂאֵנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּינָה עוֹד וַתִּשָּׁק עֶרְפָּה לְחֻמוֹתָהּ וְרוֹת דָּבָקָה  
כָּה. וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׂכָה יְכַמְתֶּךָ אֶל עַמָּה וְאֶל אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוּבִי אַחֲרֵי  
יְכַמְתֶּךָ. וַתֹּאמֶר רות אֶל תִּפְגְּעִי בִּי לְעִזְבֹּךְ לְשׁוֹב מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי  
אֶל אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֶלְךָ וּבְאִשֶּׁר תִּלְכִּי אֶלֶין עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֵלֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ.  
בְּאִשֶּׁר תִּמּוֹתִי אֲמֹת וְשֵׁם אֶקְרָא כֹה יְעִישָׁה ה' לִי וְכֹה יוֹסִיף כִּי  
הַמּוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָהּ. וַתֵּרָא כִּי מִתְאַמְצָת הִיא לְלָכֵת אֹתָהּ  
וַתַּחֲדֹל לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ. וַתִּלְכְּנָה שְׁתֵּיהֶם עַד בּוֹאֲנָה בֵּית לָחֶם וַיְהִי  
כְּבוֹאֲנָה בֵּית לָחֶם וַתֵּהָם כָּל הָעִיר עֲלֵיהֶן וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה הִזָּאת נָעֲמִי.  
וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהֶן אֶל-תִּקְרָאנָה לִי נָעֲמִי קְרָאן לִי מֵרָא כִּי הִמְרָ שְׂדֵי  
לִי מֵאֵד. אֲנִי מִלֵּאָה הִלְכְּתִי וְיִרְקָם הַשִּׁיבִי ה' לָמָּה תִּקְרָאנָה  
לִי נָעֲמִי וְהָ עֲנָה בִּי וּשְׂדֵי הָרַע לִי. וַתֵּשֶׁב נָעֲמִי וְרוֹת הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה  
כְּלָתָהּ עִמָּה הַשָּׂכָה מִשְׁדֵּי מוֹאָב וְהָמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית לָחֶם בְּתַחֲלֵת  
קֶצֶר שְׁעוֹרִים.

## GENEROUS GIVING AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

### Exodus 25:1–2, 8

God spoke to Moses, saying: “Tell the Israelites to bring Me contributions. Accept contributions for Me from each person whose heart is moved to give.... And let them build Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.”

וַיֹּדֶבֶר יי, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה.  
וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְתוֹכָם.

Sometimes our hearts are open, soft, and trusting, erupting with kindness, noticing what others need and lovingly providing it.

It may be the natural impulse of the human heart to be kind, curious, and generous. But we all know that isn't always our reality. Giving away money, time, or other resources can be hard, especially in a culture that often directs us to accumulate.

In the face of hurt, the shutters of our heart close up for protection. When we feel shamed, betrayed, abandoned, or scared we instinctively pull back, and even fortify our hearts with emotional armor. We may build barriers to separate ourselves from further pain. When we are reminded of the original pain, we may respond with fear, further walling off and barricading our hearts, consciously or unconsciously.

But our armor shuts out not only the pain but also the gain, the flow of giving and receiving, the spontaneous, trusting generosity, and the flow of forgiveness and love.

What is one to do? The prophet Ezekiel spoke of two phases in the process of opening and softening our hearts. First, “Remove your heart of stone.” How might you explore where your heart is hardened? When you imagine being spontaneously generous, can you identify any fears? What calculated risks of kindness and generosity could break through walled-off areas of your heart?

When you experience a softening and your heart is flowing with generosity, there's more. Ezekiel spoke of a second phase: “I will give you a heart of flesh.” Working on being more giving can lead to the spiritual gift of a transformed, loving heart. It is the spiritual practice of giving that can help us create a more supple heart, one that offers access to its sanctuary. Such regular practice is what Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, founder of the *mussar* movement of character development, meant when he said, “**The spiritual is higher than the physical, but the physical needs of other human beings are the work of my spiritual life.**”

Jewish tradition wants us to be happy. It provides guidance and practices to open our hearts and create healthy and just communities. Although spontaneous giving is wonderful, the Torah doesn't want our spiritual life and the well-being of our communities to depend on what our heart is feeling:

## Deuteronomy 15:7-8

When any of your kinsfolk is poor, in the land God is giving you, do not harden your heart or shut your hand against your needy kin. Open your hand generously, providing for what the person needs and is lacking.

כִּי יִהְיֶה בְךָ אֶבְיֹן מֵאַחֶיךָ, בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ, לֹא תִסָּרֵץ אֶת יָדְךָ  
מֵאַחֶיךָ הָאֶבְיֹן. כִּי פֶתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ, וְהַעֲבַט תַּעֲבִיטֵנוּ יָדְךָ  
מִחֲסָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחַסֵּר לוֹ

*Tzedakah* is the obligatory practice to give a portion of our income.

The following are some of the well-honed Jewish spiritual practices for opening our heart to generosity:

- **Noticing needs.** Set a certain time of day to practice looking carefully, to notice people around you in need: one may need monetary help, another work, and still others may need health, or emotional, or spiritual nourishment. Practice discerning the needs of others. Step one is to grow one's ability to identify the needs of others, because there's an important distinction between giving what you *feel like* giving and carefully looking and listening to discern what the real needs of another are, and seeking to meet *those* needs.
- **Practicing small acts of giving.** Set a certain number of days where you will notice others' needs and deliberately meet a need you saw. Jewish teachings guide us toward regular and deliberate practice. Consider planning to do a daily act of deliberate kindness or giving for a full week. Reflect on the experience through journaling or setting time to speak with one of your sisters or with a friend.

- **Judging favorably.** Set a practice of intentionally judging people favorably, finding their strengths, and reflecting those back to them. When you are inclined to say something critical, take a deep breath and stay quiet until you are able to find true beauty and value in the person or the situation. Only then, take any needed action from a mindset of generosity and kindness. This is not easy. Take time to reflect about it through journaling, prayer, or speaking with your *havruta* sister. Remember to judge yourself favorably too, and to celebrate small successes along the way.
- **Giving *tzedakah*.** No matter how much you have (or don't have), figure out what you are prepared to give. Determine where you are with regular giving, and take one step forward. For some it can be gathering as a family for a conversation about where and to whom to give, for others it may be setting a regular time to give, such as Friday evening (some do it before lighting Shabbat candles), and for still others it may be calculating income and setting a percentage to give. Notice any stress and worries that come up, and how you can build a practice that opens your heart.

Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luchot HaBrit*

"God's *chesed* (loving-kindness) lasts the entire day" (Psalms 52:3). A person should see to it that there is never a day on which she does not perform an act of *chesed*, either with her body or with her money.

## שְׁנֵי לוחות הברית

"חסד אל כל היום" (תהלים נב:ג). ראוי לאדם שכל ימי חייו יראה שלא יהיה שום יום שלא יעשה בו גמילות חסדים או בגופו או בממונו.

## PRIORITIES IN GIVING



There are so many needs and so many causes. It can be overwhelming to choose whom to give to, and what to give them! Is there any guidance on this?

Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:7–14) lists eight levels of *tzedakah*, sometimes called Maimonides' Ladder. Working with a partner, cut out the eight sentences on page 378 describing the levels of giving, and order them from the lowest level of generosity on the bottom to the highest level at the top.

- *Which of the categories on this ladder have you considered when seeking to help another?*
- *Are there any new insights for you from this list or considerations you'd like to take into account in the future? What additional considerations would you add that are not included on Maimonides' list?*
- *What stories have you heard from family, friends, or colleagues that have inspired your priorities in terms of generous giving?*

In the following story, Rabbi Akiva teaches Rabbi Tarfon the importance of giving *tzedakah* to support Jewish education.



**Adapted from *Tractate Kallah 1: Halachah 21***

Rabbi Tarfon was a very wealthy man. One day, Rabbi Akiva offered to help him invest his money. Rabbi Tarfon agreed and brought him 4,000 golden dinars. Rabbi Akiva went and distributed the money: some to the poor, some to support those who study Torah, and some to the houses of study. After several days, Rabbi Tarfon asked Rabbi Akiva, “Where are the investments you bought for me? Were they a good investment?” Rabbi Akiva answered, “The returns are unlimited.” Rabbi Akiva took him by the hand and brought him to the house of study. He brought before him a child carrying a book of Psalms. The child read until he reached the verse, “The person who gives freely to the poor, that person’s righteousness lasts forever” (Psalms 112:9). Rabbi Tarfon hugged and kissed Rabbi Akiva with appreciation.

- *Have you had someone in your life who awakened you to the importance of giving generously to the poor or to support Jewish education, as Rabbi Akiva did for Rabbi Tarfon?*
- *Rabbi Akiva says that Jewish education is a good investment with unlimited rewards. In what ways is Jewish education an investment in terms of the individual, the family, the community, and the world?*

- *There are so many important causes that could benefit from financial contributions. How do you make choices about where to allocate your contributions? What are the benefits of involving the whole family, including the children?*



### Reflective Writing

Take 5–10 minutes to write down your answers to the following questions. Write in silence, allowing your thoughts to flow freely, unedited. When you are finished writing, discuss with a partner some of the issues and ideas that came up for you in this exercise.

- *Where am I now in terms of giving of my time and resources to others in need?*
- *What causes have been or are becoming priorities for me in terms of giving? How do I prioritize among the many options, such as the poor, the sick, Jewish institutions in my community, education, the organization with which I came on the Momentum trip, Momentum, special education and inclusion, Israel, environment, human rights, politics, and other issues that are important to me?*
- *What is one piece of advice I would like to give myself about acting with loving-kindness, and generosity?*

## SPOTLIGHT ON ISRAEL

### *Emergency Response<sup>2</sup>*

When tragedies and trauma happen in the world, it's often hard to face the devastation with hopefulness and to know how we can help. Israel is often at the forefront of emergency response. It can be inspiring and helpful to share stories such as the following. It also shines a light on Israelis being guided by *chesed*.<sup>2</sup>

Many Israelis take the challenges that the country and its citizens face, including terrorism, and share solutions they have developed with others around the world. The Israeli organization IsraAID is one of many Israeli humanitarian organizations that share lifesaving technologies that have proven vital in disaster zones around the world.

IsraAID focuses on providing emergency relief and long-term development for populations affected by disaster. Disaster relief teams, made up of professional volunteers from across Israeli society, are deployed where needed, quickly building field hospitals and dispatching search-and-rescue specialists, as well as medical and trauma professionals, immediately following a disaster. IsraAID teams have worked in over fifty countries around the world.

In 2017, IsraAID deployed to Peru to support affected communities following devastating

floods and mudslides that destroyed much of the country's infrastructure.

One affected resident, Gloria Sedana Pascual, described the flooding, saying, "We were at home when we heard screaming coming from the street. We ran outside, and we saw the river and mudslides entering the street in front of the house. We thought to try blocking the flood, but after about ten minutes we were struck by another strong mudslide that came from behind our house. This mudslide left everything destroyed. My house is inhabitable, my garden has been annihilated, and my belongings are ruined."

Hundreds of thousands of displaced people like Gloria desperately needed emergency supplies. The deployed IsraAID team journeyed to impoverished and remote areas, providing access to basic items such as food, safe water, and hygiene kits, as well as working to develop and support the ravaged local economy.

- *With whom might you share this story?*
- *How do you take challenge and brokenness, along with the strengths and tools gained through the struggle, and share the learning to benefit others?*

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2 Viva Sarah Press, "Israeli emergency teams support flood survivors in Peru," Israel21c, April 2, 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.israel21c.org/israeli-emergency-teams-support-flood-survivors-in-peru>.



IsraAID in Peru, April 2017, *photo courtesy of IsraAID*



Nepal, September 2016, *photo courtesy of IsraAID*

Within seventy-two hours of the devastating earthquake that struck Nepal in 2015, IsraAID was on the ground, saving lives from under the rubble, tending to over five thousand sick and injured individuals, and rebuilding homes for seven hundred families.

The local economy was devastated by the destruction, and women in particular were affected. In response, IsraAID introduced HoneyAID, a beekeeping program that empowers women to become entrepreneurs and leaders in their community, training them to become beekeepers and organizers of local cooperatives.

With the skills they've learned through HoneyAID, Nepalese women affected by the earthquake now have a greater ability to support and provide for their families. A Nepalese HoneyAID participant named Sonu shared: "[Since] this project came to our village, women

have become so active and have gotten involved in the activities of the greater society."<sup>3</sup>

*• IsraAID focused on the women, who were especially affected by the devastation of their homes and the need to provide for their children. To which weak segments in your community might you be able to offer chesed?*

The desire to do good in the world is also seen through Israel's lifesaving medical advancements and its role in easing the global suffering of children and families.

The organization Save a Child's Heart is an Israeli non-profit that provides urgent pediatric heart surgery and follow-up care for children from developing countries. SACH was founded in 1995, and has since repaired the hearts of more than 2,100 children from a wide variety of countries including China, Congo, Ecuador, Angola, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Iraq, Jordan,

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3 For more on HoneyAid, see <https://www.israel21c.org/?s=honeyaid>.





Russia, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine, as well as from areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.

A visiting American doctor explained, “With all the turmoil and suffering in the Middle East and around the world, it’s easy to be heartbroken. It’s a lot harder to mend a heart – and that’s what these guys are doing here every day. It’s inspiring how they overcome politics and geography to save children’s lives. The doctors and all the staff here are heroes, they really are.”<sup>4</sup>

• *If chesed builds families, communities, and the world, it might do so by opening and healing hearts. Even if not medically, whose heart might you want to help heal this week? What is one, first small step you can take that is easily achievable?*

For more information on Save a Child’s Heart, see Jessica Katz, “How Saving a Child’s Heart Is Crossing Boundaries in the Middle East,” *Huffington Post*, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-saving-a-childs-heart\\_b\\_6591776](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-saving-a-childs-heart_b_6591776).



For more on Israeli humanitarian aid to foreign countries, see “Israel on the frontline of international aid,” on the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

<sup>4</sup> From the Save a Child’s Heart Facebook page.

## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

*Getting Started with Giving Tzedakah: Spotlight on Heather Greene*



When Heather Greene, a mother, wife, and self-employed Certified Elder Care Coordinator from Cleveland, Ohio, was invited to spend Shabbat with Lori Palatnik, she jumped at the opportunity. That Shabbat, coupled with her 2009 Momentum trip to Israel, jumpstarted her family's Jewish journey.

Then Heather's family was asked to make an annual contribution to their synagogue. But between daycare, utilities, and many other expenses, Heather didn't know how they would be able to set the necessary money aside. When her rabbi asked her to consider donating a certain amount of money each month, instead of a lump sum, she happily agreed. "That option hadn't dawned on me until then, but I realized that we could definitely do that," Heather said.

Soon, *tzedakah* became a core part of Heather's Jewish practice, and she and her family contributed small amounts whenever the opportunity arose. First, they gave to organizations that Heather had learned about during her Momentum trip, including the Koby Mandell Foundation and a lone soldier center. At the end of the year, Heather's accountant let her know that, by chance, they had given 10 percent of their earnings to *tzedakah*, and she and her husband decided to make that amount their ongoing goal.

"When you give *tzedakah*, you feel good, other people feel good, and you help make a difference in people's lives," Heather said. "It's a win-win."

### Heather's Advice for Giving Tzedakah

#### 1. Start Small

When we first started giving *tzedakah*, we just gave small amounts to organizations that we believed in – \$18, \$36, and sometimes \$54. But even with small contributions, we have been able to support more than a dozen initiatives that are important to us.

#### 2. Make it Feel Real

It's wonderful to make a donation with the click of a button. And it feels even better when

you're personally invested in your contribution. One year, my children volunteered at a kosher food pantry. Afterward, they were excited to donate *tzedakah* to the pantry, because they felt a connection to it and understood its importance.

### 3. Get Creative

During my Momentum trip, we visited an orphanage in Jerusalem. When I returned home, I organized one of my kid's grades to buy board games for the children. We couldn't ship them because of the huge customs fees, so the eighth graders delivered them during their trip to Israel.

### 4. Involve the Whole Family

I want *tzedakah* to be a collaborative effort for my family. So we started a tradition that before each Yom Kippur, we collect all our loose change and then choose where to donate the money. Also, my son just celebrated his bar mitzvah and is looking forward to exploring organizations where he wants to donate 10 percent of his gift money.

### 5. Embrace the Feeling of Humility

*Tzedakah* reminds me that my family's money isn't simply ours. God has blessed us with what we have, and we need to acknowledge that by giving *tzedakah*.



## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

### *Universal Donor*<sup>5</sup>

By Lori Palatnik



If you really want a conversation stopper, tell someone you are planning to donate a kidney and you don't even know whom you're giving it to.

It all started several years ago when my husband's good friend needed a kidney. None of his family matched or was able to donate for various reasons. My blood type is O positive, which in the world of kidney donations makes me a universal donor. I liked the sound of it. Now I had to see if I could live up to the title.<sup>5</sup>

After speaking to my husband and our rabbi, I decided to offer my kidney to our friend. But as soon as I began the testing process, his medical team told me that my kidney would not be able to sustain his body.

I still wasn't ready to give up, though.

When I learned about a very sick five-year-old boy who needed a kidney, I offered to help.

Unfortunately, he was ultimately too sick for a transplant. But then I was asked to undergo testing for other people – whom I didn't know. I decided to do so.

The few people who knew of my plans were incredulous. How could I put my life at risk? I had children and a husband and responsibilities. What was I thinking?

I explained that for donors, the risks are very low – about the same as any surgery where there is general anesthetic. And if you donate a kidney, and for some reason down the road you need one yourself, you are bumped to the very top of the list.

After an intensive process of testing, a recipient for my kidney was selected and I had the option to speak to her. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. What if I didn't like her? What if she was judgmental? In the end, I decided that I did want to speak to her, but only if she felt comfortable speaking to me.

"There are no words," she began during our first call.

I learned that she was an extremely brave woman with seven kids. She was one year older than me, and a year and a half ago, during routine blood tests to correct a hernia, she learned that she had KPD, a deadly kidney disease.

A kidney transplant is the only cure for KPD, but thousands of people die each year waiting.

The surgery was scheduled for a Thursday. That Monday, the woman who would receive my

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5 A longer version of this article can be found at <http://www.aish.com/sp/so/48937647.html?s=srcon>. The term "Universal Donor" refers to a person of blood group O, who can theoretically donate blood to recipients of any blood group.



kidney invited me to her home for dinner. I felt like I was about to meet a twin sister who was separated from me at birth.

We were so alike in so many ways, and her husband even reminded me of my husband! Clearly this was a match made in heaven. Since receiving her diagnosis, she had married off three children. “With each wedding, I knew that this child would be all right. They had married a good person. If I was to die, it would be difficult for them, but they could go on. I just wanted to live long enough to marry off my [unmarried] children.”

I couldn’t imagine being so strong. In the face of her dire situation, she always had a smile on her face. Her faith in God never wavered; in fact, it only became stronger. She continued to work full time, and was clearly the energy force of her family.

The night before the surgery, she called me. “Lori, you are taking a risk, and I want you to know that you can absolutely change your mind.”

I was moved, and I reassured her that I would be at the hospital the next morning as planned.

### **The Big Day**

Many people have asked me if I ever had any doubts. There was only one moment when I hesitated. It was on my way to the operating room. “Here we go,” the nurse said.

“Hold on,” I said. “I need to say a prayer.”

So I stood there and said the Shema, and asked God to let me live and to let the kidney recipient live, too.

“Okay,” I said, “I’m ready.”

And then she opened the doors to the operating room and I was shocked to see a room so filled with people running around and maneuvering

equipment and machines. I saw the lights, the long operating table with straps, and I froze. “What am I doing?” And then I closed my eyes and said to myself, “Just do it. Just do it.”

I laid down on the table, and the next thing I knew, I was in recovery and they were telling me that the surgery had been successful.

### **The Life It Gave Me**

The surgery was laparoscopic and I was in the hospital for just a few days. During that time, the grown children of my “kidney sister” and her extended family streamed into my room, thanking me for saving her life. When I felt better, I walked down the hall to visit her. She was doing great. She told me that she felt as though a truck had been hurtling towards her in full force, and that I had stepped in front of her from out of nowhere and put my arms out to stop the truck.

God gave me the opportunity to give her life, and the gratitude she and her family feel toward me is immense. I realized that I should feel that same gratitude to my parents, who gave me life. It was humbling to realize how casually we accept that we are here, and how little regard we have for the people who made it possible.

I am still processing the whole experience and feel very small in the face of the enormity and fragility of life and death.

Giving away your kidney is not for everyone. Some people literally cannot do it because of personal or family medical history. But as one person told me just before I left for the surgery, “Lori, I may not give away my kidney, but because of what you are doing, I will now be more of a giver.”

Take pleasure in your life, but also take care of the life that you have. And please ask yourself how you can help others do the same.

## LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

### *Laws of Tzedakah*

What are the best-kept secrets for how Jewish communities bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots? Which traditional Jewish laws guided Jewish giving and helped create communities of caring? What might we learn from them?

A biblical law that calls for offering interest-free loans within the Jewish community resulted in hundreds of years of caring. Practically all Jewish communities in the Diaspora had volunteer-run societies to which community members could give money for others to receive loans interest-free. The name for such a society is *gemach*, a Hebrew acronym for “acts of *chesed*.”

Most Jewish communities today still have a *gemach* to take the shame out of needing community support. But today a *gemach* is more of a Jewish swap society, where people can borrow and then return useful objects. It’s a way in which Jewish community members take care of one another.

In Israel, one *gemach*, founded to provide nebulizers to children in Jerusalem, grew to have over one hundred branches around the country, including in Arab and Druze villages and towns. This volunteer organization, Yad Sarah, has become the world’s largest lender of medical devices!

What follows are additional laws of giving to the poor, organized by Maimonides.

### **Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:1–3, 5, 7, 13**

It is a positive commandment from the Torah to give *tzedakah* to poor Jews according to what is appropriate for the poor person, if the donor can afford it... and all who see a poor person asking [for help] and avert their eyes, and do not give *tzedakah*, transgress a commandment.

You are commanded to provide to the poor what they are lacking: If one does not have clothing, we provide clothes; if one does not have household items, we buy such items.

If a poor person comes and asks for what they are lacking and you do not have the ability to provide it, you give according to the extent that you are financially able. Even a poor person who survives by receiving *tzedakah* must give *tzedakah* to another.

We give money and clothing to poor non-Jews along with Jews in order to maintain the ways of peace [with the other nations].

You should give priority [in your *tzedakah*] to a poor person who is a relative. A poor person in your household has priority over the poor of your city; the poor of your city have priority over the poor of another city.

- *Do any of these laws of tzedakah surprise you?*
- *Which of these laws is especially meaningful to you? Why?*

### הלכות מתנות עניים פרק ז

**א** מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה לִיתֵן צְדָקָה לָעֲנִיִּים כְּפִי מֶה שֶׁרָאוי לָעֲנִי. אִם הֵיְתָה יָד הַנּוֹתֵן מְשֻׁגָּת...

[ב] וכל הרואה עני מבקש, והעלים עיניו ממנו, ולא נתן לו צדקה--עובר בלא תעשה,

**ב** [ג] לפי מה שחסר העני, אתה מצווה ליתן לו--אם אין לו כסות, מכסין אותו; אין לו כלי בית, קונין לו כלי בית; אין לו אישה, משיאין לו אישה; ואם הייתה אישה, משיאין אותה לאיש...;

**ד** [ה] בא עני ושאל די מחסורו, ואין יד הנותן משגת--נותן לו כפי השגת ידו. וכמה: עד חמיש נכסיו, מצוה מן המובחר; ואחד מעשרה בנכסיו, בינוני; פחות מכאן, עין רעה. "... ואפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה, חייב ליתן צדקה לאחר.

**ו** [ז] מפרנסין ומכסין עניי גוים עם עניי ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום.

**יג** עני שהוא קרובו, קודם לכל אדם; ועניי ביתו, קודמין לעניי עירו; ועניי עירו, קודמין לעניי עיר אחרת: שנאמר "לאחריך לענייך ולאביוןך, בארצך" (דברים טו,יא).

**Rabbi Moses ben Maimon**, also known as **Rambam** or **Maimonides** (1138–1204), was a prolific medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher and physician. He was one of the most influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.



## TRY IT OUT

### PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

*Ideas for bringing the values of Chesed and Tzedakah, Loving-kindness and Generous Giving, into your family life*

#### For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on [MomentumUnlimited.org](https://MomentumUnlimited.org).
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
  - I give generously
  - Givers are happy people
  - Love is a verb
  - A family and the world are built through *chesed*
  - I focus on a person's virtues and strengths, and that is how I identify myself and others
  - I carry the broken and the whole
- Keep a journal of acts of *chesed* that you and others do.

- Reflect on ways you can increase self-care, offering yourself tender *chesed* regularly. What might that look like for you?
- Reflect, perhaps with others close to you, about your financial and non-financial contributions to others. Set a place to document them and set goals.
- Aleph Beta Academy is an online library of videos offering text-based, in-depth Jewish learning. To learn more about Shavuot, check out the video, "Megillat Ruth as a Window onto Israel's Mission Statement" (56 minutes): <https://bit.ly/30paUTE>.

#### For Families with Young Children

- Take your children to a dollar store or the like to assemble "*chesed* packages." If *chesed* is best described as a need anticipated, then make sure you and your kids are ready with the things that people need in a pinch. *Chesed* packs include Tylenol and Advil, Band-Aids, hand cream, a water bottle, a protein bar, bus



tokens, and gum or breath mints. Kids will love being the ones to have what people need.

- Make or decorate your own *tzedakah* boxes. This is an excellent craft activity with a learning opportunity. With smaller kids, it's a chance to even learn some math skills! Teaching 10 percent is easy with ten pennies, ten dimes, ten quarters, ten dollar bills, etc. (You could even teach them 20 percent while you're at it.) You'll even practice a little division and fractions all at the same time.
- Research has shown that the most important predictor of children who grow up with a strong sense of kindness and compassion is learning from parents who model the behavior. How can we bring these lessons into our everyday lives as a family to help our children develop these values?
- Watch this video from the Bimbam site to learn how to incorporate generosity into your family routines: <https://bit.ly/2EJ0EKz>.
- Give your children opportunities to do *chesed* in a more "structured" way. Volunteer together at a soup kitchen, participate in a

walk for a cause, or organize a cleanup in the park.

- Read (or retell) to children the story of kindness in the book of Ruth. Make it a treasure hunt by having the children search for all the examples of kindness in the book.
- In the weeks leading up to Shavuot, create and fill a "kindness jar." Each time someone does something nice, put a "warm fuzzy" (craft pom pom) into the jar. Be sure to tell the person that you noticed their behavior and have put a warm fuzzy in the jar for them. When the jar is full, have a family celebration (popcorn party, family movie night, etc.) to celebrate.
- This beautiful article from [kveller.com](https://www.kveller.com) explains how the story of Ruth teaches the values of generosity, loyalty, and kindness, and offers some suggestions about how to share the story with young children: <https://bit.ly/2HxHFFU>.

### For Families with Older Children

- Assemble “homeless kits” and always have one in your car. You can include a pair of clean socks, a fruit and a protein bar, a hat (baseball or woolen, depending on the season), gloves, and a clean, new t-shirt (size large always... nothing worse than a gift you can’t return not fitting!). All this can be assembled for under \$10. Your kids will be on the lookout for a homeless person to give to. Make this a family project!
- *Tzedakah* research projects. The bar and bat mitzvah years need not be the only time for *chesed* and *tzedakah* projects. Have a family meeting and decide on one or two charities that your family wants to support this year. Include each family member in research and implementation according to their age and temperament. Include *tzedakah* projects that require money as well as those that require time. Create scrapbooks documenting the family’s efforts, and your kids will want to do the same with their own in years to come.
- On Shavuot, there is a custom to decorate the insides of our synagogues and homes with

flowers. It’s also a wonderful opportunity to enjoy some time in nature.

- One Shavuot tradition is *tikkun leil Shavuot* – an all-night Torah study session. Enjoy the spirit of this tradition without staying up all night (unless you want to!) by having a Shavuot pajama party at home. Spread blankets and pillows on the living room floor, wear your favorite PJs, and share stories and games. Reading stories with a Jewish theme is a great way to incorporate the idea of Torah study in a kid-friendly way. Finish up with a make-your-own sundae bar for a Shavuot treat!
- Have kids come up with their own “Ten Commandments,” or work together to make a set of “commandments” for your home (“Treat each other nicely,” “Share your toys,” etc.). Decorate your list and display it in a prominent place.
- Work together to provide a warm home for an animal, or donate old towels and blankets to an animal shelter.
- Donate your gently used, outgrown clothing to a local family shelter.

- Vote on an organization to which you will donate the funds you've collected in your *tzedakah* box.
- Watch the two videos on the page titled "The Transforming Power of Acts of Kindness" (p. 348) with your middle school, high school, or college-age children.
- As a family, sort the eight cut-out strips found in the activity, "Sorting Levels of *Tzedakah*," on page 378. Together, compare them with the order suggested by Maimonides' Ladder, which is given in the Facilitator's Guide.
- Watch an 11-minute TED Talk, "How to Buy Happiness" with Michael Norton, on fascinating research showing that people who give are happier than those who spend money on themselves.





Where are you now with the values of *chesed* and *tzedakah*, loving-kindness and generous giving? What examples from your life come to mind? What are your strengths and challenges?

How would you like your relationship with *chesed* and *tzedakah* to be? What gets in the way, and what can you do to reorient toward your best self?



What is one or more small, actionable step that you can do in your daily life, that is realistic and that you could easily schedule, which will support you in growing toward your potential and vision in terms of *chesed* and *tzedakah*?

Who can help hold you accountable to your goals? How? When? What evidence can you collect to know you are making progress?

# FACILITATOR’S GUIDE

*In this session we explore the values of chesed and tzedakah, loving-kindness and generous giving*

**The guiding questions in this unit are:**

- *How can I better understand the needs of others?*
- *Where in my life have I seen giving that is also receiving and receiving that is also giving?*
- *Where in my life do I see kindness and generosity being contagious?*
- *What stories of generosity inspire me?*
- *Knowing that givers are happier people, how might I grow my generosity and share it with my children?*

## Meaningful Vocabulary

shavua	שבוע	week
shavuot (weeks) (also the name of the holiday of the giving and receiving of the Torah, which is celebrated seven weeks after Passover)	שבועות	
chesed	חסד	loving-kindness
tzedakah	צדקה	giving money to those in need
tzedek	צדק	justice

## Facilitating the Session

### 1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example:

- Hosting the event, including serving traditional Shavuot foods
- Planning an activity to accompany the study session (see **Extra! Program Ideas**)
- Compiling a list of Shavuot celebrations in your area that participants might like to attend
- Co-facilitating a discussion about generous giving in everyday life
- Researching and presenting to the group examples of the State of Israel’s acts of kindness throughout the world, pp. 358–361
- Having one or more of the women share a way she brought home the learning from your last gathering

**Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning, and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!**

### 2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

Remember: You know what will best engage your participants, and we encourage you to

tailor the session to their interests and needs.

**Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible!

### 3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the room by arranging the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need, and make sure you have everything prepared.

### 4. Welcome and Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider engaging the women in a stretching exercise or a short, guided visualization of giving or receiving *chesed*, or have them close their eyes and do a body scan meditation, offering tender, loving attention to different parts of their body.

#### **Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space**

Remind everyone that they are in the Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

### 5. Intro and Inspiration

Introduce the concept of *chesed*, the Hebrew word for loving-kindness.

Inspire your participants by watching one of the following inspirational videos:

1. “Sara Tucholsky Home Run/ESPY Sportsmanship Moment” video on YouTube

2. “A Soldier’s Gift: An Amazing True Story” video on YouTube. This is a story from Israel about God acting through human *chesed*.

Ask the women to share a *chesed* role model – someone who cares for self or for others in ways that make the world better. After everyone has shared, discuss the themes, longings, and conflicts that emerged. Make a note for yourself about which of these themes are connected to this session, and which themes you would like to follow up on in future meetings. Alternatively, do the Priorities of Giving activity, ending it with sharing the order that Maimonides provides: enabling the recipient’s self-sufficiency, two-way anonymity, donor unknown, giving before being asked, giving only after being asked, giving graciously but less than one should, and giving reluctantly.

### 6. Soul Sparks Activities

There are different activities you can try that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

#### ***What We Know about Givers (p. 349)***

Read the article together, and invite participants to underline one phrase that grabs their attention. Afterward, have each participant read their phrase “popcorn style,” one after another, with a moment of silence after each one. Invite

participants to dialogue about the ideas that struck them.

***Generous Giving as a Spiritual Practice***  
(pp. 354–355)

Ask the women, “If generous giving could be a spiritual practice, what would be some helpful ways of opening the heart to generosity?”

Explore together the texts from Exodus, Ezekiel, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, Deuteronomy, and Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz. Invite women to speak about what each text offers the vision of making *chesed* a spiritual practice.

In order to become givers, we need to practice. Split the women into pairs and encourage them to read through the practices: noticing needs, practicing small acts of giving, judging favorably, and *tzedakah*. Ask them to choose one or two that they would like to take on. Encourage the pairs to become “accountability partners,” and to check up on each other through phone calls and texts to support their practices over the next month or longer.

***Spotlight on Israel: Emergency Response***  
(pp. 358–361)

In advance of the session, invite one or two women to prepare a short talk about the *chesed* the State of Israel performs via its emergency relief responses to disasters across the world. The presenters may wish to summarize the information available in this unit, or find videos to present instead (a quick Google search of “Israel international aid response” will yield

many hits). Talk about what it means to perform *chesed* on personal, communal, national, and international scales. Ask your group, “How can we become models of *chesed* in all these areas?”

**7. Reflection and Closing**

Recall the main ideas explored in the session, and create an opportunity for reflection.

***Reflection Suggestion:*** Ask participants to reflect on the following: “What is one takeaway you’ll be going home with after our session today?” or “A *chesed* or *tzedakah* idea or practice that I would like to begin with my family is....”

Invite sisters to respond to the prompt by writing, drawing, or thinking silently. After individual reflection time, you may ask them to partner and share their reflections, which can be followed with group (voluntary) sharing.

Direct the women’s attention to the “**Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families**” section (pp. 368–371). These suggestions will help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today, in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Give them an opportunity to schedule a time with their learning partner before they leave the session today (see “**Learn With Your Sister,**” pp. 362–367). Let all the women know when



you'll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

### Extra! Program Ideas

To enhance your session, you may consider a volunteer project to engage with as a group:

- Help in a school or hospital
- Volunteer for a local food kitchen, shelter, or Habitat for Humanity
- Get involved on an issue such as hunger, child labor, women's rights, trafficking, or other social-justice cause that appeals to your group
- Visit a Jewish seniors home and socialize with residents. Most facilities offer volunteer programs and welcome new participants
- Organize a Pop-Up Giving Circle: Amplifier's quick start guide to planning a Pop-Up Giving Circle makes getting started easy and fun. Amplifier is a network of more than 120 giving circles inspired by Jewish values, and they offer the Pop-Up guide and additional free resources at [amplifiergiving.org](http://amplifiergiving.org) and [amplifiergiving.org/popupcircle/](http://amplifiergiving.org/popupcircle/), or by email at [hello@amplifiergiving.org](mailto:hello@amplifiergiving.org).
- Would you like to pay forward the experiences and inspiration you've gained

from Momentum? A great way to do so is through one of the impactful sponsorship opportunities listed here as the beneficiary of your Pop-Up Giving Circle or individual giving:

- Sponsor one Momentum class trip: \$1,000
- Sponsor one Momentum Shabbat concert: \$1,800
- Sponsor one Momentum participant: \$3,200
- Sponsor a set of seven Momentum classes: \$7,000
- Sponsor a new set of podcasts on the Momentum website: \$8,000

### Priorities in Giving

Have participants jot down some of their personal priorities in giving. Then explore Maimonides' Ladder of *Tzedakah* (see next page) by giving each pair of women slips of paper with each of the levels and inviting them to sort them in what they think should be the order of priority.

Consider as a group the teaching from Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon and the questions and writing activity on page 357.

## SORTING LEVELS OF TZEDAKAH



The strips below present the categories that Maimonides included in his Ladder of *Tzedakah*. Cut them out and consider how to sort them from lowest to highest.

*The person who gives graciously, but less than they should.*



*The person who gives another the wherewithal to become self-sufficient.*



*The person who gives without making his or her identity known.*



*The person who gives reluctantly.*



*Giving in a way that neither the person who gives nor the recipient knows the other.*



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



*The person who gives without knowing to whom he or she gives, but the recipient knows the donor.*



*The person who gives before being asked.*





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