

TEN PATHS TO GOD


UNIT 5 – Student Guide / Entry 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.

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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. How does the belief that all humans are created in God's image affect the way we behave?
3. Why does the belief that all humans are created in God's image lead to human dignity and the protection of human rights?

tzedakah: love as justice

1. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks says *tzedakah* comes from love? Can we be commanded to love something? Why then is *tzedakah* commanded?
2. How can love lead to justice?
3. How does the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* protect the dignity of human beings and ensure 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 giving *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 create 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. Who do you think is more effective at addressing injustice from unequal wealth distribution, governments or individuals?

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 (governments collecting money from taxes and spending that money on 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 with 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

1. Is everything we have from God? What about the things we have worked hard for?
2. How does this understanding, that all our material wealth is from God, change the way we live our lives?
3. How does *halacha* help remind us of this?

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

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?

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 Beit HaMikdash, 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* do you think 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.

1. Why is it our responsibility to address injustice within our community, and in society as a whole?
2. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks believes that we can play a role that even governments cannot?
3. What about God? Why isn't it His responsibility? Why can't we just pray for God to help instead?

DO NOT BE HARD-HEARTED



וּ בְיָהִיָּה בֶן אֲבִיּוֹן מֵאַחַד אֶחָיו שְׁעָרֶיךָ בָּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תֵאֻמָּן
 ח אֶת־לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת־יְדֶיךָ מֵאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן: כִּי־פָתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יְדֶיךָ לוֹ וְהֶעֱבַט תַּעֲבִיטֵנוּ
 ט דֵּי מַחֲסֹו אֲשֶׁר יִחַסֵּר לוֹ: הַשְׁמֹר לְךָ פִּזְיָהִיָּה דְבַר עִם־לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל לֵאמֹר קִרְבָּה שְׁנַת־הַשְּׁבַע
 י שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה וְרָעָה עֵינֶיךָ בְּאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי וְהָיָה בְּךָ חַטָּא: נָתַן
 תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא־יִרָע לְבָבְךָ בְּתִתֵּן לוֹ כִּי בְגִלְלִי הַדְּבַר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־מַעֲשֶׁיךָ וּבְכָל־
 יא מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ: כִּי לֹא־יִחַדֵּל אֲבִיּוֹן מִקְרֹב הָאָרֶץ עַל־פִּנְ אֲנֹכִי מִצִּוְנְךָ לֵאמֹר פָּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יְדֶיךָ
 לְאֲחִיךָ לְעֵנֶיךָ וּלְאֲבִינֶךָ בָּאֶרֶץ:

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 לְגִמּוֹר



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.

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?

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 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 proposal 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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