



## ACTIVITY

# Tzedakah Priorities and Global Giving

### Materials Needed

- Video clip
- internet connection and screening device
- paper and pens/ pencils

### Time Needed

45 minutes-1 hour

### Goal

- To consider how our universal concerns (to help the world) and particular ones (to help Jewish people) are expressed when we give charitably.
- To explore how to break down the dichotomy between “universalism” vs “particularism” when we think about giving to global causes through Jewish organizations.

## Before You Get Started

Look at the list of enduring understandings. Which one would you like to emphasize through this activity?

1. Jewish tradition and texts are concerned with particular and universal values. There are debates about questions of responsibility (for example, the debate of “aniyei ircha kodmim”) and the role of the Jewish People to improve the world as a whole (for example, the concept of “Tikkun Olam”).
2. In the 21st century, a commitment to Jewish Peoplehood can exist fruitfully with tension between particularistic values that ensure the existence and well-being of the Jewish People and a universalistic commitment to general causes.
3. The two agendas can conflict but the solution has to be in the form of a compromise.
4. A People which only cares about itself lacks soul and purpose.
5. A People that neglects developing its own identity and strength risks losing the power to do good all together.

## Directions for Activity

1. Ask participants to write about when they last gave tzedakah and to whom. What motivated them to give and how did their giving reflect their values? Have them share their responses.
2. Frame a conversation about charitable giving and limited resources with these two quotes from two leading Jewish activists:

It is easy to love everyone; it is far more difficult to love someone. The test of how one loves all people is the way one loves one’s own people.

Rabbi Avi Weiss as quoted in this article ([observer.com/2014/12/bnai-jeshurun-do-jewish-lives-also-matter/#ixzz3bK5ZbQPx](http://observer.com/2014/12/bnai-jeshurun-do-jewish-lives-also-matter/#ixzz3bK5ZbQPx)).

We want people to think about global giving. That is to go beyond our most immediate obvious circles of obligation to ourselves, to our families, to our immediate geographic and our faith based communities to people not easily seen, to people who from our point of view are today’s “other” and today’s “stranger”. As we strengthen our muscle to give globally we help to collapse the distance between people who at first appearance are 10,000 miles away, but who are also people equally made in the image of God.

Ruth Messinger, video address during the Mussar Institute’s Generosity Week ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuGQK5GTqgs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuGQK5GTqgs))

3. Questions for Discussion:

- How do Ruth Messinger and Rabbi Avi Weiss’ messages complement each other? How are they in tension?
- What are the implications of these two different approaches when it comes to giving charitably?
- How do you balance these two positions when you think about your own personal charitable giving?

4. Now – it’s time to do some work as a group. Explain that there was a crisis recently somewhere in the world and you are asked to give tzedakah immediately. (You can add more “meat” to this challenge by providing basic information about natural disasters like the earthquake in Nepal, or Haiti, or Tsunami in southeast Asia.) Your group is given \$10,000 to distribute to alleviate suffering. You must decide, 1/ how much money you should allocate to the general population, and how much money to allocate to the Jewish community in that area. 2/ which kind of organization you should channel your money through – a general international relief agency, a Jewish agency helping the general population or a Jewish agency helping mainly the Jewish population.

Some of the important information to keep in mind include:

- The majority of people effected in the region are not Jewish, but there is a small percentage of Jews who are also suffering.
  - Many international aid organizations (Like the Red Cross, Relief International and Care) are on the ground working to help the general population.
  - Other Jewish organizations are also there to help the general population including the JDC’s International Development Program (IDP) and the American Jewish World Service.
  - There are several Jewish organizations who are sending direct relief to the Jewish victims of the natural disaster.
5. Encourage participants to have a robust debate around who to help first and which kind of organization should receive their support. Try to reach an agreement as to the “plan” for addressing the crisis.
6. To sum up, consider screening the following clip, a humorous and serious description of the work of AJWS to promote dignity and alleviate poverty of people worldwide ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQTtMXZs2LA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQTtMXZs2LA))

## Note to Educator

Did the enduring understanding that you set out to teach surface during this activity?