

## Sample ISRAEL Tikkun Olam Activities

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Judaism is the only religion in which Tzedakah is not a once-in-a-while action, but instead is encouraged to be practiced every day. Jews are guided to give Tzedakah often, commit to Social Action regularly, as well as promote Tikkun Olam among other friends and families. Often it is difficult to involve youth group members in Social Action activities if the participants do not instantly see the effects of their actions. However, Maimonides' Eight Levels of Tzedakah stresses that although Tzedakah may affect the recipient on many different levels, ALL Tzedakah is important. It is strongly encouraged that you teach this value to your youth group so that they can understand that not every Social Action activity provides visible advances, and yet all forms of Tikkun Olam are acceptable, appreciated, and necessary.

EVERY LITTLE BIT COUNTS!

### TZEDAKAH:

An Explanation of Maimonides Eight Levels of Tzedakah as well how Tzedakah and Charity can utilized through modern day Judaism. This program might be used in whole or in part and could aid in introducing Tikkun Olam and Social Action to any sized youth group.

***(Appendix A)***

Once your youth group has had an introduction to Tikkun Olam and Social Action, be sure to give them more opportunities to commit to helping others. BY organizing events, lock-ins, programs, or drives your youth group will be able to aid the community or world through outreach activities. A specific interest that you should relay to your youth group is the need for support for Israel. As our Jewish Homeland, Israel is seen by many as the one Jewish place "Made by Jews, For Jews." Although it is common to have dissenting opinions about the land of Israel and its relationships with other Middle Eastern countries, there is one universal truth: We must support the IDEA of Israel being our homeland, whether or not you agree with ALL of it's policies and actions. If we move forward accepting this then programming possibilities are endless. Different programs can arouse different views and discussion between youth groupers as well as urge youth groupers to find some way to support a faction of Israel that they view as needy or of interest to them. Be it the Israeli soldiers, the poor, the homeless, the sick, or the elderly, anyone and everyone can find a way to support Israel through Tzedakah projects abroad.



### **HOLIDAY PROJECTS:**

Around the High Holidays is when most families remember and recognize the need to commit acts of Tikkun Olam and give charity. With Israel in mind, it would be beneficial to contact the Temple administrators to set up a **Food or Clothing Donation Program**. Since many Temple congregants are at Temple around this time of year, be sure to contact all of them through mailings about this unique charity opportunity. Explain that all donations would be sent to Israel to supplement those living in orphanages, those displaced by war or the poor and the homeless. Set up a donation time and place. Then, pass out paper bags so that donating canned foods or clothing is uncomplicated and accessible.

Along these same lines, hold a **Purim Carnival, Chanukah Party-Benefit, or Sukkot Harvest** in which all or most of the proceeds benefit an Israeli charity that is important to your youth group. You could sell *humantashens*, *latkes*, or pumpkins and gourds to raise money for that charity. Advertise the name of the charity and urge parents to bring their children so that they can have fun while raising money for Tzedakah to support Israeli Nonprofit and Philanthropic Organizations.

### **HERE IS A LIST OF JEWISH/ISRAELI CHARITIES YOU COULD SUPPORT:**

**MAZON-** <http://mazon.org/>

MAZON funds emergency food providers, food banks, multi-service organizations and advocacy groups both in Israel and abroad.

**TABLE TO TABLE-** <http://www.tabletotable.org.il/>

Table to Table is a food rescue organization dedicated to feeding the hungry of Israel. Table to Table harvests excess fresh food from caterers, cafeterias, manufacturers, grocers and farmers and delivers the food to soup kitchens, food pantries, senior citizen centers, homeless shelters and other places that serve those in need.

**MAGEN DAVID ADOM-** <http://www.afmda.org/site/PageServer>

Magen David Adom in Israel - the Red Star of David - is recognized by the State of Israel as its only first aid and disaster relief organization which operates according to the principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. American Friends of Magen David Adom-ARMDI (AFMDA/ARMDI) provides funding to Magen David Adom (MDA) in Israel for vital medical supplies, equipment, ambulances and paramedic and volunteer training.

**YAD LAKASHISH-** [www.lifeline.org.il](http://www.lifeline.org.il)

Yad LaKashish (Lifeline for the Old) is a non-profit organization that offers the needy elderly and disabled of Jerusalem the opportunity to remain an integral part of society. This legendary place in Jerusalem is devoted to restoring dignity to impoverished senior citizens. Yad LaKashish provides the aging population with a supportive professional and social environment in which they can utilize their skills and maintain a sense of self-sufficiency. All of the elderly workers at Yad LaKashish are treated with sensitivity, understanding, and respect.

Check out the DONATE button at [www.URJ.org](http://www.URJ.org) for more charities that Reform Judaism supports.

Also check out this website for more charity options that benefit Israel in its time of need.  
<http://www.25waystohelpisrael.com/>

#### **NOT ALL PROGRAMS HAVE TO BE JEWISHLY THEMED:**

Attempt projects that involve learning about a situation, and then promoting an answer or solution to the issue at hand. **Rallies, Drives, and Walks** are all good ways to promote Social Action positively and widely. Involve people from all age groups and religions to promote not only inter-generational and inter-religious communication but also to promote learning and advocating for issues in the Middle East that interest your community as a whole.

Outreach programs to Israel needn't be complicated or long. Once a month involves people more often, but annual events might bring in more participants. As stressed above, events, lock-ins, rallies, drives, and collecting many forms of donations all are appropriate and help to make a difference.

**Politically**, your youth group could write letters of concern to your senators and representatives stressing your views on an issue that strikes you are important. These should be well thought out, written with clarity, and should be supported with beliefs found within Judaism.

**REMEMBER:** It only takes 3 letters to a single senator to cause him to pay closer attention to an issue that is of interest and concern to his or her constituents.

### **NOW, DON'T FORGET!**

No project is too small nor any project too big! If you peers are interested in something, find a way to relate it to a Tzedakah project that involves people from many generations, families, and possibly other religions. Mahatma Ghandi declared that *"You Must Be the Change You Wish To See in the World."* In saying this he was revealing the fact that if you recognize that someone needs help or assistance, or that an issue is negatively affecting our world, then you must not ignore it, but go out and change it. You as a NFTY-ite have the power to create change and positively affect our world. Do not be afraid to step out on a limb and advocate for an issue you are passionate about. No one can prevent you from being that "change" that the world and Israel needs, especially in our modern day.

So SPEAK OUT, HELP OUT, and EDUCATE ABOUT!

*Appendix A*

**Program Title:** Jewish Values: Tzedakah

**Category:** Jewish Learning

**Author(s):** Daniel Zarfati, PVP, HOOCHY (Shaarei Beth El Congregation)

**Created for:** December 16, 2005

*Please Note: This program may be used "as-is," however; NFTYites are encouraged to "adapt" programs, combining their own elements of innovation with this preexisting program.*

**Touchstone Text:**

“Al sh'losha d'varim ha-olam omeid:  
Al ha-Torah, v'al ha-avodah  
v'al g'milut chasadim

The world stands on three things:  
On the Torah, on divine service and on deeds of loving kindness.”

-B'kol Echad

**Goals:**

1. To educate program participants about how Tzedakah is an important Jewish value.
2. To demonstrate to program participants that Tzedakah as a value has endured throughout all of Jewish history and that it will continue to into the future
3. To relate Tzedakah to Reform Jewish Movement in modern day, and the future
4. To educate program participants on the ways that reform Jewish charities make a difference in our world.

**Objectives:**

1. Program participants will learn about references to tzedakah in the Torah
2. Program participants will learn about Maimonides's 8 levels of charity
3. Program participants will watch the movie “Pay it Forward” and compare it to the Jewish value of tzedakah.
4. Program participants will learn about tzedakah in the Reform Jewish movement, its place in present and future.

**Materials:**

- Maimonides' Eight Levels of Tzedakah
- Copies of, "Tzedakah in the Reform Jewish Movement Today" (attached, 1 per event participant)
- Television
- Movie – Pay it Forward (this movie can be replaced with another movie that has to do with tzedakah.)

**People:**

Any number of event participants

One or two facilitator(s) for introduction, group discussion and wrap up

**Space Needed:**

One general area for everyone, television will be set up in this area.

**Time Table:**

00:00-00:05 – Trickle time

00:05-00:07 – Program Introduction

00:07-00:15 – Activity # 1: Read through "Maimonides' 8 levels of Tzedakah." Have a short discussion about it.

00:15-02:20 - Activity #2: Watch the movie "Pay it Forward"

02:20-02:45 - Discussion of Tzedakah in "Pay it Forward"

02:45-2:55 – Activity # 3: Read "Tzedakah in the Reform Jewish Movement Today"

2:55- 3:00 – wrap up

**Detailed Procedure:**

00:00-00:05 – Trickle time:

Allow everyone to trickle in and arrive to your event.

00:05-00:07 – Program Introduction:

Program Facilitator reads: "Tzedakah may seem like a simple concept, it is one of the first things we often learn about when we begin our Jewish journey. But what is tzedakah really and what makes it important to us as Jews in the Reform Jewish Movement? Tzedakah is one of the many important mitzvahs G-D commanded us to do. Tzedakah is mentioned many times throughout the Torah, for example in Deuteronomy 24: 19-22: "When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf [of wheat] in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow - in order that *Adonai* your G-d may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.....Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment." or "When there is among you a poor person, among your kin, in one of your cities, in your land which the Lord your God gives you, do not harden your heart, do not close your fist from your poor kin: Rather, you shall surely open your hand, and make him a loan, sufficient for his need, whatever he lacks" (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). In the Talmud it is said that "*Tzedakah is as important as all the other commandments put together.*" (Talmud *Baba Batra* 9a) Tzedakah is one of the three things that can grant your forgiveness for your sins during the Days of Awe. This concept of looking out for your fellow man, the homeless, orphans, widows or any other person in need has continued on into the present day and into the lives of Jews. Today we will be continuing this journey of Tzedakah and will learn about what Tzedakah really means to us, as a group and as individuals."

00:07-00:15 – Activity # 1: Read through "Maimonides' 8 levels of Tzedakah" - Have a short discussion about it.

Hand out and read through "Maimonides' 8 levels of Tzedakah" (attached) as a group, preferably in a circle.

Possible Discussion questions after reading:

Why do you think that Maimonides put those 8 concepts on the rung of the ladder in the order that he did?

Do you think that Maimonides forgot any important concepts or would you change the order that he placed the 8 concepts in?

Do Maimonides' concepts apply to Jews in the reform movement today, and will they apply to Jews in the Reform Movement in the future?

00:15-02:20 - Activity #2: Watch the movie "Pay it Forward"

(Please note that this movie can be replaced with a different movie if suitable for the event)

Program participants will watch the movie "Pay it Forward." Following is a synopsis of the movie:

"A young boy (Osment) is challenged by his teacher (Spacey) to make the world a better place. The boy comes up with the "pay it forward" concept, in which you do a good deed for someone, who then does a good deed for three other people, rather than "payback" the favor. The boy starts by taking in a homeless junkie, much to the surprise of his mother (Hunt)." Review by Tribute

[http://www.tribute.ca/synopsis.asp?m\\_id=1569](http://www.tribute.ca/synopsis.asp?m_id=1569)

Run time is 123 min.

02:20-02:40 - Discussion of Tzedakah in "Pay it Forward"

Possible discussion questions about the movie "Pay it Forward":

What level(s) of tzedakah from Maimonides' eight levels do characters in this movie do? How do we know this?

In what ways could this idea of "Pay it Forward" be improved or is it already perfect?

Would "Pay it Forward" work in the real world? Why? Why not? If someone told you about "pay it forward" after doing an act of Tzedakah for you would you pass it on? Why? Why not?

02:45-2:55 – Activity # 3: Read "Tzedakah in the Reform Jewish Movement Today"

Handout and read through "Tzedakah in the Reform Jewish Movement Today," (attached) as a group preferably in a circle.

Possible Discussion Questions after Reading:

Were you impressed by what the URJ is doing in the world or do you think that as North American Reform Jews should be doing more?

Do you feel that Tzedakah is important in your life? Why? Why not?

What do you see for tzedakah in the future of Reform Judaism?

Do you feel that the CCAR platforms mentioned express the place of tzedakah in Judaism well?

2:55- 3:00 – wrap up

Event facilitator says: "Thank you all for taking this journey with us. I hope that you have learned about something important and meaningful today. If each of us could do one act of Tzedakah to

one person in need we could change their lives forever, even small things could make a huge difference in someone's life."

## Maimonides' Eight Levels of Tzedakah

Moses Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, also called Rambam) was a physician, rabbi, and philosopher born in Spain in the 12 century. Maimonides is one of the most respected Jewish philosophers to date and his works are an important part of Jewish liturgy. Some of his works include the *Commentary on the Mishna*, *Sefer Mitzvot* ("The book of Commandments"), *The Guide for the Perplexed*, *Teshuvot*, and probably the most important of his works, *The Mishneh Torah*, which is a code of Jewish law. In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides compiled a list of different levels of tzedakah that outlines the degree of how charitable the act is. It goes as follows from lowest to highest degree.

1. Giving begrudgingly – The person giving the charity unwillingly and cruelly. They do not care about their fellow man, by giving begrudgingly the recipient feels worse than they did before they received the charity. This is the lowest rung of charity because the giver is not doing it out of the kindness only out of obligation. True tzedakah is given with a warm heart.
2. Giving less than you can afford, but giving it cheerfully – This is slightly higher on Maimonides' ladder because they are giving it with a smile. By showing understanding and empathy you make the recipient feel better than if you gave them the charity negatively.
3. Giving after being asked – You are giving the amount that you can afford to the recipient but they had to ask before you were willing to give them what they needed.
4. Giving before being asked – Asking for help is often of the most difficult things people do even when they are in dire need. By giving charity without being asked you show that you understand their situation and do not to be asked for the help needed.
5. Giving when you do not know the recipient's identity, but the recipient knows your identity – In the four lowest levels of tzedakah both the recipient and giver know each other. This creates a situation where the giver is superior to the recipient, the giver's ego is stoked and the recipient feels ashamed and inferior. When the recipient does not know the identity of the recipient they are humbled, however the recipient does not receive the burden of knowing who the donor was and their feelings are not spared.
6. Giving when you know the recipient's identity, but the recipient doesn't know your identity – This level of tzedakah is higher because the ego of the person giving charity is still being inflated by the recipient's dignity is spared for the most part.
7. Giving when neither party knows the other's identity – This is the second highest level of tzedakah. When both the recipient and donor of charity do not know each other. This does not create a superior – inferior bond between the giver and recipient but rather one of mutual understanding and respect.
8. Enabling the recipient to become self-reliant - This can be done by aiding someone in getting a job or set up a business with them. This is the highest level of charity because

it allows for the recipient to no longer require charity from others, and makes them able to give it, which is the greatest gift one can give. If you give a man a fish he will be fed for a day, if you teach the man how to fish he will be fed for life.

## Tzedakah in the Reform Jewish Movement Today

Tzedakah is still an important value in Judaism today. We as reform Jews should incorporate it into our daily lives. This value will never go away until every man, woman and child in the world has their essential needs. Those of us who are lucky enough to be able to give should do so either in your own community or around the world. The Union for Reform Jews (URJ) and the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) have several funds that you could donate to help those who are currently in need:

**“Southeast Asia Earthquake:** The Union for Reform Judaism is deeply concerned about the terrible devastation caused by the recent earthquake in Asia, as well as the mudslides in Central America caused by Hurricane Stan. We are working collaboratively with other members of the Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief to direct relief funds to our partner organizations that have field staff on the ground in those areas. If you wish to contribute to earthquake relief efforts in south Asia, please consider a contribution to either the [Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief](#), the [American Jewish World Service](#) or the [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#). In addition, for aid to Central America, please consider donating to American Jewish World Service.”

**“SOS New Orleans Relief Fund:** Out of the more than 2,000 families who belonged to four New Orleans-area synagogues before the hurricanes, 500 to 600 – between 25 and 35 percent – may not return. These congregations have faced enormous difficulty in trying to resume normal operations. Shabbat services, religious schools, and educational programs are up and running once again, but continuing this work without synagogue dues coming in will be extraordinarily difficult. The Union for Reform Judaism Hurricane Relief Fund has provided four months of general financial support for the congregations, but much more is needed.”

Other Grants Made by URJ:

[“Shefa Fund/Jewish Fund for Justice Hurricane Katrina Recovery and Redevelopment Fund - \\$60,000](#)

[Children’s Health Fund - \\$50,000](#)

[Houston Habitat for Humanity - \\$50,000](#)

[Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence \(LCADV\) - \\$50,000](#)

[AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth & Families - \\$30,000](#)

[Direct Relief International - \\$30,000](#)

[International Medical Corps - \\$30,000](#)

[Mercy Corps - \\$30,000](#)

[House of Hope/Casa de Esperanza de los Ninos - \\$20,000](#)

[Equality Mississippi - \\$10,000”](#)

For more information visit [www.urj.org/relief](http://www.urj.org/relief)



Over the past 120 years the Central Conference of American Rabbis (founded in 1889), which is the main organization of Reform Jewish rabbis in North America, has released several different platforms stating broad statements about the values and purpose of Reform Judaism. There have been several major platforms released since the CCAR was created and one was released before the CCAR was founded, though many of these platforms do not mention Tzedakah directly. Following are some excerpts of these platforms that mention Tzedakah or its essence.

#### Declaration of Principals – “The Pittsburgh Platform” 1885 (Prior to Founding of CCAR)

“In full accordance with the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, which strives to regulate the relations between rich and poor, we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.”

#### The Guiding Principals of Reform Judaism – “The Columbus Platform” 1937

“*Social justice.* Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs. It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish. It pleads for the safeguarding of childhood against exploitation. It champions the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property. Judaism emphasizes the duty of charity, and strives for a social order which will protect men against the material disabilities of old age, sickness and unemployment.”

#### A Statement of Principals for Reform Judaism- “The New Pittsburgh Platform” 1999

“We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God's creation. Partners with God in *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age. We seek dialogue and joint action with people of other faiths in the hope that together we can bring peace, freedom and justice to our world. We are obligated to pursue *tzedek*, justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger, to protect the earth's biodiversity and natural resources, and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice. We affirm the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, setting aside portions of our earnings and our time to provide for those in need. These acts bring us closer to fulfilling the prophetic call to translate the words of Torah into the works of our hands.”

Other CCAR documents that deal with Tzedakah are:



#### Commentary on the Principals of Reform Judaism – 2004

**“Tzedakah.** Literally translated as "justice," the word *tzedakah* reflects the Biblical belief that giving to the poor is a way to right the imbalance between the affluent and the poor. It suggests that *tzedakah* is not a favor to the poor but their due, since it is not human beings but God who owns all things, and human beings are God’s agents in ensuring an equitable distribution of God’s property to all people. "There shall be no poor among you," Deuteronomy (15:4) states, ruefully recognizing shortly thereafter (15:11) that because of a lack of human generosity, "the poor shall not cease from your midst." Can we do better?”