

ברית

**BRIT**  
partnership

*Nurture Community*

The Jewish approach includes forging relationships and communities— meaningfully connecting ourselves to others by agreeing to shared commitments.

SENSIBILITY CARD

# On One Foot: Brit (Partnership)

## IMPORTANT TEXTS

“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” — *Breishit (Genesis) 18:17-19*

“The wicked child — what does he say? “What is this service for you” — for you and not for him. Since he excluded himself from the nation, he has spoken heresy. You shall thus sharply condemn him and say to him, “It is because of what the Lord did for me when I left Egypt” — ‘for me’ and not for him; had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.” — *Passover Haggadah*

“If there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs.” — *Devarim (Deuteronomy) 15:7-8*



## The Implications

We will look at *Brit* in the context of:

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# Jews and Social Justice: A Covenant of Responsibility

This Activity is Great For



**Social Justice**



**Immersive Experiences**

• Alternative Break



**Identity & Relationships**

• Student Leaders



## Big Idea

As the children of Abraham, Jews have responsibility to “extend the boundaries of righteousness and justice in the world.”

### I. Beginning the Conversation

Ask students if they have ever heard of “code switching”, when we express ourselves differently depending on who we are with at the moment. As an example, show them the Key and Peele clip of code switching:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzprLDmdRlc>

NPR defines code switching in this way:

So you’re at work one day and you’re talking to your colleagues in that professional, polite, kind of buttoned-up voice that people use when they’re doing professional work stuff. Your mom or your friend or your partner calls on the phone and you answer. And without thinking, you start talking to them in an entirely different voice — still distinctly *your voice*, but a certain kind of your voice less suited for the office. You drop the g’s at the end of your verbs. Your previously undetectable accent — your easy Southern drawl or your sing-songy Caribbean lilt or your Spanish-inflected vowels or your New Yorker — is suddenly turned way, way up. You rush your mom or whomever off the phone in some less formal syntax (“Yo, I’mma holler at you later,”), hang up and get back to work. Then you look up and you see your co-workers looking at you and wondering who the hell you’d morphed into for the last few minutes. That right there? That’s what it means to code-switch.

Linguists would probably quibble with our definition. (The term arose in linguistics specifically to refer to mixing languages and speech patterns in conversation.) But we’re looking at code-switching a little more broadly: many of us subtly, reflexively change the way we express ourselves all the time. We’re hop-scotching between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities — sometimes within a single interaction.

Gene Denby, *How Code Switching Explains the World*,

<http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/04/08/176064688/how-code-switching-explains-the-world> (accessed August 21, 2016).



# TALK IT OUT

- How do you code switch in your own life?
- Do you code switch between home and college? Between the rest of college and Jewish life?
  - What are some of the words you use in your college life?
  - What are some of the words you use in your Jewish life?
  - If you do code switch, does it bother you?

If you are using this session before a social justice or service activity:

- As you are about to go on your service/social justice activity with Hillel, does it feel Jewish? Or does it feel like a student trip/activity that happens to be run by Jews?
- Which language do you speak when you do justice work: your college/universal code or your Jewish code?



## II. A Deeper Dive

Divide students into chavruta pairs and ask them to read the next two sources, and discuss the questions that follow.

**A. In the following excerpt from *Breishit* (Genesis), God tells Abraham that the cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* are about to be destroyed because of the great sins of their inhabitants.** Note in particular verse 19 when God explains why Abraham and his descendants have been chosen.

### *Breishit* (Genesis) 18:16-21

טז וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁקֹפוּ עַל פְּנֵי סְדֹם וְאַבְרָהָם הֵלֵךְ עִמָּם לִשְׁלָחָם.

**16** The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off.

יז וְה' אָמַר הַמְכֹסֶה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה.

**17** Now the Lord had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

יח וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִי־לִּי לְגֹוִי גָדוֹל וְעַצוֹם וְנִבְרַכְתִּי בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ.

**18** since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him?

יט כִּי יִדְעִיתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָגְהוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא ה' עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עֲלָיו.

**19** For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him."

**Breishit (Genesis) 18:16-21 (continued)**

כַּ וַיֹּאמֶר ה' זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וְעֹמֶרָה כִּי רָבָה  
וַחֲטֵאתֶם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד.

**20** Then the Lord said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!

כֹּא אֶרְדָּה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקוֹתֶהּ הַבָּאֵה אֵלַי  
עֲשׂוּ כָלָה וְאִם לֹא אֶדְעָהּ.

**21** I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note.” (Translation from <http://www.taggedtanakh.org/Chapter/Index/english-Gen-18.>)



**B. In this text, Rabbi Sid Schwarz looks at two main purposes of Judaism. The first purpose that he finds comes from God’s words to Abraham in Genesis Chapter 18.** Note how he translates verse 19 slightly differently.

**Rabbi Sid Schwarz, “Can Social Justice Save the American Jewish Soul?”:**

Based on my reading of Judaism, there are two compelling answers to the question, “What is the purpose of Judaism?”

The first purpose is based on Genesis 18, when God expands on an initial charge to Abraham to go forth from his land to the land that God will show him. In 18:19, God adds a critical prerequisite that will enable Abraham to fulfill his destiny and become the father of a great nation. He is to obey God’s commandments and “extend the boundaries of righteousness and justice in the world,” *la’asot tzedakah umishpat*.

The second purpose of Judaism is based on God’s revelation to Moses, which is recounted in Exodus 19:6. The Jewish people are told to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” a *mamlechet kohanim* and *goy kadosh*. The Hebrew word for holiness — *kedusha* — comes from a root that means separate and apart.

Judaism is a religion based on a paradox: Jews are expected to maintain a holy apartness as God’s chosen people and, at the same time, are expected to be totally engaged with the world around them. The observance of ritual laws must be combined with acting toward others with justice and compassion, to be loyal to God’s covenant with the Jewish people.

Rabbi Sid Schwarz, “Can Social Justice Save the American Jewish Soul?” **Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice**, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, [http://www.rabbisid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social\\_justice\\_save\\_american\\_jewry\\_soul.pdf](http://www.rabbisid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social_justice_save_american_jewry_soul.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2016)



# “ TALK IT OUT

- Rabbi Schwarz points to two purposes of the Jewish people: to spread righteousness and justice, and to be a holy nation. How have these two purposes of Judaism manifested in your own life?
- Do these two purposes seem opposed to each other? Could you think of a way that these two purposes could work together?

Reconvene the group and discuss the *chavruta* pairs' answers to these questions.



## III. Letter to Abraham

In preparation for your social justice activity or trip, ask students to write a letter to Abraham. They should answer the following two questions (handout included in Student Textsheets):

Dear Abraham,

1. When I am on this social justice trip/activity, I commit to following in your footsteps by . . .
2. After I complete this social justice trip/activity, I will continue to “extend the boundaries of righteousness and justice” by . . .

# Passover: Can I Be Jewish Without Community?

This Activity is Great For



## Holidays

- Pesach (Passover)



## Learning

- Beit Midrash



## Immersive Experiences

- Pre-Birthright Session



## Coffee Dates

## Big Idea

Jews are connected by a “covenant of fate” in which we affirm that we are interconnected and have responsibilities toward each other.

### I. Beginning the Conversation

Tell students to walk around the room. Each person should secretly choose two people and try to walk exactly in between both of them, without them knowing. Let students attempt this difficult feat for a few minutes, then reconvene the group. (This activity is taken from: <http://trainings.350.org/for/trainers/>)

## TALK IT OUT

- Was it difficult to stay in the group you chose?
- What groups do you consider yourself to be part of?
- Do you consider yourself to be part of the Jewish people? Is that an important part of how you identify yourself?



## II. A Deeper Dive

**A. At the Passover seder, we read about the four children. The wicked child asks a question that does not seem so bad: “What is this service to you?” and yet he is answered harshly:**

רָשָׁע מִה הוּא אוֹמֵר: מִה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם?  
לָכֶם וְלֹא לוֹ.

וּלְפִי שֶׁהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכָּלל כִּפְר בְּעֶקֶר.  
וְאִם אֵתָּה הַקִּהָה אֶת שְׁנֵי וְאָמַר-לוֹ  
בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם  
לִי וְלֹא לוֹ.

אֵלֹהֵי הָיָה שָׁם לֹא הָיָה נִגְאָל:

The wicked child — what does he say?  
“What is this service for you” — for you  
and not for him.

Since he excluded himself from the  
nation, he has spoken heresy. You shall  
thus sharply condemn him and say to  
him, “It is because of what the Lord did  
for me when I left Egypt” — “for me”  
and not for him; had he been there, he  
would not have been redeemed.

**Ask:** Do you think that this child should be called wicked based on her question? Is her question really so terrible?

**B. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains that the wicked child is understood in ancient texts as someone who had chosen to abandon his people — and it is this separation from the fate of other Jews that earns him the *Haggadah's* wrath. Rabbi Sacks explains:**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Bo (5768): *The Covenant of Fate*:**

Judaism is a communal faith. This is the “principle” that the rebellious child denies. Judaism is not addressed to individuals. Nor is it addressed to humanity as a whole. God chose a people, a nation, and asked them at Mount Sinai to pledge themselves, not only to Him but also to one another. *Emunah*, that key word of Judaism, usually translated as “faith,” more properly means loyalty — to God, but also to the people He has chosen as the carriers of His mission, the witnesses to His presence. To be sure, Jews are sometimes exasperating. Rashi, commenting on Moses’ charge to his successor Joshua, says that he told him: “Know that they [the people you are about to lead] are troublesome and contentious.” But he also told him: “You are fortunate for you will have the privilege of leading the children of God Himself.”

...

[A] Jew who does not say “You” when Jews or Israel are under attack, but “Me,” has made a fundamental affirmation — to be part of a people, sharing in its responsibilities, identifying with its hopes and fears, celebrations and griefs. That is the covenant of fate and it still summons us today.

(Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Bo (5768): *The Covenant of Fate*, <http://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5768-bo-the-covenant-of-fate/>)

**Ask:** How important do you think it is “to be part of a people, sharing in its responsibilities, identifying with its hopes and fears, celebrations and griefs”?

Take three pieces of paper. On one paper, write “Jew? Who Me?”, on another write “Jew-ish” and on the third write “Jewy Jew”. Place the “Jew? Who Me?” sign to the far left of the room or table, “Jew-ish” sign in the middle, and “Jewy Jew” sign to the far right. Tell students that these papers form a continuum of how connected one might feel to the Jewish people — from “Jew? Who Me?” to “Jewy Jew.” Remind students that you are not talking about ritual observance, but only how connected they feel to the Jewish people. Ask students to stand somewhere on the continuum that represents how connected they feel to the Jewish people.

Once students have chosen their spots, debrief their choices with them.





## OFF THE PAGE AND INTO LIFE

Invite students to call The Jewish Number, a phone hotline that connects you with Jewish people all over the world. They can dial 1-323-310-0622 to connect with a Jew in any participant country, or they can go to the website (<http://jewishnumber.com/>) and use the menu to find the direct extension number to call a specific country.



When on the phone, students should ask: What connects you to other Jews? Did you have a time in your life when you felt most connected to other Jews?

After about 5 minutes, ask students to finish their calls, reconvene and compare notes on the conversations that students have had.



# Tzedakah: How Many People Must I Save?

This Activity is Great For



## Social Justice

- Service Projects



## Learning

- Beit Midrash



## Immersive Experiences

- Alternative Break



## Big Ideas

- *Tzedakah* is different from charity; it is a religious and ethical obligation.
- The money that I have is not totally mine to use as I see fit — I have obligations with this money.

## I. Beginning the Conversation

The philosopher Peter Singer has developed a scenario, called “Child in the Pond” that challenges us to re-think our views about “charity” and the ethical use of our money. You may wish to read Singer’s article *The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle* (<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/199704--.htm>) to prepare for this segment of the session.

Ask students the following questions (These questions are adapted slightly from: <http://www.philosophyexperiments.com/singer/>) based on Singer’s scenario:

1. Your route to class takes you past a shallow pond. One morning you notice that a small child has fallen in and appears to be in difficulty in the water. The child is crying in distress and it seems is at risk of drowning. You are tall and strong, so you can easily wade in and pull the child out. However, although you’ll come to no physical harm if you rescue the child, you will get your clothes wet and muddy, which means you’ll have to go home to change, and likely you’ll be late for class. In this situation, do you have a moral obligation to rescue the child?
2. Okay, now suppose that there are other people walking past who would equally be able to rescue the child but are not doing so. Does the fact that they are not doing what ought to be done mean that you’re no longer obligated to save the child?
3. Let’s imagine that there is some uncertainty attached to the situation. You know you’re not going to come to any harm if you attempt the rescue, but you *can’t be sure* that your efforts will make any difference to how things turn out. This is partly for the counterfactual reason that if you don’t intervene, then it is possible that somebody else will do so, thereby bringing about the same result (i.e., the rescue of the child from the pond); and it is partly because it is possible that by the time you reach the child, it will already be too late.

It is important to be clear about the precise situation here. You have *good reason* to suppose that your intervention will bring about a better outcome than would otherwise be the case, but you *can’t be sure about it*. The question is —





does this element of uncertainty mean you're no longer obliged to go ahead with the rescue attempt?

4. Now consider another variation on the basic scenario. It so happens that you cycle to work, and the pond is located in a park where you know a gang of bicycle thieves operates. You don't have time to lock up your bike, and you know that if you leave it, even briefly, to rescue the child, there's a good chance that it'll be stolen. It's a battered old bike, it doesn't hold any particular sentimental value to you, and you can easily replace it. Does the possibility your bike will be stolen while you're saving the child mean you're no longer obliged to go ahead with the rescue?
5. Now let's imagine that this is not the first time you've come across a child struggling in an expanse of water and seemingly at risk of drowning. In fact, only last week on your way home from work you heard cries as you passed by a local reservoir and when you investigated, you found that a young boy had fallen in and was struggling to drag himself out. Happily, he was quite near to dry land, so you were able to reach into the water and pull him out, albeit you did ruin your work shirt in the process.

Does the fact you saved a child's life last week mean you're not obliged to go ahead with the rescue this week?

6. We have one final question based on this scenario. Would it make any difference if the child were far away, in another country perhaps, but similarly in danger of death, and equally within your means to save, at no great cost — and absolutely no danger — to yourself?

#### Note to Facilitator:

Presumably, most or all of the students have answered until now that they would save the drowning child, even if they missed class or had their bike stolen, if other people could possibly help, and even if they had already saved other children last week. They may have also answered that it makes no difference if the child is in another country.

Ask them: If you believe that you are obligated to save the drowning child, despite the costs, then what is your obligation to the children around the world who are dying and could be helped by your donations? Are you obligated to help them?

Specifically:

- If it costs \$10 to buy a mosquito net for a family in Africa to protect them from malaria, do you have an obligation to do so?
- How many nets do you have to buy?
- Are you obligated to take the money you were going to use to buy a new shirt or see a movie, and send the money to a charity to save someone instead?

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Singer writes: "In a society in which the narrow pursuit of material self-interest is the norm, the shift to an ethical stance is more radical than many people realize. In comparison with the needs of people going short of food in Rwanda, the desire to sample the wines of Australia's best vineyards pales into insignificance. An ethical approach to life does not forbid having fun or enjoying food and wine; but it changes our sense of priorities. The effort and expense put into fashion, the endless search for more and more refined gastronomic pleasures, the added expense that marks out the luxury-car market — all these become disproportionate to people who can shift perspective long enough to put themselves in the position of others affected by their actions. If the circle of ethics really does expand, and a higher ethical consciousness spreads, it will fundamentally change the society in which we live." <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/199704---.htm>



## II. A Deeper Dive

Brit

Let's look and see how Judaism answers these questions.

Divide students into groups, and give them the following 5 sources. Ask them to keep in mind the questions we had raised before, about a person's obligation to buy malaria nets or otherwise use their money to save lives.

Ask them to specifically think about the following questions as they read the sources:

- (1) According to Jewish law and thought, how much *tzedakah* do you think one should give?
- (2) Would these Jewish texts agree with Singer? Do they have a different rationale for why to give *tzedakah*?



### 1. *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 15:7-8, 10-11

ז כי יהיה בך אביון באחד אחיך באחד שעריך בארצה אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפץ את ידך מאחרי האביון.

7 If there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman.

ח כי-פתח תפתח את ידך לו והעבט תעביטנו די מחסרו אשר יחסר לו. . .

8 Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. . .

י נתון תתן לו ולא ירע ללבבך בתתך לו כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך ה' אלקיך בכל מעשך ובכל משלח ידך.

10 Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Lord your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings.

יא כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ על כן אנכי מצוך לאמר פתח תפתח את ידך לאחריך לעניך ולאביוןך בארצה.

11 For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

(Translation adapted from: <http://www.taggedtanakh.org/Chapter/Index/english-Deut-15.>)

### 2. George Robinson, *Tzedakah in the Jewish Tradition*, MyJewishLearning

(<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tzedakah-in-the-jewish-tradition/> (accessed August 17, 2016):

*Tzedakah* is loosely translated as "charity," but that is a misrepresentation of the concept. The Hebrew has its root in another word, *tzedek*/justice. In the Torah, we are strongly enjoined, "Tzedek, tzedek tirdof/Justice, justice thou shalt pursue." Rabbinical commentators have said that the repetition of the word justice is designed to underline the importance of the command. *Tzedakah* is not charity given out of caritas, in the Christian understanding of those words; it is given as an act of redress, as part of the process of seeking a just world.



### 3. Maimonides, *Hilchot Matnot Aniyim*, Chapter 10, *Halachot 1-2*

**א** חייבין אנו להיזהר במצות צדקה, יתר מכל מצוות עשה-שהצדקה סימן לצדיקי זרע אברהם אבינו, שנאמר "כי ידעתיו, למען אשר יצווה . . ." (בראשית יח, ט). ואין כיסא ישראל מתכונן ודת האמת עומדת אלא בצדקה, שנאמר "בצדקה, תיכונני" (ישעיהו נד, יד); ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בזכות הצדקה, שנאמר "ציון, במשפט תיפדה; ושביה, בצדקה" (ישעיהו א, כז).

**ב** ולעולם אין אדם מעני מן הצדקה, ואין דבר רע ולא היזק נגלל בשביל הצדקה  
- שנאמר "והיה מעשה הצדקה, שלום" (ישעיהו לב, ז).

**1** We are obligated to be careful with regard to the mitzvah of *tzedakah* to a greater extent than all [other] positive commandments, because *tzedakah* is an identifying mark for a righteous person, a descendant of Abraham, our patriarch, as [Genesis 18:19] states: "I have known him, because he commands his children... to perform charity." The throne of Israel will not be established, nor will the true faith stand except through charity, as [Isaiah 54:14] states: "You shall be established through righteousness." And Israel will be redeemed solely through charity, as [ibid. 1:27] states: "Zion will be redeemed through judgment and those who return to her through charity."

**2** A person will never become impoverished from giving charity. No harm nor damage will ever be caused because of charity, (Rabbi Sid Schwarz, "Can Social Justice Save the American Jewish Soul?" *Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice*, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, [http://www.rabbiid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social\\_justice\\_save\\_american\\_jewry\\_soul.pdf](http://www.rabbiid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social_justice_save_american_jewry_soul.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2016) as [ibid. 32:17] states: "And the deed of charity is peace." (Translation adapted from: [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/986711/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-10.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/986711/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-10.htm).)



#### 4. Rambam *Hilchot Matnot Aniyim* Chapter 7, *Halachot* 1,5

**א** מצות עשה ליתן צדקה לעניים כפי מה שראוי לעני אם היתה יד הנותן משגת שנאמר פתוח תפתח את ירך לו ונאמר והחזקת בו גר ותושב וחי עמך ונאמר וחי אחריך עמך:

**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. ולעולם אל ימנע אדם עצמו משלישית השקל בשנה; וכל הנותן פחות מזה, לא קיים מצוה. ואפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה, חייב ליתן צדקה לאחר.

**1** It is a positive commandment to give *tzedakah* to the poor according to what is appropriate for the poor person if this is within the financial capacity of the donor, as [Deuteronomy 15:5] states: "You shall certainly open your hand to him." [Leviticus 25:35] states: "You shall support him, a stranger and a resident and they shall live with you," and [Ibid.:36] states: "And your brother shall live with you."

**5** When a poor person comes and asks for his needs to be met and the giver does not have the financial capacity, he should give him according to his financial capacity. How much? The most desirable way of performing the *mitzvah* is to give one fifth of one's financial resources. Giving one tenth is an ordinary measure. Giving less [than that] reflects parsimony... Even a poor person who derives his livelihood from charity is obligated to give charity to another person. (Translation adapted from: [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/986708/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-7.htm#footnote14a986708](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/986708/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-7.htm#footnote14a986708).)



#### 5. *Derech Eretz Zuta*, 1:29

אם הטיבות הרבה, יהי בעיניך מעט, ואמור לא משלי הטיבותי אלא ממה שהטיבו לי.

If you did someone a great favor, regard it as small, and say, 'I did not do this good act with my own money; rather it was from the good that others have done for me.'

Reconvene the group and discuss what they have learned from the texts about *tzedakah*.

## OFF THE PAGE AND INTO LIFE

Give out index cards and ask students to write one specific thing they will do as a result of this discussion this week. If they will not do anything different, they should write "nothing" and explain why. Let them know you will read these out loud.

- Collect the index cards and read the answers out loud.
- Remind students to follow through on their answers over the next week.

# Just for Hillel Professionals: Service Trips

This Activity is Great For



**Just for Hillel  
Professionals**



## I. Beginning the Conversation

Use these questions to incorporate some of the lessons of *Brit* into your service trips:

1. What is your goal for this service trip?

- To bring students into Hillel?
- To bring students to ritual observance?
- To help students feel connected to a community?
- To give another perspective on Judaism?
- What other goals do you have?

2. It has been said in the Jewish world: “You can’t build Jewish identity on the backs of poor people.” How would you respond in terms of your service trip?

3. How will you continue the experience of service and Judaism when students return from the trip?

4. What is your ideal Jewish community? How does it blend the Jewish obligation of service and the obligation of holiness?



# Textsheets for Students

On the next pages, you'll find just the texts mentioned in each of the sections of this curriculum, without the facilitator's guide. Use these sheets if you would like to make copies of the texts for students, while keeping the facilitator's notes just for you!



## Jews and Social Justice: A Covenant of Responsibility

**A. In the following excerpt from *Breishit* (Genesis), God tells Abraham that the cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* are about to be destroyed because of the great sins of their inhabitants.** Note in particular verse 19 when God explains why Abraham and his descendants have been chosen.

### *Breishit* (Genesis) 18:16-21

**טז** וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁקְפוּ עַל פְּנֵי סֹדֹם וְאַבְרָהָם הֵלךְ עִמָּם לִשְׁלֹחַם.

**16** The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off.

**יז** וְה' אָמַר הַמְכֹסֶה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה.

**17** Now the Lord had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

**יח** וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעֲצוּם וַיְבָרְכוּ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ.

**18** since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him?

**יט** כִּי יִדְעֲתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָגָה ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא ה' עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו.

**19** For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him."

**כ** וַיֹּאמֶר ה' זַעֲקַת סֹדֹם וְעַמָּהָ כִּי רַבָּה וַחֲטָאתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד.

**20** Then the Lord said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!

**כא** אֲרִדָּה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָה הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ כָּלָה וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעָה.

**21** I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note."  
(Translation from <http://www.taggedtanakh.org/Chapter/Index/english-Gen-18.>)



## Jews and Social Justice: A Covenant of Responsibility (continued)

**B. In this text, Rabbi Sid Schwarz looks at two main purposes of Judaism. The first purpose that he finds comes from God's words to Abraham in Genesis Chapter 18.** Note how he translates verse 19 slightly differently.

**Rabbi Sid Schwarz, "Can Social Justice Save the American Jewish Soul?":**

Based on my reading of Judaism, there are two compelling answers to the question, "What is the purpose of Judaism?"

The first purpose is based on Genesis 18, when God expands on an initial charge to Abraham to go forth from his land to the land that God will show him. In 18:19, God adds a critical prerequisite that will enable Abraham to fulfill his destiny and become the father of a great nation. He is to obey God's commandments and "extend the boundaries of righteousness and justice in the world," *la'asot tzedakah umishpat*.

The second purpose of Judaism is based on God's revelation to Moses, which is recounted in Exodus 19:6. The Jewish people are told to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," a *mamlechet kohanim and goy kadosh*. The Hebrew word for holiness — *kedusha* — comes from a root that means separate and apart.

Judaism is a religion based on a paradox: Jews are expected to maintain a holy apartness as God's chosen people and, at the same time, are expected to be totally engaged with the world around them. The observance of ritual laws must be combined with acting toward others with justice and compassion, to be loyal to God's covenant with the Jewish people.

Rabbi Sid Schwarz, "Can Social Justice Save the American Jewish Soul?" **Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice**, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, [http://www.rabbisid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social\\_justice\\_save\\_american\\_jewry\\_soul.pdf](http://www.rabbisid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social_justice_save_american_jewry_soul.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2016)



## Jews and Social Justice: A Covenant of Responsibility (continued)



### “ TALK IT OUT

- Rabbi Schwarz points to two purposes of the Jewish people: to spread righteousness and justice, and to be a holy nation. How have these two purposes of Judaism manifested in your own life?
- Do these two purposes seem opposed to each other? Could you think of a way that these two purposes could work together?

Reconvene the group and discuss the *chavruta* pairs' answers to these questions.

### III. Letter to Abraham

In preparation for your social justice activity or trip, ask students to write a letter to Abraham. They should answer the following two questions (handout included in Student Handouts):

Dear Abraham,

1. When I am on this social justice trip/activity, I commit to following in your footsteps by . . .
2. After I complete this social justice trip/activity, I will continue to “extend the boundaries of righteousness and justice” by . . .

## Passover: Can I Be Jewish Without Community?

**A. At the Passover seder, we read about the four children. The wicked child asks a question that does not seem so bad: “What is this service to you?” and yet he is answered harshly:**

רָשָׁע מַה הוּא אוֹמֵר: מַה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם?  
לָכֶם וְלֹא לּוֹ.

וְלִפִּי שְׁהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכָּלָל כְּפֹר בְּעֵקֶר.  
וְאִם אֵתָהּ הִקְהֵה אֶת שְׁנֵי וְאָמַר-לוֹ  
בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם  
לִי וְלֹא לּוֹ.

אֵלֹהֵי הָיָה שָׁם לֹא הָיָה נִגְאָל:

The wicked child — what does he say?  
“What is this service for you” — for you  
and not for him.

Since he excluded himself from the  
nation, he has spoken heresy. You shall  
thus sharply condemn him and say to  
him, “It is because of what the Lord did  
for me when I left Egypt” — “for me”  
and not for him; had he been there, he  
would not have been redeemed.

**B. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains that the wicked child is understood in ancient texts as someone who had chosen to abandon his people — and it is this separation from the fate of other Jews that earns him the *Haggadah's* wrath. Rabbi Sacks explains:**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Bo (5768): *The Covenant of Fate*:**

Judaism is a communal faith. This is the “principle” that the rebellious child denies. Judaism is not addressed to individuals. Nor is it addressed to humanity as a whole. God chose a people, a nation, and asked them at Mount Sinai to pledge themselves, not only to Him but also to one another. *Emunah*, that key word of Judaism, usually translated as “faith,” more properly means loyalty — to God, but also to the people He has chosen as the carriers of His mission, the witnesses to His presence. To be sure, Jews are sometimes exasperating. Rashi, commenting on Moses’ charge to his successor Joshua, says that he told him: “Know that they [the people you are about to lead] are troublesome and contentious.” But he also told him: “You are fortunate for you will have the privilege of leading the children of God Himself.”

...

[A] Jew who does not say “You” when Jews or Israel are under attack, but “Me,” has made a fundamental affirmation — to be part of a people, sharing in its responsibilities, identifying with its hopes and fears, celebrations and griefs. That is the covenant of fate and it still summons us today.

(Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Bo (5768): *The Covenant of Fate*, <http://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5768-bo-the-covenant-of-fate/>)



## Tzedakah: How Many People Must I Save?

### 1. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 15:7-8, 10-11

**ז** כִּי יְהִי בְךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאֶחָד אַחֶיךָ בְּאֶחָד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֶחֶיךָ הָאֶבְיוֹן.

**ח** כִּי-פָתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֵעֵבֵט תַּעֲבִיטֵנוּ דִּי מִחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסַר לוֹ. . .

**י** נָתַתָּה נִתְּנָה לוֹ וְלֹא יֵרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתַתָּהּ לוֹ כִּי בְגִלְלֵי הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכֹל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ.

**יא** כִּי לֹא יִחְדַּל אֶבְיוֹן מִקְרֵב הָאָרֶץ עַל כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ לֵאמֹר פָּתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לְאֶחֶיךָ לְעֵנֶיךָ וְלֵאבְיוֹנְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ.

**7** If there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman.

**8** Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs . . .

**10** Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Lord your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings.

**11** For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

(Translation adapted from: <http://www.taggedtanakh.org/Chapter/Index/english-Deut-15>.)

### 2. George Robinson, Tzedakah in the Jewish Tradition, MyJewishLearning

(<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tzedakah-in-the-jewish-tradition/> (accessed August 17, 2016):

*Tzedakah* is loosely translated as "charity," but that is a misrepresentation of the concept. The Hebrew has its root in another word, *tzedek/justice*. In the Torah, we are strongly enjoined, "*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof/Justice, justice thou shalt pursue.*" Rabbinical commentators have said that the repetition of the word justice is designed to underline the importance of the command. *Tzedakah* is not charity given out of *caritas*, in the Christian understanding of those words; it is given as an act of redress, as part of the process of seeking a just world.



## Tzedakah: How Many People Must I Save? (continued)

### 3. Maimonides, *Hilchot Matnot Aniyim*, Chapter 10, *Halachot* 1-2

**א** חייבין אנו להיזהר במצות צדקה, יתר מכל מצוות עשה-שהצדקה סימן לצדיקי זרע אברהם אבינו, שנאמר "כי ידעתיו, למען אשר יצווה . . ." (בראשית יח, ט). ואין כיסא ישראל מתכונן ודת האמת עומדת אלא בצדקה, שנאמר "בצדקה, תיכונני" (ישעיהו נד, יד); ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בזכות הצדקה, שנאמר "ציון, במשפט תיפדה; ושביה, בצדקה" (ישעיהו א, כז).

**ב** ולעולם אין אדם מעני מן הצדקה, ואין דבר רע ולא היזק נגלל בשביל הצדקה – שנאמר "והיה מעשה הצדקה, שלום" (ישעיהו לב, ז).

**1** We are obligated to be careful with regard to the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* to a greater extent than all [other] positive commandments, because *tzedakah* is an identifying mark for a righteous person, a descendant of Abraham, our patriarch, as [Genesis 18:19] states: "I have known him, because he commands his children... to perform charity." The throne of Israel will not be established, nor will the true faith stand except through charity, as [Isaiah 54:14] states: "You shall be established through righteousness." And Israel will be redeemed solely through charity, as [ibid. 1:27] states: "Zion will be redeemed through judgment and those who return to her through charity."

**2** A person will never become impoverished from giving charity. No harm nor damage will ever be caused because of charity, (Rabbi Sid Schwarz, "Can Social Justice Save the American Jewish Soul?")

***Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice***, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, [http://www.rabbisid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social\\_justice\\_save\\_american\\_jewry\\_soul.pdf](http://www.rabbisid.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/social_justice_save_american_jewry_soul.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2016) as [ibid. 32:17] states: "And the deed of charity is peace." (Translation adapted from: [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/986711/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-10.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/986711/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-10.htm).)



## Tzedakah: How Many People Must I Save? (continued)

### 4. Rambam *Hilchot Matnot Aniyim* Chapter 7, *Halachot* 1,5

**א** מצות עשה ליתן צדקה לעניים כפי מה שראוי לעני אם היתה יד הנותן משגת שנאמר פתוח תפתח את ירך לו ונאמר והחזקת בו גר ותושב וחי עמך ונאמר וחי אחריך עמך:

**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. ולעולם אל ימנע אדם עצמו משלישית השקל בשנה; וכל הנותן פחות מזה, לא קיים מצוה. ואפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה, חייב ליתן צדקה לאחר.

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**5** When a poor person comes and asks for his needs to be met and the giver does not have the financial capacity, he should give him according to his financial capacity. How much? The most desirable way of performing the *mitzvah* is to give one fifth of one's financial resources. Giving one tenth is an ordinary measure. Giving less [than that] reflects parsimony... Even a poor person who derives his livelihood from charity is obligated to give charity to another person. (Translation adapted from: [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/986708/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-7.htm#footnote14a986708](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/986708/jewish/Matnot-Aniyim-Chapter-7.htm#footnote14a986708).)

### 5. *Derech Eretz Zuta*, 1:29

אם הטיבות הרבה, יהי בעיניך מעט, ואמור לא משלי הטיבותי אלא ממה שהטיבו לי.

If you did someone a great favor, regard it as small, and say, 'I did not do this good act with my own money; rather it was from the good that others have done for me.'

