

# ACCORDING TO OUR ABILITY

## HOW MUCH SHOULD WE GIVE?

### FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

#### NAME TAGS:

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Please ask everyone in the group to wear a name tag. Even if most people know one another, it is important that no one feel uncomfortable for not remembering everyone else's name.

#### INTRODUCTION AND ICE-BREAKER:

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Have everyone give their name, and say one word that comes to mind when they hear the word "charity."

#### BIG QUESTION FOR THIS SESSION: "HOW MUCH SHOULD WE GIVE?"

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In modern society, charitable giving is voluntary. Therefore it is up to each individual or family to determine how much they will give in *zedakah*. This session will examine both modern ethical norms and traditional Jewish texts to consider the extent of our obligation to those in need.

#### OPENING ACTIVITY:

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**For this activity, you will need space for participants to walk around and arrange themselves in a line.** Attached, you will find a sheet entitled "Give 'til it hurts?," which lists statements about charitable giving, and then asks participants to agree or disagree. Before the session begins, clear a space to allow for people to move, and post the "Agree" and "Disagree" signs on opposite ends of the space.

- (1) Tell participants that you will be reading a number of statements about giving. You may wish to note that these statements do not necessarily reflect your own views. After each one is read, participants should arrange themselves along a continuum between the "Agree" and "Disagree" signs, depending on whether they strongly agree, somewhat agree, disagree, strongly disagree, etc. In other words, on a scale of 1-10 of agreement, 1 being completely disagree, and 10 being completely agree, where would they place themselves?

[If you do not have space to walk around, or if participants are limited in their mobility, you may have people note their agreement or disagreement on a piece of paper and then debrief, but the exercise is much more powerful if people are moving.]

- (2) After each question, when participants have claimed their spot, allow a moment for the group to see who is standing where, and then move to the next statement.
- (3) Once all the statements have been read, you may wish to ask questions such as:
  - a. What similarities did you notice in the group?
  - b. What questions provoked strongly divergent answers?
  - c. Did anyone regularly find themselves in the minority?
  - d. What is the effect of seeing how you measure up against a larger group? Did you find that you were tempted to follow the crowd?

## “JEWISH VOICES”

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Attached is a text-study sheet entitled “Jewish Voices: According to Our Ability” that you may use to facilitate a discussion about the extent of our obligation to offer financial assistance to those in need.

Here are some things to consider:

- (a) It is customary to recite a blessing before studying Torah.

**BARUCH** atah, Adonai  
Eloheinu, Melech haolam,  
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ  
וְצִוֵּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

**BLESSED ARE YOU**, Adonai our God,  
Sovereign of the universe,  
who hallows us with mitzvot,  
commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

- (b) Our tradition teaches us that Torah study can be a source of healing and blessing. You may want to ask members of the group if they would like to dedicate their study to anyone in particular. This is a nice way to help the group get to know one another, and to learn about significant events in each other’s lives.
- (c) Depending on the preferences of your group, you may choose to distribute this sheet the week before the meeting, so that participants will be familiar with the texts, and can begin to think about their own responses.
- (d) You can choose to either work through the texts as one group, or to break up into pairs (“hevruta”) for an initial period of discussion, and then allow the pairs to share something they learned with the group.
- (e) The ultimate goal of these groups is not for participants to master a particular number of Jewish texts, but to connect with one another. If group members are sharing their own stories and experiences in a way that seems fruitful, there is no need to cut off that conversation in order to make sure you “finish” the text sheet. If you are unsure, you can always poll the group to decide whether it is time to move on.

## CONCLUSION

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We recommend that you wind down the text study about 15 minutes before the end of the session, to allow for a meaningful conclusion. This conclusion may take any shape you wish. Some possibilities are:

- (a) Ask each person to name one insight they have gained, or one question that they are taking with them.  
(b) Ask each person to offer a blessing to the group, drawn from your learning together.  
(c) Ask each person to say one word to represent how they are feeling coming out of your discussion.

# Give 'til it hurts?

## EXAMINING OUR PRIORITIES AROUND CHARITABLE GIVING

Please read each of the following statements, and then have participants arrange themselves on a continuum of strong agreement to strong disagreement:

- (1) How much a person chooses to give to charity is a private decision.
- (2) It is wrong to give a significant portion of your income to charity if it means that you will not be able to pay for college for your children.
- (3) I would be uncomfortable having my friends know how much I give to charity every year.
- (4) I would give up everyday luxuries (like coffee from Starbucks or manicures) if I really *knew* that I could use the extra money to save lives.
- (5) I think I give about the same amount of money to charity as most people in my income bracket.
- (6) It would make me uncomfortable for a rabbi to preach about how much we are obligated to give to charity.
- (7) It is wrong to send your children to private school unless you are also able to donate a significant portion of your income to charity.
- (8) I feel guilty spending money on a vacation for myself when I could be donating the money to the poor.
- (9) I would be willing to sign a public pledge to donate a certain amount of my income to charity.
- (10) I think religious leaders have an obligation to speak up about our obligation to give to the poor.
- (11) I could probably give more money to charity if I wanted to.
- (12) I would be willing to move into a smaller apartment if I really *knew* that I could use the extra money to save lives.
- (13) It is wrong for people who are struggling financially to tithe to religious institutions.
- (14) I think about how much I give to charity as a Jewish question.
- (15) The wealthy should give a higher percentage of their income to the poor than those in the middle class.

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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- a. What similarities did you notice in the group's answers?
- b. What questions provoked strongly divergent answers?
- c. Did anyone regularly find themselves in the minority?
- d. What is the effect of seeing how you measure up against a larger group? Did you find that you were tempted to follow the crowd?
- e. What surprised you?