

TEN PATHS TO GOD

UNIT 5 – Student Guide / Advanced Level

צדקה TZEDAKAH

Love as Justice

Based on the teachings of Rabbi Sacks





“Among the fine people it has been my privilege to know, Chaim (Harry) and Anna Schimmel hold a special place. Their life has been built on a love of Torah, which they have learned, taught, supported, and in Harry’s case written brilliantly about. They epitomized it for our community; they have communicated it to everyone they know, and especially to their children and grandchildren. I always counted Harry as my benchmark. If he agreed with an interpretation I had given, I was confident I was on the right lines. Now that Harry and Anna have made *aliyah* to *Yerushalayim Ir ha-Kodesh*, I count it as a special delight that this curriculum project has been sponsored in their honor. They inspired me; I hope these materials inspire others. ”

RABBI SACKS

Introduction

Watch: The opening video for Unit 5



First Reading: Read through the text from the video. Highlight each word or phrase that you are unsure of, whether it is the meaning of the language or the meaning of the concept.

There are two kinds of *mitzvot*. There are the commands of self-restraint that hold us back from damaging the human or natural environment. And there are the positive commands of love, for the world as God's work, and for human beings as God's image. Of the second, the greatest is *tzedakah*: love as justice or sometimes translated as "charity".

The world is not always just, or equitable, or fair. Our task is to make it more so, by helping those in need, sharing some of what we have with others. This act of sharing is more than just charity. It is a recognition of the fact that what we have, we have from God, and one of the conditions of God's gifts is that we ourselves give. That way we too become like God, "walking in His ways".

The market creates wealth: that is its virtue. But it does not necessarily distribute it in such a way as to alleviate poverty, granting everyone the means of a dignified life. That is its weakness. So there are two possibilities: either abandon the market, or mitigate its negative effects. The first has been tried, and failed. The second can be done in two ways: through the government by taxation or welfare, or through individuals. Governments can do much, but not everything. *Tzedakah* is Judaism's way of saying that each of us has a part to play. Every one of us must give.

Tzedakah means both justice and charity, because we believe that they go hand in hand. Justice is impersonal, charity is personal. We call God *Avinu Malkenu*, "Our Father, our King". A king dispenses justice, a parent gives a child a gift out of love. That is the meaning of *tzedakah*, an act that combines both justice and love. Giving to others is one of the most beautiful things we can do, and one of the most creative. We create possibilities for other people. We soften some of the rough edges of the world. We help alleviate poverty and pain. We give God the sacrifice He most desires of us: that we honor His image in other people.

Nothing more marks Judaism as a religion of love than its emphasis on *tzedakah*. We do not accept poverty, hunger, homelessness or disease as God's will. To the contrary, God's will is that we heal these fractures in His world. As God feeds the hungry, so must we. As God heals the sick,



so must we. We become good by doing good. We walk in God's ways by acting out of love.

Jonathan Sacks



Analysis in Chavruta: Now in *chavruta* (pairs), take a look again at the text. Discuss and answer the questions on the key terms and phrases that are highlighted for you.

There are two kinds of *mitzvot*. There are the commands of self-restraint that hold us back from damaging the human or natural environment. And there are the positive commands of love, for the world as God's work, and for **human beings as God's image**. Of the second, the greatest is **tzedakah: love as justice** or sometimes translated as "charity".

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human beings as God's image

1. If God has no physical presence, how can humans be "God's image"? What does it mean to be created in God's image?
2. What are the ethical ramifications of the belief that all humans are created in God's image?
3. What is the connection between human dignity and human rights, and the belief that all humans are created in God's image?

tzedakah: love as justice

1. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks equates *tzedakah* with love? Can love be commanded? Why then is *tzedakah* commanded?
2. How can love lead to justice?
3. What is the connection between *tzedakah*, the dignity of the human being, and justice?

That way we too become like God, "walking in His ways".

1. "Walking in His ways" is a philosophical concept called *Imitatio Dei* (imitating God). Why should we "walk in God's ways" and imitate God?
2. How is *tzedakah* imitating God?
3. What else do we do to imitate God?

The market creates wealth: that is its virtue.

1. The "market" means a free economy (as in most western countries) where government interferes as little as possible, allowing market forces to play out. How does that generate wealth?
2. Is this a good thing? What do you think the Torah view would be of a market economy?
3. What are the drawbacks of a free (market) economy?



through the government by taxation or welfare, or through individuals

1. How can the government address the downside of a free economy such as poverty and other injustices?
2. Is taxation the same as *tzedakah*? If you pay your taxes, do you still need to give *tzedakah*?
3. Which do you think is more effective at addressing injustice from unequal wealth distribution, governments or individuals and NGOs?

an act that combines both justice and love

1. How is *tzedakah* the act of both a father and a king?
2. Is the welfare state (government taxation and spending on services for its citizens) more like a king dispensing justice, or a father giving a present?
3. Is an individual giving *tzedakah* more like a king dispensing justice or a father giving a present?

God's will is that we heal these fractures in His world.

1. What are the "fractures in God's world"?
2. How can we heal them?
3. Why do we have to heal them? Why can't God? Can we partner God in this? How?

Share your analysis: Come together as a class, and share your answers to the questions. Listen carefully to the perspectives of your classmates. Did anyone take a different approach to the text from you? Does their approach resonate with you?



The Core Concepts



Exploration of the Core Concepts: Together with your *chavruta* join another pair to form a small *chabura* (study group). Look at the supplementary sources provided below for each of the core concepts highlighted in the text. Your teacher will tell you which core concept to look at first. Make sure you understand it fully, and write down any questions you have.

Explain how the supplementary text helps you understand the core concept it is connected to. Use the questions to guide your discussion and analysis.

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The Ethics of Materialism

what we have, we have from God

TREASURES OF SOULS



Our masters taught: it is related of King Monabaz [king of Adiabene in the first century CE who converted to Judaism] that during years of scarcity he spent all his own treasures and the treasures of his fathers on charity. His brothers and other members of his family reproached him: “Your fathers stored away treasures, adding to the treasures of their fathers, and you squander them!” He replied: “My fathers stored away for the world below, while I am storing away for the world above. My fathers stored away in a place where the hand of others can prevail, while I have stored away in a place where the hand of others cannot prevail. My fathers stored away something that produces no fruit, while I have stored away something that does produce fruit. My fathers stored away treasures of money, while I have stored away treasures of souls.”

Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 11a

ABRAVANEL: WE OWN WHAT WE ARE WILLING TO SHARE



The fifteenth century Jewish diplomat and scholar Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), chancellor to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Castile, was once asked by the king how much he owned. He named a certain sum. “But surely,” the king said, “you own much more than that.” “You asked me,” Abravanel replied, “how much I owned. The property I have, I do not own. Your majesty may seize it from me tomorrow. At best I am its temporary guardian. The sum I mentioned is what I have given away in charity. That merit alone, neither you nor any earthly power can take away from me.” We own what we are willing to share.

Adapted from Abraham J. Twerski, *Do Unto Others*, pp. 26–27

1. These two sources are about leaving a lasting legacy. King Monabaz and the Abravanel believe that material wealth is not a lasting legacy. Why not? Do you agree with them?
2. According to these texts, what can be a lasting legacy?
3. What will your legacy be?



The Dignity of Human Beings

a dignified life

RAMBAM'S EIGHT LEVELS OF TZEDAKAH



There are eight degrees of charity, one higher than the other.

The highest degree, exceeded by none, is that of one who assists a poor person by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment – in a word by putting him in a situation where he can dispense with other people's aid...

A step below this is one who gives alms to the needy in such a way that the giver does not know to whom he gives and the recipient does not know from whom he takes. This exemplifies doing a good deed for its own sake. One example was the Hall of Secrecy in the Temple, where the righteous would place their gift clandestinely and where poor people from noble families could come and secretly help themselves to aid. Close to this is putting money in a charity box...

One step lower is where the giver knows to whom he gives, but the poor person does not know from whom he receives. Thus the great sages would go and secretly put money into poor people's doorways...

A step lower is when the poor person knows from whom he is taking, but the giver does not know to whom he is giving. Thus the great sages would tie coins in their scarves, which they would fling over their shoulders, so that the poor could help themselves without suffering shame.

Lower than this, is where someone gives the poor person a gift before he asks.

Lower still is one who gives only after the poor person asks.

Lower than this is one who gives less than is fitting, but does so with a friendly countenance.

The lowest level is one who gives ungraciously.

Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Mattenot Ani'im* 10:7–14

1. Which important values at the heart of this *mitzvah* may have influenced Rambam when he compiled these eight levels of *tzedakah*?
2. According to these values, how is entering a business relationship with a poor person the highest level of *tzedakah*?
3. Why is anonymity important for the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*?



Responsibility

Tzedakah is Judaism's way of saying that each of us has a part to play.

DO NOT BE HARD-HEARTED

ז כִּי־יְהִיָּה בְּךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאֶחָד אֶחָיִךְ בְּאֶחָד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תֵאֶמֶן
 ח אֶת־לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת־יָדְךָ מֵאֶחָיִךְ הָאֶבְיוֹן: כִּי־פָתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֶעֱבַט תִּעֲבִיטֵנוּ
 ט דֵּי מַחְסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסֹר לוֹ: הִשְׁמַר לְךָ פִּן־יְהִיָּה דְבַר עַם־לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל לֵאמֹר קָרְבָּה שְׁנַת־הַשְּׁבַע
 י שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה וְרַעַה עֵינֶךָ בְּאֶחָיִךְ הָאֶבְיוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עֲלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי וְהָיָה בְּךָ חַטָּא: נָתַן
 תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא־יִרַע לִבְּךָ בַּתְּתֵת לוֹ כִּי בְגִלְלָהּ הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכֹל־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכֹל
 יי מִשְׁלַח יָדְךָ: כִּי לֹא־יִחַדֵּל אֶבְיוֹן מִקְרֹב הָאָרֶץ עַל־פְּנֵי אֲנָכִי מִצְוֶיךָ לֵאמֹר פָּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ
 לְאֶחָיִךְ לְעֵנֶיךָ וּלְאֶבְיוֹנְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ:

If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother. Rather be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs... Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed towards your brothers and towards the poor and needy in the land.

Devarim 15:7–11

לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמֹּר

He used to say: It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.

Mishna Avot 2:16

1. Is being open-hearted and open-handed the same thing? Can you be one without the other?
2. What if you are also poor? Do poor people also have to give *tzedakah*?
3. Can our small contributions through *tzedakah* really make a difference?



Tzedakah as a vehicle for our spiritual and moral growth

We become good by doing good. We walk in God's ways by acting out of love.

ADMITTED TO THE DIVINE PRESENCE

R. Dostai son of R. Yannai taught: Consider the difference between the Holy One and a king of flesh and blood. If a man brings a present to the king, it may or may not be accepted. Even if it is accepted, it remains doubtful whether the man will be admitted into the king's presence. Not so with the Holy One. A person who gives even one small coin to a beggar is deemed worthy of being admitted to behold the Divine presence, as it is written, "I, through charity, shall behold your face" (Tehillim 17:15). R. Eleazar used to give a coin to a poor man and only then say his prayers, because, he said, it is written, "I, through charity, shall behold your face."

Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 10a



THE STRONGEST THING

There are ten strong things in the world:

Rock is strong, but iron breaks it.

Iron is strong, but fire melts it.

Fire is strong, but water extinguishes it.

Water is strong, but the clouds carry it.

The clouds are strong, but the wind drives them.

The wind is strong, but man withstands it.

Man is strong, but fear weakens him.

Fear is strong, but wine removes it.

Wine is strong, but sleep overcomes it.

Sleep is strong, but death stands over it.

What is stronger than death?

Acts of charity (*tzedakah*), for it is written,

"*Tzedakah* delivers from death" (Mishlei 10:2).

Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 10a





ISRAEL'S TWO SEAS



There is a fascinating feature of the geography of the land of Israel. It contains two seas: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of life: fish, birds, vegetation. The Dead Sea, as its name implies, is not. Yet they are fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee receives water at one end and gives out water at the other. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. The Jordan ends there. To receive but not to give is, in Jewish geography as well as Jewish psychology, simply not life. To live is to give.

Covenant & Conversation, Pekudei (5771)

1. What message about the importance of *tzedakah* do these sources present?
2. Why do you think Rabbi Eleazar would always give *tzedakah* before praying?
3. How can a *mitzvah* that asks us to look after our fellow man also bring us closer to God?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class and present your approach to the core concept allocated to you, making reference to the supplementary sources, and the answers you came up with to the questions accompanying them. As a class, consider what you have learned about the four core concepts.

The Core Concepts in the Writings of Rabbi Sacks



Analysis in Chavruta: Now you have explored each of the four core concepts through supplementary sources, in your original *chavruta* explore the same core concept as it appears in the writings of Rabbi Sacks. Rabbi Sacks discusses these concepts more fully in his book *To Heal a Fractured World*, and you will find relevant quotes for each of the core concepts below. Read through each quote and use the questions to guide your discussion. Make sure you understand each concept fully, and write down any questions you have.

The Ethics of Materialism

what we have, we have from God



The word *tzedakah* is untranslatable because it joins together two concepts that in other languages are opposites, namely charity and justice. Suppose, for example, that I give someone \$100. Either he is entitled to it, or he is not. If he is, then my act is a form of justice. If he is not, it is an act of charity. In English (as with the Latin terms *caritas* and *iustitia*) a gesture of charity cannot be an act of justice, nor can an act of justice be described as charity. *Tzedakah* means both.

It arises from Judaism's theological insistence on the difference between possession and ownership. Ultimately, all things are owned by God, creator of the world. What we possess, we do not own – we merely hold it in trust for God. The clearest statement of this is the provision in Vayikra: "The land must not be sold permanently because the land is Mine; you are merely strangers and temporary residents in relation to Me." If there were absolute ownership, there would be a difference between justice (what we are bound to give others) and charity (what we give others out of generosity). The former would be a legally enforceable duty, the latter, at best, the prompting of benevolence or sympathy. In Judaism, because we are not owners of our property but guardians on God's behalf, we are bound by the conditions of trusteeship, one of which is that we share part of what we have with others in need. What would be regarded as charity in other legal systems is, in Judaism, a strict requirement of the law and can, if necessary, be enforced by the courts

To Heal a Fractured World, p. 32



1. Does everything we have come from God? What about the things we have worked hard for?
2. How does this recognition, that all our material wealth is from God, change the way we live our lives?
3. How does *halacha* remind us of this?
4. What is the most accurate translation of the Hebrew word *tzedakah*?
5. If we truly owned our possessions and wealth then could *tzedakah* be enforceable by law? If not, why not?



The Dignity of Human Beings

a dignified life

The nearest English equivalent to *tzedakah* is the phrase that came into existence alongside the idea of a welfare state, namely social justice . . . behind both is the idea that no one should be without the basic requirements of existence, and that those who have more than they need must share some of that surplus with those who have less. This is fundamental to the kind of society the Israelites charged with creating, namely one in which everyone has a basic right to a dignified life and equal worth as citizens in the covenantal community under the sovereignty of God . . .

Ibid pp. 32–33

There is nothing inevitable or divinely willed about social and economic inequality. Judaism rejects the almost universal belief in antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages that hierarchy and divisions of class are written into the structure of society. What human beings have created, human beings can rectify.

It followed that everyone should be provided with the basic requirements of a dignified life. The sages inferred this from the biblical phrase, “be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs”. Needs included food, housing, basic furniture, and if necessary funds to pay for a wedding. To this end, each community organized *tzedakah* funds, contributions to which could be coerced by communal sanction.

Ibid, p. 36

Judaism represents a highly distinctive approach to the idea of equality, namely that it is best served not by equality of income or wealth, nor even of opportunity. Nor is it sufficient that we each have equal standing before God at times of prayer, and before the law in cases of dispute. A society must ensure equal dignity – the Hebrew phrase is *kavod habriyot*, “human honor” – to each of its members.

Ibid, p. 39



1. What is a “dignified life”? What is not a “dignified life”?
2. Do you need to be wealthy to have a dignified life?
3. Do you need justice to lead a dignified life?
4. The dignity of the recipient is a core value of giving *tzedakah*. How does this affect the way we perform the *mitzvah*?
5. Equality for a socialist means everyone has equal wealth. Equality for a democrat means everyone is equal under the law as citizens of a state. Equality for a feminist means equal opportunities for women and men. What does equality mean for a Jew?



Responsibility

Tzedakah is Judaism's way of saying that each of us has a part to play.



The ethic of responsibility structures Judaism's entire approach to the world. An obvious example is that biblical ethics is constructed in terms of responsibilities, not rights. Does this make a difference? Are rights not simply responsibilities seen from another point of view? "Thou shalt not murder" creates a right to life. "Thou shalt not steal" creates a right to property. The obligation to administer justice creates the right to a fair trial, and so on. That is true, but it omits one feature insufficiently alluded to in discussions of law.

Rights are passive, responsibilities active. Rights are demands we make on others, responsibilities are demands others make on us. A responsibility-based culture exists in the active mode. It emphasizes giving over receiving, doing not complaining. What is wrong with what Mary Ann Glendon calls "rights-talk" is that it draws on resources that only exist if we recognize responsibilities. It puts the cart before the horse. It neglects the moral commitments we need to create if rights are to be honored at all. Rights are the result of responsibilities; they are secondary, not primary. A society that does not train its citizens to be responsible will be one in which, too often, rights-talk will be mere rhetoric, honored in the breach not the observance...

To give and not receive, to act rather than be acted on, to be free and not dependent on other human beings, to be dependent on God alone: these are what give Judaism its distinctive tone of voice. That is what makes *tzedakah* something other than charity. It is not merely helping those in need. It is enabling the afflicted, where possible, to recover their capacity for independent action. Responsibility lies at the heart of human dignity.

Ibid, pp. 183–184

1. Why is it our responsibility to address injustice in our community and in society as a whole?
2. In the original text for this unit Rabbi Sacks writes that we can play a role that even governments cannot. How so?
3. What about God? Why isn't it His responsibility? Why can't we just pray for God to help instead?
4. What is the difference between a responsibility and a right?
5. Why is a society focused solely on human rights not enough? Why must society be focused on responsibility as well?



Tzedakah as a vehicle for our spiritual and moral growth

We become good by doing good. We walk in God's ways by acting out of love.



Justice-as-charity is a religious act, not merely a social one. We worship God not only in prayer, but also by how we act in the world. The nineteenth-century biblical commentator R. Zvi Hirsch Mecklenburg gave a striking interpretation of Bereishit 1. That chapter sets out creation as a series of stages in which God says, “Let there be . . .” and there is, and “God saw that it was good.” Mecklenburg notes that the word “that” in biblical Hebrew more often means “because”. God saw, not “that it was good” but “because He is good”. To be good is to do good. God created the world so that others could enjoy it. Goodness is not an attribute of the soul but a way of acting and creating: creating happiness for other people, mitigating their distress, removing even a fraction of the world's pain. We worship God spiritually by helping his creations physically. That is why, when the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed and the sacrifices came to an end, *tzedakah* became a substitute.

Ibid, p. 40

1. Why doesn't the Torah leave it to us to decide how to be a good person? Why does it need to tell us how?
2. Is love an emotion that can be commanded? Why does the Torah tell us how to show love?
3. Does acting like God bring us closer to God? How?
4. How is giving *tzedakah* a way of worshipping God?
5. How can helping our fellow man bring us closer to God?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class, and share your answers to the questions. Listen carefully to the perspectives of your classmates. Did anyone take a different approach to the text from you? Does their approach resonate with you?

The Assignment



Final Thoughts: In this unit we have explored the core values behind the *mitzvah* of *Tzedakah*.

1. **The ethics of materialism** – that our material wealth comes from God and does not really belong to us.
2. **Responsibility** – that every one of us has the responsibility to be a social activist and “heal our fractured world” by addressing injustice in society, including poverty.
3. **The dignity of human beings** – injustice, and poverty as an example of injustice, is a compromise on the dignity of the human being, and *tzedakah* should address that by protecting the dignity of every member of society.
4. ***Tzedakah* is a vehicle for our spiritual and moral growth** – we become good people, and can connect to God, through doing acts of kindness, and that is why the Torah requires us to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*.



Part 1: Design a *tzedakah* campaign for your school community. Working in small groups allocated by your teacher, create a proposal for a *tzedakah* campaign to help those in need in your community. Your design should reflect the four core values of *tzedakah* identified in this chapter.

Part 2: For bonus points, prepare a list of questions for Rabbi Sacks on any of the topics we have studied in this unit. Send your questions to your teacher, who will forward a number of insightful questions from the class to Rabbi Sacks. Rabbi Sacks will respond to a selection of the questions he receives for each unit from students around the world. Visit www.RabbiSacks.org/TenPaths to see his responses.



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