

**1 + 1 = 3**

And

37 Other Mitzvah Principles

For a Meaningful Life

By

**DANNY SIEGEL**

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FOR MARK HYMAN  
רבי בחכמה ואלופי בדרך ארץ  
My TORAH TEACHER  
AND  
Guide in THE WAYS of MENSCHLICHKEIT

נפשי קשורה בנפשו  
Good FRIEND

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## INTRODUCTION

Tzedakah is not about giving;  
Tzedakah is about being.

*Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson*

This book is all about **תיקון עולם**—Tikkun Olam, Fixing the World. It is about doing good, and, hopefully through doing good, becoming good people. The Shabbat prayerbook expresses this theme in a phrase from the Zohar (2:206) **אנא פקידא בגו צדיקיא**—“Allow us [O Holy One] to be counted among The Good People.”

I believe that Fixing the World is easier to do than is generally perceived. It isn't necessarily *easy*, but it *is* easier than most people would think. I want this to be an eminently practical book. I think it will work for individuals, for teachers and students, for parents and children, for activists, as well as for those who have not yet been challenged by the battle for The Good and The Just and The Right.  $1 + 1 = 3$  has one basic purpose: to make it easier to change the world. It should allow us to focus better on our **מצוה**—Mitzvah capabilities. In turn, it will change *us*, reinforcing in ourselves the sense that we are able to far surpass any Tikkun Olam goals we may have set for ourselves in the past.

Hopefully, it will also nourish our sense of vision. The late Shraga Arian, **ש"ר** — my teacher, the teacher's teacher, and educator's educator — addressed this all-important topic of vision in a most eloquent passage:

*My favorite pastime was daydreaming...I am standing with a large group of people looking out toward the horizon. Everyone is saying that it can't be done; that we can never reach the far-off mountains. I step out of the crowd and announce that it can be done; that I am now going to walk toward the mountains and take with me those who are unafraid and undaunted. I turn my back to the crowd and with head held high, I walk toward the mountains. Twenty or thirty clear-eyed young men and women break out of the crowd; they beg me to take them with me. I say nothing; together we walk toward the horizon as the group behind us stares at us in awe and wonder....*

*The other day, when my young son remarked that he might become a meteorologist when he grows up, I said to him, “Good, you'll make me very proud. Then there will be two of us looking up at the stars.”*

Or, to quote Leland Kaisee, “Don't predict the future. Create it.”

Since January, 1975, when I stumbled into the world of צדקה-Tzedakah and מצות-Mitzvah work, the accumulated mass of human encounters, Life-experiences, and new Jewish texts I learned from a multitude of teachers grew at an astonishing pace. Newspaper and magazine articles that I found — and that friends, students, and strangers sent me — now number in the thousands. I have viewed dozens of Mitzvah videos.

Over the past 25 years, patterns have emerged, and I realized that if I organized them into obvious Mitzvah categories, it would become easier to change the world. I have even included passages and ideas from some of my previous books that fit well into the context of the present volume. At times, the writing may sound catchy or cutesy. I do that in order to make it easier to remember the principles of Tikkun Olam.

As you read the book, I recommend that you think of two-way arrows:  $\leftrightarrow$ , Principles on one side of the arrows, Life on the other. The Principles and Life interplay in both directions: (1) If we know the principles, we may more readily recognize a particular Principle as it operates in real life, and, (2) reversing direction, we will see a Life-situation and then relate it to a Principle that will make it easier to solve that specific Tikkun Olam problem. Of course, many Tikkun Olam encounters fall into more than one category.

This volume works best when used with some of my other books: *Heroes and Miracle Workers* and *Munbaz*, both of which tell the stories of many of the Mitzvah heroes, *Good People*, which among other things, has many useful Jewish quotes, *Where Heaven and Earth Touch*, a source for even more Talmudic and Midrashic material, and *Tell Me a Mitzvah*, which offers children both tales of the Mitzvah heroes and practical Mitzvah projects. It also works exceptionally well with *The Ziv Giraffe Curriculum* for schools.

I have appended a copy of my list of Mitzvah phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and websites so that the reader may directly contact many of the people described in the book. Ultimately, I hope that the reader will create his or her own principles and phone sheet, tailor-made to that individual's specific dreams and needs.

One final note: The order of articles in this book is governed by a principle which someone once noticed on a T-shirt: *First Things First, But Not Necessarily in That Order.*

## Duh!

This principle has proven to be the most common one in my entire list. (Simply add the word Duh! at the end of each example:)

1. Everyone should have food, clothing, and shelter.
2. Everyone should have access to affordable health care.
3. No one anywhere — neither child nor adult — should die of dehydration, dysentery, or *any* easily-preventable threat to life.
4. No human being should go without shoes that fit, Menschlich shoes.

5. Elders in nursing homes have wishes and dreams. We should ask residents what those dreams are, and make them come true. Duh! That's exactly what an organization called Second Wind Dreams does in more than 300 nursing homes.

6. A study conducted in nursing homes reached the following conclusion: Elders who have plants to care for and nurture live longer than those who don't have plants. An additional significant factor in that study: when they divided the residents into two groups, one group was told that they were free to choose *how* to care for the plants, while the other group was told that the plants would be cared for entirely by the staff. Let's get more life-saving plants into nursing homes and let's let the Elders themselves care for them, as they should have been caring for them all along. (Duh!) Let's hand over freedom, choice, and responsibility to the people to whom it rightfully belongs. (Duh!) "Acquired helplessness" is a familiar term in psychological circles. Let's do away with this plague and re-empower our Elders.

7. Adult emotions in hospitals can range from loneliness to fright and utter boredom. That's why chaplains, clowns, and sports heroes come to visit. Recently, my friend, Gary Gondos, was in the hospital and among the visitors were members of the Washington Redskins team as well as the cheerleaders, the Redskinettes. According to Gary, the visit certainly hastened his recovery.

8. Children experience the same boredom, stress, and fear in hospitals — but to a much greater extent than adults. So Connie Nether-ton, first officer of a United Airlines A320 jet, founded Pilots for Kids. Particularly in December, pilots in the Chicago area make the rounds of children's wards in local hospitals. Imagine: right by their bedside, the men and women who fly the big jets!...and all it took was this one person, Connie Nether-ton, to make it happen.

***Duh!***



## Wow! → Duh!

When I describe grand Tikkun Olam to others, I often hear half-words and an assortment of exclamations: Wow! (the most common sound), Ah!, Oh!, Oh my!, Oy!, Ugh!, Feh! (a Yiddish word expressing extreme disgust), or sometimes a sigh or simple gasp. The Wow! → Duh! principle simply states: *Through the power of Tikkun Olam, that which is astonishingly radical can become the common rule.* In retrospect, all of it makes sense; this is the way things should be, most certainly can be.

1. David Levitt's Bar Mitzvah Project: urging public schools to donate leftover food from the cafeteria. First his own county's school system agreed, and ultimately the entire state has joined the effort. (More than 600,000 pounds of food in the first three years.) Why not every state?

2. John Beltzer and friends have written more than 1,300 individual personalized songs for children with life-threatening diseases. His program is called "Songs of Love". Why doesn't every child in such a catastrophic situation have his or her own song?

3. An organization called Casting for Recovery organizes retreats where they teach women who have had breast cancer surgery how to fly fish. It is wonderful and appropriate exercise, and provides a means to get away and talk in a sheltered, comfortable environment.

4. Naomi Berman-Potash's Project Debby finds hotels that have unoccupied rooms which may be used to provide safe haven for victims of domestic violence.

5. A most extraordinary project called "Dying with Dignity" illustrates the Wow! → Duh! principle exceptionally well. One aspect of the program is "Five Wishes", an eight-page document that a person may fill out long before dying seems a possibility. Part of the third wish states:

*I wish to have warm baths often...to be kept fresh and clean at all times....I wish to have personal care like shaving, nail clipping, hair brushing and teeth brushing, as long as they do not cause me pain or discomfort.*

*I wish to have a cool moist cloth put on my head if I have a fever.*

*I wish to have religious readings and poems read aloud when I am near death.*

A section of the fourth wish states:

*I wish to have pictures of my loved ones in my room, near my bed....I wish to be cared for with kindness and cheerfulness, not sadness.*

*I wish to have my hand held and to be talked to when possible, even if I don't seem to respond....*

This document, or a similar one written in the same spirit, should be made available to everyone. In retrospect, it is such an obvious and necessary part of Life.

6. In Albemarle, NC, the residents of Stanly Manor Nursing Home regularly party with members of the local Harley-Davidson biker club. (Think of the postcards and e-mails to friends: "Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here!")

7. Synagogues distribute balloons to their deaf members on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, so they can grip the sides and feel the vibrations when the Shofar is sounded.

8. Why don't hospitals keep a supply of hearing aid batteries on hand? If a patient's battery wears down, he or she might not respond properly to questions or could miss some critical instructions for their present and future recovery.

9. A photography teacher gets a request from blind people to teach them how to use a camera. At first glance, this doesn't make any sense. Among the reasons for the request: People ask them out on dates — they want to know what they look like. Photography for blind students....Why not?

10. Petting a cat or a dog can relieve stress. My student and teacher, Samantha Abeel, suggests that such common pets be made available to students at exam time (or any other time when they get stressed out). Why not?

11. Joe Lejman of Gas City, IN, dressed in a tuxedo, borrowed fine china and crystal, and served as a butler for a day in a shelter for battered women. To quote Lejman, "The ladies have such low self-esteem. Some of them have never felt special for any reason. During the course of the day, I was serving one of the clients coffee, and then lighted her cigarette, and she started crying. She said, 'This is the first time I could ever cry because someone's been so nice to me.'"

12. Voice mail for homeless people — to help them find work. A free service provided by Chris Petty of Littleton, CO.

13. All those people who did a stint in the Peace Corps and VISTA back in the Sixties....They were wowed, for sure, about how much of a difference they could make in the lives of other people. When they came home, if you asked them, "Did you make a difference?" the response would have been clearly, "Duh!" (Now we should commission a study to see how much those experiences play a part in their lives *today*: how much are they presently involved in active Tikkun Olam

work and in their commitment to protest against All Things Wrong in the World?)

14. Once upon a time on Wall Street, a young clerk misplaced \$900,000,000. He knew exactly where he had put it, but it was the wrong place. His immediate problem was how to correct the situation. The young man's boss, known as "a screamer", had ruled her division of the corporation by intimidation and fear. So, understandably afraid to admit the error, the clerk began to move the money over several days — \$50,000,000 at a time — to the appropriate account. The problem was: the flow of money crossed into the next calendar month. Government regulators discovered the irregularity and reported it to my friend, Marc Sternfeld, the young man's boss's boss's boss. Sternfeld fired the woman and kept the young clerk on the job. His reasoning, *the clerk* had made an honest (if rather enormous) mistake. *His arrogant boss* was the flaw in the system.

15. A teen-ager arranges for leftovers from a bagel shop to be taken regularly to the waiting room outside the intensive care unit at the hospital...for all those people who need a pleasant diversion and bit of nourishment amid the horrible stress.

16. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, Brown v. Board of Education, 1954 (desegregating the public schools), The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996, (providing liability protection for donors of food to non-profit organizations feeding hungry people), laws eliminating sex discrimination, and various child-labor laws — all thought to be radical when introduced into law, but now the norm.

17. At one point in his career, Abraham Maslow, א"ר, the eminent psychologist, turned away from the study of pathological phenomena in the human personality and, instead, devoted years of research to investigating what makes people *good* human beings.

Let us not dwell on the embarrassment or dismay that these breakthroughs were not made long, long ago. Instead, let us place our creative and emotional energy into making more Tikkun Olam a matter of routine sooner, before it is too late or much too late.

***Wow! → Duh!***

## 3 PRONGS

How to fix the world?

Here are the 3 prongs which, in combination, work best:

1. Meeting Mitzvah heroes.

2. Seeking out and learning Jewish texts about Tikkun Olam-Fixing the World.

3. Doing it.

**#1:** The Mitzvah heroes are our teachers. We learn best by watching them at their work, listening to their teaching and even their commonplace conversation. Over 20 years ago, Hadassah Levi gathered more than 40 infants with Down Syndrome who had been abandoned in the hospitals and raised them to young adulthood. She knows things that nobody else in the world knows. She has much to teach us.

**#2:** Jewish texts give us a thousands-years-long connection to our roots. We are performing Mitzvahs as our ancestors have done for centuries before us, and as others are doing simultaneously around the world. Jewish texts often give us a different perspective on Fixing the World than the general, secular, or humanitarian society does. We need to live in both of these worlds, so that they can better interact with each other. One well-known text (Mishnah Sanhedrin, end of Chapter 4) is worthy of remembering throughout our lives. It is a fundamental motivating force for all our attempts to bring about Tikkun Olam.

וכל המקום נפש אחת...

מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו קים עולם מלא...

Our Jewish sources teach that whoever saves a single life —  
it is as if that person had saved an entire world.

**#3:** In the final analysis, we cannot “talk” Tikkun Olam, we have to *do* it. We get a sense of its power and wonders when it brings together all human elements: body, mind, heart, and soul.

All three elements — texts, heroes, and the doing — interact with each other, sometimes more intensely, sometimes less so. Sometimes one or two of the three is the most prominent element.

Three prongs — just like the prongs of a fork, which enable us to enjoy our food, or, a pitchfork used for hard labor in the fields. Some have likened this concept to a braid, such as in a Challah or a Havdalah candle, interwoven and blending together. The important thing is that *all three elements* are essential.

## THE 4 QUESTIONS

לא ישתמש אדם בפניו ידיו ורגליו אלא לכבוד קונו  
One should only use one's face, hands, and feet  
to honor one's Creator.

*(Tosefta Brachot 4:1)*

### ***The Question We Need to Ask***

#### ***Before We Ask the Four Questions***

What are the other person's needs?

*Then, and only then,* should we ask the Four Questions.

### ***The Four Questions (+ 1)***

1. What am I good at?
2. What do I like to do?
3. What bothers me so much about what is wrong in the world that I weep or scream in anger and frustration, or am speechless at the horror of it?
4. Whom do I know?
5. Why not?

Answers to #1 may include: caring, hugging, holding the hand of those who are critically ill, driving for hours on end, being able to get along on only a few hours sleep for five days in a row, being a good friend in time of crisis, and bringing presents to others at the perfect moment when they are most needed. Do not exclude from your list certain personality traits: Hugh Kaufman, one of my old Hebrew High School friends, remembered for his loud (and sometimes "overly enthusiastic") manner, grew up to be a gadfly and whistleblower in the Environmental Protection Agency. His persistent protests, particularly concerning the clean-up of toxic waste dumps, has alleviated great suffering and saved many lives.

Answering #2 forces us to search and re-search our past and present lives. For myself, I like to be with, play with, and enjoy domestic pets. That may mean that I might want to take a brief Sabbatical in order to work in some area of Tikkun Olam that involves pets, people, and happiness. I also remember from my past how much I enjoyed playing baseball with my brother, Stan, particularly as the sun began to set and dusk made it more difficult to trace the ball's arc against the sky. Surely I could harness that enjoyable memory and connect it to Mitzvahs that could then provide a similar pleasant feeling for others. Another

example: recalling their teen-age years, many of my friends yearn for a few moments as pleasant as Shabbat at a convention or camp, particularly the hours of song and deep friendship. Those were simple, pure, sweet moments, and that simple, pure joy can be brought to others.

#3. “What bothers you?” Do the struggles of new immigrants to Israel trying to adjust frustrate you? The thought of domestic violence? Perhaps the idea of children falling behind in school for lack of food for breakfast or lunch (or both) angers you? Drugs wiping out our youth? The fact that not enough people are willing to part with enough of their money to make the world a more Menschlich place? Consider the sheer malevolence of one 31-year-old-man in New Jersey who invented the “Melissa” virus that wreaked havoc on e-mail systems around the world. What motivates a person to be so destructive, to so clearly do the exact opposite of Tikkun Olam? Was it a feeling that this was a game? Was it the weak excuse, often heard — just to see if it could be done? Simple bullying? *This* particular story really disturbs me...it so violates the classic principle *primum non nocere* — “Above and beyond all else, do no harm.”

Whatever we identify that outrages us, we can now take that anger, frustration, and sometimes tears, and turn them into something positive...Tikkun Olam. It is there, deep in our gut — we can now use that energy to make a difference.

#4. The classic example of “Whom do I know?": In the 1980's there was a famine in Ethiopia; the media brought the horrors all-too-graphically to the public's attention. Bob Geldof, leader of the (well-known, but not superstar) rock group, The Boomtown Rats, organized Live Aid on July 13, 1985, a 16-hour marathon concert designed to raise money for the starving Ethiopians. Experts estimated that the worldwide satellite hook-up brought the British concert to 1,500,000,000 people (that's 1.5 billion people) in 100 different countries. After *Live Aid*, there was *Band Aid* in the United States, another mammoth concert. The money raised came to \$100,000,000. How did it happen? In Geldof's own simple words, “I decided to utilize my abilities to help. *I knew people. I thought I could do something to help...*” [Italics mine.]

#5, “Why Not?” is generally the easiest of all: almost always the answer is, “There's no real reason why not. So, let's do it.”

*Now* — list your own answers, pick a piece of Tikkun Olam, and go do it.

## OCCUPATION: MITZVAHS

Living is not a private affair of the individual.  
Living is what man does with God's time,  
what man does with God's world.

*(Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, ל"ר)*

Why would anyone take a serious cut in salary, leave a comfortable job, and go into full-time mitzvah work?

Because they then experience the *12-Ziv*, the exceptional Radiance of doing Mitzvahs.

Because they become students of The Great Ones, The Awesome Teachers, day in and day out.

Because they feel good about themselves.

Because they feel positive that the world is getting to be a better, more Menschlich place.

Because they love living simultaneously in the worldly fray of human endeavor and the Upper Worlds of the Sublime and the Ineffable.

And because "living" becomes "Living" with a capital "L".

A Jewish text articulates this idea beautifully:

פְּתַחוּ־לִי שַׁעַר־צְדָקָה  
לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא אֲמָרוּ לוֹ לְאָדָם מָה הִיא מְלֹאכְתְּךָ  
וְהוּא אֹמֵר מֵאֲכִיל רַעֲבִים הִייתִי  
וְהֵם יֹאמְרוּ לוֹ זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֵה, מֵאֲכִיל רַעֲבִים הִכְנַס בְּךָ  
מִשְׁקָה צְמֵאִים הִייתִי  
וְהֵם אֹמְרִים לוֹ זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֵה, מִשְׁקָה צְמֵאִים הִכְנַס בְּךָ  
מִלְּבִישׁ עֲרוּמִים הִייתִי  
וְהֵם אֹמְרִים לוֹ זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לֵה מִלְּבִישׁ עֲרוּמִים הִכְנַס בְּךָ  
וְכֵן מִגְדֵּל יְתוּמִים וְכֵן עוֹשֵׂי צְדָקָה וְכֵן גּוֹמְלֵי חֲסָדִים

"Open the Gates of Righteousness [Justice, Victory] for me,..."

[At the Time of Judgment] in the Future World,

everyone will be asked, "What was your occupation?"

If the person answers, "I used to feed hungry people,"

they will say to that person,

"This is God's gate, you, who fed hungry people, may enter." ...

"I used to give water to thirsty people,"

they will say to that person, "This is God's gate, you, who gave water to those who were thirsty, may enter." ...

"I used to give clothing to those who needed clothing,"

they will say to that person, “This is God’s gate, you, who gave clothing to those who needed clothing, may enter.”... and, similarly, those who raised orphans, and who performed the Mitzvah of Tzedakah, and who performed acts of caring, loving kindness. (Psalms 118:19, Midrash on Psalms, 118:17)

So, no matter how that person earns a living, everyone’s personal bio should include entries such as: 1. Life-saver 2. Dignity-restorer 3. Everyday-miracle-worker 4. Mitzvah-magician 5. Hope-giver 6. Dream-weaver 7. Star-gazer 8. Solution-maker 9. Tool-user-for-Mitzvahs 10. Soul-repairer 11. Broken-body-fixer 12. Mitzvah-power-hungry-person 13. Creator-of-radiance.

Apparently, the *Occupation: Mitzvahs* phenomenon is playing itself out in some Rabbinical schools. First-year classes have many students who are clearly not right out of college. There are some in their 30’s and 40’s and 50’s, most on their second careers, a few already on their third. Obviously they had done some very serious thinking, looked deeply within themselves, and asked what *really* was important in their lives. They were uncomfortable in their present jobs and began to feel that their True Life’s Work lay somewhere else. Then they acted on it.

I call this process *עיקר*-Ikkar and *טפל*-Tafel. These terms originate in Jewish law’s system of *ברכות*-Brachot-blessings for various foods. For example: a tuna sandwich. Bread — the staff of life — is the *עיקר*-Ikkar, the predominant element, and the tuna is *טפל*-Tafel, secondary to the bread. So the blessing to be recited is the one for bread, *המוציא*-HaMotzi, and the tuna is “covered”.

In a way, these older Rabbinical students went through a serious evaluation of the Ikkar and Tafel, and concluded that they needed to make a bold move. (A common term in modern Hebrew is *עיקר העיקרים*-Ikkar HaIkkarim, i.e., the absolutely most important thing under consideration.) The older students had truly found the *עיקר העיקרים* of their own lives.

Where the more personal and human addendum to the biographical “facts” of one’s life may lead, depends on the individual. It may lead to a change of occupation or possibly a minor, medium, or major re-ordering of priorities in that individual’s personal Life of Mitzvahs. In all instances, with the appropriate faith, it will surely be all for the good.



## OUR SELVES

What we want to change we curse and then pick up a tool.  
Bless whatever you can with eyes and hands and tongue.  
If you can't bless it, get ready to make it new.

*(Marge Piercy, poet)*

We are defined by what we do, not by what we say or think. A well-known Jewish teaching expresses this concept beautifully:

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר"  
כל שמעשיו מרובין מחכמתו. למה הוא דומה.  
לאילן שענפיו מועטין ושרשיו מרובין.  
שאפילו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו  
אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says...To what may we compare a person whose deeds exceed his or her wisdom? To a tree that has few branches, but many roots. Even if the mightiest winds in the world blow, they will not move it from its place. (*Pirke Avot, Chapter 3*)

While Torah study often leads to engaging in serious acts of Tikkun Olam, Torah-knowledge without Mitzvahs, is insufficient. There are many Jewish sources on this topic. One statement in the Midrash is particularly graphic.:

אלישע בן אבוייה...היה אומר...  
ואדם שאין בו מע"ט ולמד תורה הרבה  
דומה לסוס שאין לו רסן לבלום  
כיון שאדם רוצה לרוכבו זורקו בבת אחת.

Elisha ben Abuya used to say:...a person who has no good deeds — though the person has learned a great amount of Torah — is like a horse with no bridle to restrain it. The minute anyone tries to ride it, the horse throws the rider. (*Avot DeRabbi Natan, Chapter 24*)

My own particular understanding, then, of the common Talmudic phrase *לשמה תורה*-Torah Lishmah-Torah for its own sake is: Torah-for-the-sake-of-Tikkun Olam.

Jewish tradition asserts that we “find ourselves” through the process of doing Mitzvahs. Our “self” is in the doing. To use a '60's phrase, that is how we “get it together”. Life is meaningful because of our deeds, and we are the stronger for our efforts to make the world a better place.

## David Copperfield

דרש ר, שמלאי  
תורה תחלתה גמילות חסדים וסופה גמילות חסדים

Rabbi Simla'i explained in a sermon:  
The Torah begins and ends with acts of caring, loving kindness.  
(Sotah 14a)

The meaning of man's life lies in his perfecting the universe. He has to distinguish...and redeem the sparks of holiness scattered throughout the darkness of the world.  
(Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, ז"ר)

From [www.dccopperfield.com/modc/bio3.html](http://www.dccopperfield.com/modc/bio3.html), David Copperfield's website:

...for all his accomplishments, David Copperfield insists that his greatest work to date is Project Magic. He developed this rehabilitative program over a decade ago to strengthen dexterity and motor use in disabled patients by using simple sleight-of-hand magic. As Copperfield explains, "It motivates a patient's therapy and helps to build self esteem." What I like the most, though, is his statement, "*There is nothing I do that is more important.*" [My Italics.] Project Magic is currently being used in 1,000 hospitals in 30 countries around the world, from Belgium to New Zealand, Iceland to Singapore.

**The Copperfield Principle: No matter what we "do" as an occupation, we should remember that there is nothing more important than our Mitzvah work.**

I would add that, while Copperfield's talents are awesome, we *all* have absolutely unique talents. No one else in the world can do what we can do. So a corollary to The Copperfield Principle would be: **We should use our absolutely unique talents to fix the world the way absolutely nobody else can fix it.** In some situations this involves our professions, but it can also include our avocations, and even our ostensibly peripheral interests. As a consequence, we should pursue training in all areas that will expand our capabilities and horizons and allow us to use our talents and skills even more for Tikkun Olam.

## DIGNITY - כְּבוֹד - Kavod

Maybe I'm a fool, but I believe that dignity wins out.  
When it doesn't, then we as a people become extinct.  
(Roy Stryker, *The Depression Photography Project*)

Three things in human life are important:  
The first is to be kind.  
The second is to be kind.  
And the third is to be kind.

(Henry James)

For 15 years I thought the single most important term in the world of Tikkun Olam was צְדָקָה - Tzedakah. After innumerable discussions with others, I understood that Tzedakah is really a sub-category of כְּבוֹד - Kavod-Dignity.

The Talmudic sage, Ben Azzai, explains the source of human dignity:

וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעִי כְּמוֹךָ  
רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר זֶה כָּלֵל גְּדוֹל בְּתוֹרָה  
בֶּן עֲזַאי אוֹמֵר זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת אָדָם זֶה כָּלֵל גְּדוֹל מִזֶּה  
“Love your neighbor as yourself,” (Leviticus 19:18) —  
Rabbi Akiva says,  
“This is the all-encompassing Torah-principle.”  
Ben Azzai says,  
“This is the story of humanity:  
[When God created the first human being,  
He created that person in the likeness of God]’ (Genesis 5:1)  
is an even greater principle.” (*Sifra, Kedoshim, on Leviticus 19:18*)

Another text, equally striking further clarifies:

כִּי מִלֵּאכֵי יִצְוֶה לְךָ לְשֹׁמְרֵךְ בְּכָל־דְּרֹכֶיךָ  
אָמַר ה', יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לׁוֹי בִּשְׁעַת שֶׁאָדָם הוֹלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ  
אִיקוֹנֵי אֱלֹהִים מֵהַלְכִין לִפְנֵי וּמְכַרְזִין וְאוֹמְרִים  
תְּנוּ מָקוֹם לְאִיקוֹנֵי אֱלֹהִים שֶׁל הַקָּב"ה  
וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר  
כִּי מִלֵּאכֵי יִצְוֶה לְךָ לְשֹׁמְרֵךְ בְּכָל דְּרֹכֶיךָ

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said:  
 An entourage of angels always walks in front of people,  
 with messengers calling out.  
 And what do they say?  
 “Make way for the image of the Holy One!”  
 As the verse says,  
 “For God has instructed the angels to guard you wherever you go.”  
 (*Midrash Psalms 17:8, Psalm 91:11*)

Everyone is made in God’s image. This endows every human being with **כבוד**-Dignity. Acts of Tzedakah and Tikkun Olam are meant to bring out every person’s **כבוד**-Dignity.

In Brachot, page 19a, the Talmud states this very succinctly: **גדול כבוד הבריות**, which I translate two different ways:

1. Descriptively: The **כבוד**-Dignity of God’s creatures is very great.
2. Emphatically: How very great is the **כבוד**-Dignity of God’s creatures!

The first translation states an existential fact, the second — how awesome Life truly is. Being aware of, and awed by, human dignity should lead us to a crucial point of departure and a prime motivating force in all our Mitzvah work. This is why I am so confused when I hear so many Tales of Exclusion in the field of education. Admittedly, I have a personal interest in this issue, because of the differences in my own ability to learn. I am dismayed every time I hear of students who have no more a disability than a simple stutter and still suffer ridicule from their teachers and classmates and are — in this, the year 2000 — still considered stupid! And, as if that were not enough, the stories I hear extend to university and graduate school levels where the professors seem to have forgotten the **כבוד**-Dignity of the student. So, too, my sadness, when I hear of people who learn differently and have been cut off from the stream of so-called “normal” education. A poignant example — a young woman in her 20’s handed me the following note after one of my lectures:

*I cried during your speech. When you said you had a teacher who knew you didn’t understand. And helped you. All my teachers always knew.*

*All were idle in helping me. I’m glad for you; it always makes me feel sad no one ever saw enough in me.*

And these should be the easy-to-remedy situations.

***To be is to be-with-dignity.***

## THE STARFISH

*Someone is strolling along the beach and sees hundreds of starfish that have been washed ashore. As he is walking, he sees a child picking one of them up and throwing it back in the water. The adult says to the child, "Why are you doing this? There are hundreds of starfish on the beach. What difference does this make?" The child replies, "It makes a difference to that one!"*

Many of us have read this popular story on the Internet. Sometimes, it is just an undefined "someone" strolling and "someone" else putting the starfish back in the water. Other versions say it is an adult and a child; still other versions have an interesting twist — a teacher asks the child "What difference does it make?"

A story from Jewish tradition expresses the very same idea:

אמרו רבותינו  
כשהיה מרע"ה רועה צאנו של יתרו במדבר  
ברח ממנו גדי ורץ אחריו עד שהגיע לחסית  
כיון שהגיע לחסית  
נודמנה לו בריכה של מים ועמד הגדי לשתות  
כיון שהגיע משה אצלו אמר  
אני לא הייתי יודע שרץ היית מפני צמא עיף אתה  
הרכיבו על כתיפו והיה מהלך  
אמר הקב"ה יש לך רחמים לנהוג צאנו של בשר ודם  
כך חיך אתה תרעה צאני ישראל

Our teachers have said:

Once, while Moses, our Teacher, was tending [his father-in-law] Yitro's flocks, one of the kids ran away. Moses ran after it until he reached a small, shaded place. There, it came across a pool and began to drink. As Moses approached it, he said, "I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. You are so exhausted!" He then put it on his shoulders and carried him back.

The Holy One said, "Since you tend the flocks of human beings with such overwhelming love — by your life, I swear you shall be the shepherd of My Own flock, Israel." (*Exodus Rabba* 2:2)

By definition, since every human being is made in God's Image, everyone, every one, every single human being is valuable. "Usefulness to society" is not a valid criterion. There is a certain arrogance to those who maintain that the mover-and-shaker, the orchestra conductor, or

research geneticist is of greater importance than the cashier at TJ Maxx, the taxi driver, the UPS person, or the custodian at the synagogue. God chose Moses because Moses cared about every single individual in the flock.

In the world of Jewish tradition, *no one* gets left out.

By extension and possible analogy, a curious section of Jewish law hints at this. The background: for certain prayers to be recited, a minimum of 10 adults must be present. This quorum is called a מנין-Minyan. In the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), section Orach Chaim, 55:6, it states:

או שהוא ישן אפילו הכי מצטרף עמהם

*“...if one of them is asleep, even so, that person is counted.”*

Some commentators disagree, but the plain text says that, even asleep, the person is part of the Minyan.

I have discussed this with several people over the past few months, and their interpretations vary: (1) That there are many people in society who are, as it were, “asleep”, unaware, or unresponsive...of their own volition or involuntarily. They are most certainly part of our community; (2) Perhaps the sound of the prayers themselves will awaken the person. Stories are legion about people in comas waking up from the most likely to the least likely stimuli...a piece of music, petting a dog, a familiar smell, a touch or stroke on the arm. It is all very mysterious, and, while not everyone is capable of “waking up”, certainly many more are than we might initially assume; (3) Medical personnel in operating rooms are ever-more-aware of how much an anesthetized person can hear and remember. While the person may not visually or aurally respond, clearly the person is definitely absorbing the words.

To summarize: (1) Everyone who is alive is part of the community, and (2) We can never know how little or how much or what in particular will “wake someone up”.

A story: My Mother, זכרונה לברכה, was in the hospital for about a month. Though she was unresponsive, I remember many occasions when her cardiologist, Dr. Warren Levy, יגדל לחיים — May he live a long, happy, and full life! — came in, and before examining her, would whisper into her ear, “Now, Edythe, I am going to check....” It was so gentle, so very, very moving. It was the perfect human touch.

## No "Us" AND "Them"

A very powerful Jewish text states:

לפיכך נברא אדם יחיד' ללמדך'...  
ומפני שלום הבריות'  
שלא יאמר אדם לחברו אבא גדול מאבך.  
...ולא יגיד גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא'  
שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד וכולן דומין זה לזה'  
ומלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא  
טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון  
ואין אחד מהן דומה לחברו.

[At the time of Creation]

only one human being was created  
in order to teach us...that — for the sake of peace —  
no one should say to another person,  
“My ancestor was greater than your ancestor.”....  
And in order to emphasize the greatness of the Holy One:  
When human beings mint coins,  
they make many coins from one die, and they are all alike.  
But the Ultimate Sovereign, the Holy One,  
minted all human beings with the die of Adam,  
though not a single one resembles another.  
(*Mishnah Sanhedrin, Chapter 4, end*)

I am uncomfortable with the expressions “the poor”, “the homeless”, “the disabled”, and similar terms. It appears to me that these terms imply otherness, people who are more dissimilar than similar to myself. Even though it is more cumbersome, I prefer to say and write “a poor person”, “homeless individuals”, “people with disabilities”, and the like. This re-phrasing is a constant reminder that we are all the same...*people*, some of whom happen to have disabilities or find themselves in difficult financial circumstances, or without a place to live. The implications for Mitzvah work are many. Some of them are: (1) It prevents us from seeing Tzedakah situations as “helper-helpee”, an unequal relationship, (2) It keeps God’s Presence in the Mitzvah-act by reminding us that what we all have in common is that we are made in God’s image, (3) It is a constant reminder to be humble, not arrogant, and that all gifts and talents are God-given gifts and talents and ought to be used for the benefit of other people, who are really just the same as our own selves.

## WHATEVER I WANT FOR MYSELF

Maimonides succinctly defines the meaning of loving others as we love ourselves:

This is the commandment that we were commanded to love each other just as we love ourselves. That is to say...

וכל מה-שארצה לעצמי ארצה לו כמוהו

Whatever I want for myself,  
I want the same for that other person.

וכל-מה-שלא ארצה לעצמי ולידידי  
לא ארצה לו בשבילו כמוהו

And whatever I do not want for myself or my friends,  
I do not want for that other person.

והוא אמרו יתעלה  
וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעִי כְמוֹךָ

This is the meaning of The Most Sublime One's verse,  
“And you shall love the other person as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18)  
(Maimonides, *Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Mitzvah #206*)

“Want for that other person” means, of course, “want so much, I will make certain they receive it. They are entitled to it.”

We should make a list of things we want in our *own* lives: a sense of meaning and fulfillment, love, to be cared about and cared for, good health, protection from the elements, food, Menschlich shelter and clothing. Then, keeping in mind Maimonides' two briefly-stated criteria — I want/don't want for myself — we will have a better understanding of where our efforts on behalf of Tikkun Olam lie.

A short letter accompanying a \$2.00 contribution to a local Jewish Federation is one of the most eloquent in my files. I believe this says it all:

*Dear Sir,  
Enclosed, two dollars.  
I hope the hungry will be fed.  
I have enough food.  
I live off of Social Security.*

*Yours truly,...*



## K.I.S.S. – KEEP IT SIMPLE, SHIMON

Some עולם תיקון–Tikkun Olam is easy to do. Other Fixing falls into the mid-range, and the rest can be daunting. The problem? Mistaking the middle ground and daunting Tikkun Olam work for the simple solutions. Let us solve the simple ones simply:

1. For the benefit of visually-impaired people: have a variety of magnifying glasses on a table at the entrance to the synagogue sanctuary so they can read the standard-sized text of the prayerbook.

2. Cellphones: see the following chapter, “The Butterfly”, for details.

3. For people who are hungry *now*: make it a practice to buy one extra item for Tzedakah whenever you grocery shop.

4. The classic example from the world of health care: In the great Vienna hospital where Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis worked in the late 1840’s, women were dying in childbirth in catastrophic numbers. Indeed, it was happening everywhere. Though there were many prevailing theories about the cause of childbed fever, Semmelweis urged the doctors simply to wash their hands. As trite as it sounds, the rest is history.

5. The story of Semmelweis is overwhelming in its magnitude. More down to earth would be:

A. Robert Strauss, a teen-ager who loves to play poker with Elders in a nursing home. (I don’t think there is a need to worry that he is on the road to eternal damnation as a compulsive gambler.)

B. Meyer Greenberg, מ”ר, used to distribute gloves to homeless people on the Bowery in New York. Over the years, it became thousands of pairs. He was known as “Gloves” Greenberg, his Tikkun Olam very simple, his philosophy profound: “I prefer to go looking for the people I want. The ones who avoid eye contact. It is not so much the gloves, but telling people they count.”

6. Add your own examples to this brief and incomplete list.

## THE BUTTERFLY

Please make sure my red bear gets a good home.

*(Lisa, a Jewish communal worker,  
donating one of her favorite stuffed animals during  
her agency's campaign to provide for others.)*

When a butterfly flutters its wings in China, it can cause a storm in Los Angeles. That's what the 9th grade science teachers used to teach us about the physical world. The same is true with Mitzvahs: any Mitzvah, no matter how ostensibly small, changes the entire world. We learn from God's gorgeous ever-so-fragile creature: ***There is no such thing as a small Mitzvah.***

Now add some of your own examples to the following list:

1. Paul Newman gives away to Tzedakah all of the after-tax profits from the sales of his food products...more than \$100,000,000! Nevertheless, from the first 23¢ he donated, the whole world was changed for the better.

2. Elana Erdstein's Bat Mitzvah Project — collecting soaps and shampoos from hotels that people had put away in their medicine chests, drawers, and closets. She collected 25,000 of them, which she took to shelters for homeless people and for victims of domestic violence. And yet, *the very first little bottle* she delivered changed the life of the person who used it. This changed the whole world.

3. For his Bar Mitzvah, a young man collected used, out-of-service cellphones people had lying around the house because the owners had changed carriers. He gathered 75 of them, which were re-programmed to 911 emergency numbers and given free of charge to victims and potential victims of domestic violence. *The very first phone* changed the world.

4. Ray Buchanan, founder of Stop Hunger Now, had hoped to provide \$500,000 of international relief in his organization's first year of operation. As it happened, he provided \$7,500,000 worth of relief. One of our favorite aspects of his work is funding the purchase of anti-worm medicine that prevents malnutrition and possibly death for adults and children in Central America. To quote from Ray's e-mail, "The \$1500 from you translates into 30,000 doses of life-saving worm medicine with a fair market value of \$75,000!" That comes out to 5¢/dose. *One nickel* — only one step removed from the least valuable coin in America! 5¢ — a small Mitzvah? To the contrary: the Mitzvah-energy of 5¢ carries to the very ends of the universe.

5. One of Linda Tarry's Project People Foundation's many programs is the manufacture of black dolls. Beginning with unemployed women in South Africa (where these innocent objects were outlawed under Apartheid), and now including an employment program in rural Georgia, it affords the workers an opportunity to make a living. And...the dolls are distributed in many other parts of the world where they make black children happy, including Ethiopian children in Israel. Project People's workers have made thousands of them. *Every single doll* in the hands of a child offers profound warmth and comfort. *One doll*, such a small thing? To use a phrase from my Southern upbringing, "Not hardly!"

6. When pre-schoolers paint primitive designs on simple pads that they bring as *place mats* for Elders at a nursing home, is that such a small Mitzvah?

7. A letter I received in 1992:

*I am sorry I can not donate any money. My husband has been laid off since Sept. and I can not give —*

*Your work is very important.*

*I am sorry.*

*H.S.*

This *one letter* is so filled with passion! While I do not agree that the author needed to apologize, nevertheless, her words moved me then, and have guided me ever since in my own Tzedakah work.

If we keep in mind The Butterfly Principle, we will avoid a number of pitfalls:

1. There is no reason to feel guilty or have a sense of inadequacy about our own Mitzvah work. All too often when people meet Mitzvah heroes or hear stories about their Mitzvah work, they feel guilty that they have not done enough. This is not about guilt. *Every act of Tikkun Olam makes a difference.* We do whatever *we* are capable of doing.

2. Tikkun Olam is not about charisma as it is commonly understood. None of the Mitzvah heroes has any magical powers or is in any way different than we are. They are just "regular people". Indeed, one of the basic meanings of the Greek word "charisma" is "a gracious gift [of the gods]". Jewishly speaking, everyone has The Divine Gift. We express our gratitude by doing acts of Tikkun Olam, and every act changes the entire world for the better.

***There is no such thing as a small Mitzvah.***

## THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Through Tzedakah and Tikkun Olam, everyone has the power of life and death. As a child of a doctor, it took me many years to understand this. It was always my Father who was the one saving lives, day in and day out. Obviously, Sir Alexander Fleming, discoverer of penicillin, had the power of life and death, as did Dr. Salk and Dr. Sabin. In the 1950's, the infant mortality rate in Chile was more than 130 deaths/1,000 live births. Today it is less than 16/1,000, in no small part due to the work of Dr. Fernando Monckeberg, who established infant nutrition and intensive treatment centers throughout the country, ultimately benefiting all future generations of Chileans....all of them connected to medicine.

But what of the everyday nobody-in-particular? A most astonishing Jewish text awakens us to our incredible power:

מה אני בורא עולמות ומחיה מתים אף אתם כן  
[God says:] Just as I create worlds and bring the dead back to life, you [human beings] are also capable of doing the same. (*Midrash Psalms 116:8*)

Creating worlds, of course, refers to the Talmudic statement that anyone who saves a life — it is as if an entire world has been saved. (*Mishna Sanhedrin, Chapter 4, end.*) Rabbi Milton Steinberg, ז"ל, once wrote, “To live is to create.” In this context, this means to create new worlds.

What is meant by “the dead” is “though they are still alive, it is as if they were dead”, as the following text explains:

דאמר מר ארבעה חשונים כמתים' אלו הן עני'...  
...as one of the Sages said: Four types of people, though they are alive, exist is if they were dead, [among them] namely: a poor person,...(*Avoda Zara 5a*)

To which we may add: people in need of bone marrow transplants, individuals who are dying of loneliness, people who live in despair, the languishing and the battered ones, and all those who live in terror for their lives. The rest of the list is very long.

Every single act of Tzedakah saves lives and creates worlds anew — the recipient's world, and everybody's world, since everyone benefits when real Tikkun Olam happens.

***We need to think twice before we say,  
“It's in God's hands now.”***

## 1 + 1 = 3

My friend, Marc Sternfeld, once told me, “1 + 1 = 3 for very high values of 1.” It’s a goofy line, good for a laugh, and for all I know, in the world of mathematics it might even be true for some weird systems or alternative universes. In the world of Mitzvahs, we *know* it is true. We have seen it time and time again: one person touches the life of another person through the act of Tzedakah, and the sum total of that human contact produces brilliant and profoundly moving results. Thus, in Mitzvah Math: 1 + 1 = 3 (or more) when you join together to do Tikkun Olam. In the world of Mitzvahs, everyone is a high value of One, a very high value, a supreme high value of One, the One in Whose Image we are created.

Read the following examples, then compile your own list.

1. In 1965, Ralph Nader published his book *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile*. In it, he describes how a Chevrolet Corvair would break apart and burst into flames in an accident. This was a turning point in the battle for consumer rights. In 1966, Congress passed the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act. By 1984, 102,500,000 defective automobiles had been recalled for repair. How many people are alive today, or whole in body and spirit, because of this one man’s work?

Rachel Carson’s book, *Silent Spring*, was a similar turning point for the environmental movement, which saved not only wildlife, but the lives of countless human beings.

2. Since the 1950’s, thousands of people in a Japanese community called Minamata were being poisoned. Toxic chemicals from a factory were being dumped into Minamata Bay, contaminating the fish, a staple of the residents’ diet. The consequences were catastrophic: paralysis, brain damage, degenerative diseases, and hideous physical deformities from the chemicals’ virulent effects on the fetuses. W. Eugene and Aileen Smith’s devastating photographs of Minamata — published in 1975 — horrified the world, and caused the corporation to not only make compensation to the victims but also to clean up the damage. In 1997 Andrew Pollack’s story in *The New York Times* simply stated, “There was a plain announcement last week that the fish in Minamata Bay are once again safe to eat.”

Ah, the power of Mitzvahs!

## MITZVAH POWER

כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר' בשבילי נברא העולם  
...every single person is required to say,  
“The whole world was created for my sake.”  
(*Mishnah Sanhedrin, end of chapter 4*)

True Power is Mitzvah Power. Consider the following:

1. Liz Taylor, superstar, the first one shouting and pushing Big Time, never leaving us alone until we took note of the immediate need to care for people with AIDS, and to raise money for research to find a cure.

2. Billionaire Ted Turner, wheedling, encouraging, daring his circle of ultra-rich to make a *real* name for themselves by donating colossal sums rather than giving away a mere few millions here and there. Or worse, keeping their entire fortunes to themselves.

3. Ann Landers tracking down and publicizing in her columns companies that trash merchandise instead of donating it to worthy individuals and organizations. And — after denials from those corporations — writing more columns saying readers had sent her photographic proof that they persist in their insensitive practices.

4. In retirement, President Jimmy Carter becoming a remarkable peace negotiator and chief spokesperson for Habitat for Humanity.

5. All those football and basketball and other sports stars establishing their own foundations and pouring money back into their communities.

One thinks of Mordechai's words to Queen Esther when he urges her to make a personal appeal to King Ahashuerus on behalf of her Jewish brothers and sisters. He says,

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אֶם-לְעֵת כְּזֹאת הִנְעַתָּ לְמַלְכוּת  
Who knows? It may be for this reason alone that you have attained royalty. (*Book of Esther 4:14*)

Those I have described are the royals, the super-rich, and ultra-famous, but the same is true for every one of us. Whatever power we have, whatever connections, resources, fortune and good fortune — all of it may be used for the sake of Tikkun Olam. If we would be power hungry, let it be a Kosher hunger, i.e., hungry for Mitzvah power.

## GRASSHOPPERS AND GIRAFFES

### *Grasshoppers*

The story: Moses sends out a dozen scouts to survey the Land of Israel. They report back about the wonderful possibilities, calling it a land of milk and honey. Then, ten of them (Joshua and Kalev dissenting) give discouraging news: the inhabitants are too mighty to conquer. They conclude their report by saying:

וְשָׁם רָאִינוּ אֶת־הַנְּפִילִים...  
וְנָהִי בְעֵינֵינוּ כַּחֲגָבִים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְעֵינֵיהֶם:

...we saw the Nephilim [a people of giants] there...and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them.  
(Numbers 13:33)

The message of the scouts for those who would reach The Promised Land is two-fold:

1. They should have never thought of themselves as mere grasshoppers. (Prof. Nahum Sarna comments that this is comparable to our English phrase, “We’re just a bunch of shrimps.”) Consider the history of Habitat for Humanity. This Mitzvah project has built over 80,000 houses around the world. Since its founding in 1976 by Millard Fuller and his wife, Linda, they have built housing for over 400,000 people in more than 2,000 communities. Habitat has affiliates in all 50 states and 63 countries around the world. Its 80,000th house was built on September 19, 1999. Habitat expects to complete its 100,000th house in September, 2000. Did Mr. Fuller feel like a mere grasshopper when he founded Habitat for Humanity? Did he think it was only a symbolic act to build the first Habitat house, or did he *really* believe he would make such an enormous dent in the low-income housing problem in the world? I think the latter is true, and so it has happened.

One more example — a letter after a simple hospital visit:

*On the morning of Sunday, March 14, 1999, I was recovering from extensive surgery in Tarzana Hospital. The procedure had occurred some days before, so while I still had some pain, I was well on the way to full recovery.*

*That morning a group of youngsters, shepherded by two adults, appeared at the door of my room. They were teenagers from the USY Kinus [United Synagogue Youth convention] that VBS [Valley Beth*

*Shalom Synagogue] was hosting that weekend. One of the events scheduled into the program was an experience of bikur holim. [the Mitzvah of visiting sick people] The young people - about eight or nine of them as I recall - were distributing little gifts and some smiles to the patients.*

*My visitor was a charming young lady from Tucson, who identified herself as a USYer and wished me well, etc., etc. She gave me a small pot of miniature pink roses. They were lovely. I identified myself only as a member of VBS and thanked her for the gift. We spoke for awhile: yes... she had spent summers in Ramah [a Jewish camp] since she was little; Oh yes, last summer she was in Israel... She loved it... She was having a great time at the Kinus... She glowed with delight and charm.*

*Surely she was engaged in the ancient mitzvah of bikur holim for the first time outside the circle of their family and friends. It is one thing to visit a sick aunt or an ailing classmate, quite another to visit a stranger. She had probably never been in the sick room of an absolute stranger. But she was calm, composed and intent on bring[ing] a word of cheer. She was great.*

*Her little visit - not more than 10 minutes start to finish - was the most delightful and cheering experience I ever had in my various hospital stays (that go back to the 1930's). Her warmth brought genuine cheer. No one has ever fulfilled the mitzvah with more sincere kavannah. [enthusiasm, the right spirit] Bless her!*

*When I got home I transplanted the tiny rose buds to a larger pot. I want them to grow and to flourish as a reminder of the mitzvot that are there for us to perform, a living, growing reminder of the opportunities that blossom, all around us - opportunities for service and kindness to others.*

*I hope that every time I look at them, I may have a quick glimpse of how much abundant life comes from the performance of Mitzvot.*

2. How could they have possibly known — or even thought — that the inhabitants of The Land considered them as insignificant as grasshoppers? The most common example is when people give a “small” donation to Tzedakah. They often apologize, assuming that the organization thinks the few dollars are of little consequence. I think we ought to train people not to apologize. Of course we should be happy and even awed when we hear of a multi-million dollar Tzedakah donation. But if we lose the sense of what \$1.00 or 10¢ or a penny can accomplish in the World of Tzedakah, we have lost some of the sense of the true power of Mitzvahs.



### *Giraffes*

Each man has inside him a basic decency and goodness. If he listens to it and acts on it, he is giving a great deal of what it is the world needs most. It is not complicated but it takes courage. It takes courage for a man to listen to his own goodness and act on it.

*(Norman Cousins)*

Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, you can.  
Boldness has a genius, magic and power to it.

*(Goethe)*

It is not the critic who counts, or how the strong man stumbled and fell, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; and if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that he will never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

*(Theodore Roosevelt)*

Giraffes are people who stick their necks out for the common good. In 1982, Ann Medlock founded The Giraffe Project. Its purpose: to publicize the Mitzvah work of people who do just that — they do incredible Tikkun Olam, even at great risk to themselves or to their financial stability. It is a natural metaphor: Among Ms. Medlock's comparisons are — giraffes can see danger far away and can warn others about the danger, they are magnificent, and, of course, they have very big hearts. More than 800 people and several organizations have been honored with the title "Giraffe", and I could write a very large book just telling their stories. Here are a few of my favorite Giraffes:

This is a quote from GBS - The Giraffe Broadcasting Service, a sample radio spot sent to radio stations to tell the story:

1. Jim Walsh was a football coach at a high school in New York City where the players had always been pretty large kids. A few seasons ago, Walsh saw that his new team was a lot smaller — too small, he was sure, to play against the other teams in the league. Walsh told the authorities that they had to switch his team to a league of teams their own

size, but no one would listen. So Jim Walsh stuck his neck out — he walked onto the field before a big game and forfeited the entire season rather than risk serious injury or death for his players. Are you standing tall for what you believe in? The Giraffe Project and (THIS STATION) urge you to stick your neck out!

2. At the age of 78, Muriel Clark joined efforts with a New York City Prosecutor to expose and eliminate some well-known abuses in nursing homes. The two of them went undercover: he, “the son”, she, “the mother” in need of such a facility. As Ms. Clark put it, “I told them I love to sew, read, take a little walk, watch TV, and do some knitting. I tried to make it seem I was inert.” Two of the nursing home directors were indicted for soliciting bribes to get her into their nursing homes. Ms. Clark had not been to a doctor in 40 years, but *did* have a long history of fighting injustice. She was the perfect choice for the job.

3. For more than two decades, Janet Marchese of White Plains, NY, has been a resource to parents who have given birth to babies with Down Syndrome, as well as to medical professionals and social workers. She and her husband, Lou, adopted TJ, an infant with Down Syndrome, in 1977. Now Janet wants others to know all there is to know about raising children with Down Syndrome. Of course, the decision about whether to keep the baby or offer him or her for adoption is ultimately up to the parents. Janet has facilitated the adoption of more than 4,000 infants since she began her project in the 1970’s.

4. The story of the Shoe Woman of Denver is well-known: In January of 1985, Ranya Kelly needed a box to mail something to her mother. She couldn’t find one at home, so she looked in a dumpster behind a nearby store. What she found — *500 pairs of brand new shoes* — changed her life and the lives of thousands of other people. Since then, she has received and donated more than 600,000 pairs of shoes to appropriate non-profit agencies for redistribution to people in need....besides millions of dollars of other — also brand new — merchandise that businesses were throwing out.

People who do Tikkun Olam are not grasshoppers. They are giraffes.

## WHO? WHERE? WHAT? WHEN?

### *Who?*

Who are these Teachers, these Mitzvah Heroes? What do they look like and how do they move about this world of ours?

Startlingly tall, short, or strikingly nothing physically special — neither especially portly nor noticeably thin; slow or hyper or supplied with an average supply of adrenaline; of nerdy bearing, geeky appearance, or supremely debonair; affable; impeccably dressed or shlumpy; aged very, very young to very, very old; eloquent or verbally boring; bespectacled or without optometric aids (however they see, they all have perfect vision); either recovering from sorrow, tragedy, and addictions or not; perfectly co-ordinated or clumsy and always breaking things lying around the house and everything in between; childlike in its best sense even in old age or wise beyond their years; gentle; sincere; unlettered or possessing walls covered with degrees *cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, *summa cum laude*, or *honoris causa*; humble; exceptionally mechanical, 100% dangerous with any tool, or at most capable of opening a box of cereal after considerable whining and fumbling; at ease with everyone or shy; possessed of a loud voice or speaking so quietly you have to stand or sit right next to them to hear them; some are incredibly wealthy, others barely manage to put bread on their own tables. There is nothing slick or tricky about them; there is no need to weary yourself trying to “figure them out”. As we say in Yiddish, “No חכמות-Chochmas”, which means, “What you see is what you get.”

They are all good people, decent, *Menschen* — every one of them. And amazing.

### *Where?*

Where does one find them? They are everywhere, as a classic Jewish text explains:

וּמַצְדִּיקֵי הָרַבִּים כְּכּוֹכְבֵים לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד  
וּמֵה כּוֹכְבֵים רוֹאִים אוֹרֵם מִסוּף הָעוֹלָם וְעַד סוּפוֹ.  
כִּךְ צַדִּיקִים רוֹאִים אוֹרֵם מִסוּף הָעוֹלָם וְעַד סוּפוֹ.  
מֵה כּוֹכְבֵים פְּעָמִים נִגְלִים פְּעָמִים נִכְסִים. כִּךְ הַצַּדִּיקִים  
וּמֵה כּוֹכְבֵים כְּתוּת כְּתוּת שְׂאִין לָהֶם מִנִּין  
כִּךְ צַדִּיקִים כְּתוּת כְּתוּת שְׂאִין לָהֶם מִנִּין

“And those who bring the people to do the right thing shall be as the stars, eternal” (*Daniel 12:3*)

Just as one sees the light of the stars  
from one end of the world to the other,  
so, too, one sees the light of Good People  
from one end of the world to the other.  
Just as the stars are sometimes visible  
and at other times hidden,  
so, too, with Good People.  
And just as the clusters of stars  
are so numerous they cannot be counted,  
so, too, the groups of Good People are innumerable.  
(*Sifre Devarim, Ekev 11, 47*)

### *What?*

To be with them, learn from them, *do* with them and then do on our own, teaching others in turn, in this adventure-and-blessing called Life. Taken out of context, and freely paraphrased, a Talmudic line states most beautifully: **אורחין רחיקא וצוותין בסימא**-It is a long, long journey we are on, how exquisite it is; being together in this Grand Company is a pure pleasure. (*Sukkah 52a*)

### *When?*

Now.

A text from the Jewish mystical tradition describes a scene from the Future World:

דעבדין טבין דבר נש דעביד בהאי עלמא.  
אינון עובדין משכי מנהורא דזיווא עלאה.  
לבושא לאתתקנא ביה לההוא עלמא  
לאתחזאה קמי קב"ה. ובההוא לבושא דלביש.

The good deeds a person does in This World become threads of light from the Sublime Radiance of God. Those threads are woven into the garments which The Good Person will wear in the Next World when it is time to appear before The Holy One. (*Zohar, Pekuday, II, 229b*)

Taking the description metaphorically, it is a beautiful description of Heaven-on-Earth in this Life.

“When?” is “Now!”

## PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER

The story: Pharaoh decrees that all infant sons of the Israelite slaves be drowned in the Nile. Moses' parents put the child in a basket and float him down the river. Pharaoh's daughter goes down to bathe in the Nile, sees the basket with the infant inside, brings the child home, and raises him as a Prince of Egypt. In the Divine Plan, he becomes God's emissary and leads us out of Egypt to freedom. So goes the simple story in the Book of Exodus.

But Jewish tradition teaches that there is another miracle involved. It is based on chapter 2, verse 5:

וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אִמָּתָהּ וַתִּקַּח:

which can be translated two ways:

1. She [Pharaoh's daughter] *sent her servant* to take in the basket.
2. She [Pharaoh's daughter] *stretched out her arm* and took in the basket.

Following the second translation, and taking into account an interpretation in the Talmud (Sotah 12b), one of the greatest Chassidic Rebbis, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859), explained a most crucial element in the World of Mitzvahs. He said, "The boat was much farther from her than she could have ever possibly reached with her own arm. [According to some Jewish interpretations, it was almost a hundred feet away when she saw it.] But a miracle happened and her arm became longer, far enough to reach the boat." The Kotzker continues, "But look — when she stretched out her arm, she had no idea that a miracle would happen. What could have possibly entered her mind to make her stretch out her arm to a place so far away that she couldn't [reasonably] reach it?" The Rebbi says that the real, the ultimate human lesson is — "...this is the way of people who do good: whether or not they can do it, they become so enthused about doing whatever good needs to be done, they don't sit around trying to figure out whether or not they can really succeed. The reward [for this kind of thinking-and-action] is that miracles happen, and these people achieve even that which is normally considered impossible."

**The Pharaoh's Daughter Principle: *Think-and-act for the sake of Mitzvahs, stretch yourself for the sake of Mitzvahs, and miracles may happen.***

I have always been troubled by the TV advertisements for the U.S. Army that preach the principle "Be all that you can be!" It is an excellent tag line, but incomplete. "...all that you can be to what end, to

what purpose?” I am equally uncomfortable with parents who teach their children to use all their talents but do not give them a context for using their talents. A budding pianist may become an accomplished pianist, but a pianist who also plays for the brokenhearted and the lonely — Ah, that is using one’s talents! A whiz kid with motors who becomes a car mechanic and occasionally repairs cars for free for poor people living on the economic edge — *that’s* the purpose of “Be all that you can be.” Why, in all their training, are they not taught to use their talents for Mitzvahs?

Were it not for Pharaoh’s daughter — being all that she could be *for the sake of Mitzvahs* — we would still be slaves.

There is a corollary to The Pharaoh’s Daughter Principle: Logical or linear thinking can only take us so far with Tikkun Olam. We should pay special attention to Mitzvah heroes, people who have learning disabilities, musicians and artists, pre-school teachers, dreamers, day dreamers, visionaries, and anyone else who does not “normally” think the same way “normal” adults do. From these teachers we may learn to be associative, dissociative, weird, or wild in our thinking. It makes us free, like the Children of Israel in ancient times. And as long as the thinking is thinking-for-the-sake-of-doing-Mitzvahs, nothing but Good will come of it.

And there is a second corollary, taught to me by my friend, student, and teacher, Miriam Heller. I quote from her note to me: “Following your sentences about thinking ‘normally’, again, my mind ran off in a different direction. (Fitting that in the context of your writing that there is more than one way to think, I go off in a different direction.) The slaves who left Egypt did not survive the 40-year journey through the desert. Only the next generation could enter the Promised Land, a generation who knew not of the slave mentality, who could think and act like free people. In this age, we also need to raise a new generation — one that will feel free to think differently than the generation that preceded it — out of the box, non-linearly. A generation that will be idealistic, that won’t be jaded by bureaucracy, that won’t take no for an answer.” I only add: This “next generation” — untainted by the thinking of “It can’t be done” and “That’s just the way the world is” — the children, in the brightness and idealism of youth, will remind us of what blessings there are to be had by making the world a Promised Land for all.

[See the chapter “Listen to Kids, Especially Little Kids” for further exposition of this idea.]

## THE PEDESTAL

Mitzvah heroes. Just plain everyday people who made big-time Tikkun Olam happen.

The good thing to do is to meet them, watch them at their Mitzvah work, listen to them, and learn from them. Draw close to them, not as a fawning, unquestioning disciple, but rather as one who shares their vision. The not-so-good thing to do is to put them on a pedestal and admire them and stand in awe of them. It separates us from them, keeps us at a safe, but unfortunate, distance.

Though I have used the educator John Holt's quote in a number of my books, I use it again here, because it is so apropos:

“Charismatic leaders make us think,  
'Oh, if only I could do that, be like that.'

True leaders make us think, 'If they can do that, then...I can too.'”

Mitzvah heroes *are* awesome because their Mitzvah work is awesome. For example, Kathy Freund, concerned about the dangers of some Elders who were no longer able to drive safely, established the Independent Travel Network (ITN) in Portland, ME. It provides (mostly) volunteer drivers to transport Elders to the market, doctor, hairdresser, wherever they need to go, all for a very nominal fee. It is a *very* impressive program and it benefits so many Elders, particularly those who are unable to use public transportation, afford cabs, or don't have relatives or friends to drive them.

If we stand back and merely admire Ms. Freund and others like her, we miss the point. “If they can do that, then...[to whatever extent I, myself, am able], I can, too.” *They* don't want to be on a pedestal, so don't feel a need to put them there.

There is no need to be afraid that this will blow our egos out of proportion. This is not about ego; it is about Tikkun Olam, and, if anything, that makes for quite an opposite reaction, i.e., a very humbling feeling to be a part of this Grand and Holy Work.

In November, 1999, Ziv Tzedakah Fund sponsored its first “Mitzvah Heroes Conference”. Gathered together were 90 people, 15 of whom were the very personalities whose stories I have been recounting for years. All of this packed into a day-and-a-half. It was *extremely* intense. But the participants knew we were there together to see what we had in common with the teachers, and then to apply our own talents and time and energy to do as they do.

No pedestals!

## Ask THE EXPERTS

We all know experts in particular areas of life:

You have a Rabbi to consult on things Jewish.

If you are a diabetic or have a thyroid problem, you have an endocrinologist, one you trust and one who cares about you as a person.

You have a car mechanic, an accountant, and a lawyer.

You might want to add to your list some that I have found:

1. Who can find Survivors of the Shoah-השואה-Holocaust who are living in poverty and need support? The Blue Card.

2. Who can find non-Jews who saved Jewish lives during the Shoah who are living in poverty and need support? The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous.

3. Who can find Mitzvah heroes near to where you live, work, or go to school? Ziv Tzedakah Fund, The Giraffe Project, The Caring Institute.

4. Who probably knows more about redistributing to Third World Countries usable surgical supplies from operating rooms that are being thrown out? The REMEDY people in New Haven and Liisa Nenonen in Oakland, CA.

5. Who knows the most about projects concerning animals and their many benefits to human beings? Delta Society.

6. Who can find the nearest therapeutic horseback riding club? NARHA.

7. Who can get used school supplies (including computers) directly to students who desperately need them? Frank and Faye Clarke, Lisa Hopper.

Many of these experts are Mitzvah heroes themselves, their students, or students of their students.

Now you need to assemble your own personal list. Remember to include: Big-hearted people, People with gentle souls, Individuals with the Ultimate Human Touch, Life-savers, Dignity-restorers, Everyday-miracle-workers, Mitzvah-magicians, Hope-givers, Dream-weavers, Star-gazers, Solution-makers, Tool-users-for-Mitzvahs, Soul-repairers, Broken-body-fixers, Mitzvah-power-hungry-people, and Creators-of-radiance.

[Note: Consult Appendix IV, a list of names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and websites for many of my personal experts.]



## MONCKEBERG

It's not what you are, but what you don't become that hurts.

(Oscar Levant)

When the great, sweet Rabbi Zusia of Hanipol was on his deathbed, his students gathered all around him. The Teacher said to them:

When I get to the Next World, I am not afraid if God will ask me, "Zusia, why weren't you Moses, to lead the people out of this land where Jews are so oppressed and beaten by the people?" I can answer, "I did not have the leadership abilities of a Moses."

And if God asks, "Zusia, why weren't you Isaiah, reprimanding the people for their sins and urging them to change their ways, to repent?" I could answer, "I did not have the eloquence of Isaiah, the Great Master of powerful and dazzling speech."

And if God should ask, "Zusia, why weren't you Maimonides, to explain the deeper meaning of Judaism to the philosophers of the world, so they would understand the Jews better and perhaps treat them better?" I can answer, "I did not have the vast intellectual skills of Maimonides."

No, my students, I am not afraid of those questions. What I fear is this: What if God asks me, "Zusia, why weren't you Zusia?"

Then what will I say?

(Chassidic Tale)

The average height of Chilean children has increased by six inches in the last thirty years. Much of this is attributable to the work of a certain Dr. Fernando Monckeberg who established infant nutrition centers throughout the country. Back in the 1950's or 1960's, we might have thought Chileans were naturally shorter than Americans, that it was in their genes. Dr. Monckeberg knew otherwise.

The Monckeberg Principle: *It's all there — sometimes hiding or hidden, sometimes buried — waiting to come out, to grow, to flourish.* "It" is "the good things", "the Menschlich things", "hope". "There" is "in the world", "in Life". And like The Good Dr. Monckeberg, we can make it real.

You could also call this The Michelangelo Principle. The Renaissance genius saw the statue in the raw block of marble. All he did was to carve away the excess so the classic work of art would emerge for everyone to see.

## No Dogs Allowed

I once asked a group of 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th graders to give me all the reasons why hospitals can't have a visiting dog program. (Incidentally, more than 50 active programs already exist.) They gave the usual answers: allergies, noise, what happens if the dogs run wild? One child, a 4th grader, said, "It's because there's a sign in the hospital that says '*No dogs allowed*'." In light of this child's stunning and very wise answer, the one that cut right to the grotesque essence of so many Mitzvahs-that-never-happen, perhaps it is time we make a list of all the things we have been told that we can't do, and then ask ourselves, "Why not?" If the answer is insufficient, ask again, "Why not?" and if the answers we get from our true Selves are still insufficient, silly, or downright dumb, then, let's just go out and do that small or large amount of Tikkun Olam.

Another way of stating this *anti*-Tikkun Olam principle is: ***You can't do it because you can't do it.***

## LISTEN TO Kids, Especially Little Kids

*I would say to young people a number of things...I would say let them remember that there is meaning beyond absurdity. Let them be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power, and that we can, everyone, do our share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and all the frustrations and all disappointments.*

*(Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, ז"ר)*

### *In General*

The innocence of childhood — we talk about it and philosophize about it, sometimes lament its passing. Perhaps the child's view of the world is more accurate, more real? Are there not a number of black-and-white realities (as they see it) that might *really* be black-and-white? Is it not patronizing for us, the adults, to keep harping on how "it's really a gray area" — when sometimes it might *really* be straightforward? They say, "Restaurants throw out food; people are hungry; let's get the food to the hungry people." They are right. Eight-year-olds know better than any age group the realities of computers, ecology and endangered species, the desperate need for a child to have a stuffed animal. They were raised on these realities; they feel them more deeply than we do, we the adults. Furthermore, kids kvetch and whine much less about doing real-live Tikkun Olam. They feel less powerless when confronting enormous injustice and need. In their eyes, anything is possible.

### *In Specific*

1. A woman once handed me an essay from her 10-year-old son, Jordy. The topic was "What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?" It is incredibly eloquent:

*I would be 21 years old. I would gamble and smock sigars and I would be rich. I would have all the cars in the world. I will work at...furs like my parinets. I would give homeless people homes and money. I would give kids toys - and a good edgikation. I would get people off the streets. I would rebuild temples and chirches. I will be nice.*

2. An awesome story about a group of students at the Broad Meadows Middle School in Quincy, MA: When they heard the story of a young Pakistani child, Iqbal Masih, (who was about their age) and his escape from slavery, they were stunned. Iqbal told them that he had been sold into bonded labor at the age of four by his parents who owed a

moneylender a mere \$12.00. For six years Iqbal was chained to a rug loom for long hours, his tiny fingers weaving the intricate designs into expensive rugs. At the age of 10 he escaped and started to speak out against child slavery. His work became known to an international human rights organization and he was invited to the United States to accept a humanitarian award. It was on this trip that Iqbal visited the Broad Meadows Middle School and told his story. The story did not end there. Some time after his visit, the kids at the school learned that Iqbal, upon returning to his native Pakistan, was murdered. He was 12 years old. And so, A School for Iqbal was born. Inspired by his story, the Quincy kids began a campaign to raise money to build a school in Iqbal's village. Remembering Iqbal's belief in the power of education, they went on a letter-writing campaign, reaching kids and adults all over the country and touching them with Iqbal's story. As adults, we would have probably discouraged them from this seemingly impossible task — they were only middle school students! Undaunted, they asked their potential benefactors for \$12.00 to help build this school — the exact amount that Iqbal was sold for. Their two-room schoolhouse, built for \$150,000, is now a reality. They have a principal, teachers, and, recently, a nurse on staff to insure the kids' health. They have also expanded their work to provide microloans (\$50 or less) to Pakistani mothers, hoping to empower them to start a small business on the condition that they enroll their children in Iqbal's school. By breaking the cycle of poverty, it is possible to end a family's desperate need to sell their child's labor. Middle school kids! Imagine!

3. Many families have adopted the practice of buying one extra item whenever they shop for groceries — for Tzedakah. As their young children grow in understanding, they begin to offer their own suggestions about what would be most useful for a food bank, soup kitchen, or shelter. They often suggest candy and other junk food, and they are right. They understand that it is not only hunger that is at stake, it is also a matter of **כבוד**-Kavod-Dignity. Children in families experiencing hard times cannot live only on “food that is good for you”. They miss the “specialness” of a sweet treat. The candy and junk food make a difference, and it is The Little Ones who remind us how very important a Hershey Bar really is.

4. The Tzedakah dime: At some point during my speeches or seminars (if it is not on Shabbat or a holiday), I usually “pass the hat”, often a baseball cap. I ask people to give \$1, \$2, \$5 which will be used for bone marrow drives, or buying horses for The Therapeutic Riding Club of Israel, or for Second Wind Dreams so that we can make dreams

come true for residents of nursing homes, or whatever Tzedakah project happens to be the order of the day. Once, a couple of years ago, a young child, maybe 6 or 7 years old came up to me during the collection and asked, “Is it OK to give a dime?” I was stunned...and delighted, and learned some lessons:

A. Since then, the coins have added up to hundreds of dollars of Tzedakah money, desperately needed money.

B. I had been depriving many people of the opportunity and privilege of being a part of that moment’s Mitzvah. Even more, I had not allowed them the experience of High Glory:

דרש רבי דוסתאי ברבי ינאי...  
אדם נותן פרוטה לעני זוכה ומקבל פני שכינה שנאמר  
אֲנִי בְצַדִּיק אֶחְיֶה פְּנֵיךָ אֶשְׁבְּעָה כְּהִקְיִן תְּמוֹנֶתְךָ

Rabbi Dosta’i the son of Rabbi Yannai explained in a sermon:...

If a person gives even a *perutah* (the smallest coin), that person is privileged to sense God’s Intimate Presence, as the verse (Psalms 17:15) states:

I, through just-and-righteous acts, will see Your face;  
awake, I am filled with the vision of You. (*Bava Batra 10a*)

I have changed my ways since that child reminded me how much I had forgotten about Tzedakah and its wonders.

5. A wonderful tale from the Holy City of Jerusalem: Seven weeks. That’s all the time Yehuda Sperber, age 15, and his youth group had to raise money for the mother of one of the teen-agers who needed a kidney transplant. It is an astonishing story: Kupat Cholim, Israel’s National Insurance, paid 150,000 Shekels, and Yehuda’s people raised the other 600,000 — approximately \$150,000. Some donations were as “small” as two or three Shekels. The story was told to me by Professor Daniel Sperber, Yehuda’s father, who is chairman of the Talmud Department at Bar Ilan University. Professor Sperber has raised considerable funds over the years for various projects, but, referring to Yehuda’s project, he said, “I couldn’t have done it. I simply couldn’t have done it.” (Told to me with a warm tone of pride and admiration for his son’s Mitzvah accomplishments.)

We should listen to them, the kids.

## "I WAS CUTE"

I once asked a teen-ager what kinds of Mitzvah projects she had been involved in during the past year in high school. She listed a few of them, then added, "But when I was seven, I was *really* good!"

I asked, "And why is that?"

"Because I was cute."

Her insight and her phrase made my day. To illustrate:

1. Makenzie Snyder, age 7, began collecting and distributing suitcases and duffel bags to foster kids who would carry all their worldly possessions from foster home to foster home in big garbage bags. At last count, it was 2,000 bags, each with a stuffed animal inside. She even received a \$15,000 grant from a corporation for her project. Most likely Makenzie launched her project after learning about Aubyn Burnside's Suitcases for Kids. Aubyn heard about the problem from her sister, who is a social worker. Aubyn began to gather luggage at age 14. Sixteen months later Suitcases for Kids had branches in all 50 states, as well as Canada and Great Britain.

2. A 6-year-old writes a letter to her synagogue, explaining the need to have a crib in the lobby as a collection point for baby items to be donated to families in need, complete with her own spelling and format: *Dear Congregation: We do have a food Pantry. But some babies need more. Thanks, Jessica Sender.* [Listed above her note:] *Baby Crib: Formula toys diapers food ointment bottles blankets clothes strolled high chairs.* [Below her signature] *P.S. Feel free to bring items not listed.*

3. In Chicago, a four-year-old boy named Noah Moss gave away a Mighty Morphin' Power Ranger that he had received for Channukah. This was 1993 when the Rangers were the Ultimate Toy. The family had read about a seven-year-old boy who had lost his power of speech and had become paralyzed from the neck down. Even though Noah himself loved the Power Rangers very much, he knew that the other boy needed it more. The doctors were confident that the stricken boy would eventually recover...the parents believe that the recovery began the moment their son received this precious gift.

4. In Spokane, WA, Valerie Darling and Arielle Ring, both age 11 at the time, formed The Helping Hearts. They sold homemade beeswax candles for Tzedakah projects benefiting orphans in Romania. First they took in \$3,500, then another \$4,500. The owner of a gift shop let them set up a table, and during an ice storm when 100,000 people were left without power, they sold candles door to door. To quote Val,

“We were a big hit because people needed candles. Plus, they thought we were cute and they loved the cause.”

### *Why People Respond*

It’s not only a matter of cute. It’s innocence, it’s hope, it’s pure Mitzvah, it’s a reminder of how it *can* be done. Every age in life has a *unique* advantage in the way a person can do Mitzvahs. 1. Our Elders command great respect when they speak. They have an abundance of life-experiences and memories that serve as examples and important teachings for our Tikkun Olam endeavors. Time and again we hear of our youth culture, and the emphasis business and Madison Avenue put on the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X. Let us keep in mind a Biblical quote:

בִּישִׁישִׁים חֲכָמָה וְאַרְךָ יָמִים תְּבוּנָה

The Elders have wisdom;

Those who have lived long, have insight. (*Job 12:12*)

And let us keep in mind the wise and rather sharp words of the late Maggie Kuhn, מִיָּז, founder of The Gray Panthers, the well-known organization of activist Elders who fight against age discrimination — “What *can* we do, those of us who have survived to this advanced age? We can think and speak. We can remember. We can give advice and make judgments. We can dial the phone, write letters and read. We may not be able to butter our bread, but we can change the world.”

2. By middle-age, many people may have assembled a vast network of Mitzvah connections.

3. The Up-and-Comings, eager to establish themselves, will often stumble across or discover through research, Mitzvah resources no one else would find.

4. College students proved their Mitzvah power in the ’60’s with the Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements. Today, their struggle to free the universities from buying products made in sweatshops is a major force in a movement that is beginning to gain serious momentum.

5. Bar and Bat Mitzvah people are listened to. After all, on their special day they *do* have the attention of family, friends, and the congregation. When they speak of Mitzvahs, people take them seriously.

6. Elementary school kids rise to the occasion: Ian O’Gorman, a 5th grader in Oceanside, CA, shaved his hair off before it would fall out from chemotherapy. Many of his classmates did the same to soften Ian’s גִּשְׁחָה-embarrassment. The teacher, Jim Alter — inspired by the students

— did it, too.

7. Now, let us not forget the little children. And from the adult end of the spectrum, let us remember to teach them that Tikkun Olam is an essential part of being a young child...and that they have tremendous power — *because* they are so young — power that we adults *don't* have. *Someone* is doing it right — here's an excerpt from a letter I received a few years ago:

*Dear Daney Sigal,*

*My name is Aviva. I am in the Rashi second grade in Needam. Are teacher Stephanie Rotzky recived the Keter Torah award last night...I have been working on a progect this year called "The Mitzvah Makers" MM for short. What we do is visit nursing homes and talk to the people....The people are amazing and the kids love it...I would also like to tell you that for hanukah are teacher gave us a 3 dollar check to send. This year has been graet and I love Rashi.*

*From*

*Aviva Rosman*

*P.S. in closed find 2\$.*

And, a flyer someone sent me, in authentic "kid" handwriting, complete with illustrations of dripping lemons:

*Dear Parents,*

*The Kindergarten will have a "lemonade stand"...on Thursday, January 7th in the lobby between 11:30 a.m. & 12:30 p.m. Each cup of lemonade will cost 25¢.*

*Please support our effort for Tzedakah. We want to raise money for Jay Feinberg who requires a bone marrow transplant.*

*Thank you,*

*The Kindergarten Boys*

***Someone is, indeed, doing it right.  
It's good for them, and it's good for us.***



## KIMBERLY COOK

According to a report in *The Newark Star-Ledger* (June 1, 1994), the pager with Braille numbers was invented by Kimberly Cook. At the ripe age of 9. It was a science homework assignment. When I ask my audiences, “How did she do it?” the answers always fall into two categories:

1. They try to describe circuits, cogs, and gizmos.
2. They say, “She knew it had to be done.”

The first answer deals with the mechanics of the Tikkun Olam situation, the second with the reality and the need.

The Kimberly Cook Principle is: the *actual* Mitzvah and the *mechanics* of the Mitzvah — though related — are two separate and distinct matters.

Confusing the two all too often prevents the real Mitzvah from happening. Too many people never embark on a Mitzvah project because the mechanics are too overwhelming. I do not dispute the fact that sometimes the logistics are difficult, but it should not fog the issue that *something* has to be done. Read my examples, then add your own to the list:

1. Wigs: There are hundreds of wigs — thousands — lying around unused. We need to get them to people experiencing cancer therapy who cannot afford to buy them. *How* we do it is a separate matter, doable to a greater or lesser extent depending on our energy, resources, and good will.

2. Shoes: how many kids and adults need shoes? How do we get them donated, and how do we get them delivered in a manner that avoids embarrassment to the recipient?

- 3: Edible bagels, doughnuts, and other food thrown into dumpsters instead of brought to shelters and soup kitchens. Rock bands also have considerable quantities of leftover food (rehearsals and backstage parties), as do political rallies, and sports arenas.

4. Access to the Bima and other parts of the synagogue for individuals who use wheelchairs. (Many congregations send me photographs of their successes in this area of Jewish life.)

5. People who use wheelchairs should enjoy the beach. *Someone* invented a chair with balloon tires, so it could easily negotiate the sand. Relatively simple mechanics, pure mechanics.

6. Playgrounds that are accessible to all children. (Consult the Jewish Community Center of Greater Hartford. Their special playground is beautiful. And fun.)

## IF ONE...THEN OTHERS

*If one Mitzvah project is being done in one place, it can be done in other places.* The people directing the successful project can provide the expertise and guidance on how to replicate the program — adjusting for local circumstances. But (almost always) it *can* be done.

*If one Mitzvah hero is doing it, he or she — with his or her guidance and expertise — can teach others how to make it happen in other places.* For example:

1. If New York University can sign a contract with ARAMARK, the school's food services provider, to donate all leftover food to shelters and soup kitchens, then (almost) every other university can do the same.

2. If one summer camp can do it, so can (almost) all other camps. On July 16, 1997, Food Share picked up 333 pounds of food from Camp Ramah in Ojai, California, for delivery to agencies feeding hungry people.

3. If the Plaza Hotel can donate its retrievable food, then other hotels can do it, too. Hilton Hotels Corporation has instructed all of its American properties to donate. If *they* can do it, Hyatt can, Sheraton, Marriott — all of them can.

4. Winston-Salem, NC: Human Service Alliance provides four types of service — (A) Hospice care (Care for the Terminally Ill = CTI), (B) week-end respite care for families with disabled children, (C) a health and wellness program for people with chronic illnesses, and (D) a mediation program for resolving disputes out of court...free. And those who provide the services are all volunteers.

And in 1996 they provided \$926,800 worth of services — 70,000 hours — with an operating budget of \$80,000. If it can be done in Winston-Salem, it can be done in other communities, too. No doubt about it.

5. If Denver Children's Hospital and Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena, CA, can have a visiting dog program, then other hospitals can, too.

Put together your own list, until the rhythm sounds like some old exercise for a math class:

If X can..., then Y can....

If X..., then Y....

If..., then....

Just keep emphasizing the word "*can*".

## (ALMOST) ANYTHING WORTH DOING IS WORTH DOING POORLY

This isn't even my own rule. Two of my friends told it to me years ago, and they must have learned it from a motivational speaker or self-help book. I have thought about it for years, and I still believe this principle is valid in the world of Mitzvahs.

This is not a universal rule. And yet, it must be taken into account when doing Mitzvahs. Sometimes a haphazard response *now* is exactly what is needed. There may be no time to think things through.

We need only speak to Schindlerjuden, Jews saved from the Nazis by Oskar Schindler, to understand how much and how frequently he had to improvise and act on the spur of the moment...no matter how much he eventually may have formulated an overall rescue plan. There were far too many chaotic factors shifting and rushing around him to expect a completely well-thought-out plan to succeed. It was a matter of Life and whimsical Death, and it would appear that this principle applies most frequently in times of emergency and grave danger. The rule also applies to less extreme cases, and I think this would be a worthwhile doctoral dissertation for some PhD student eager to provide greater insight for all people involved in Tikkun Olam. Perhaps a mathematics student would do well with it, tying in chaos theory, and transferring those principles over to the anguish, fears, and sadness of those in need. It is really all right in some (or several, or many) areas of Tikkun Olam to be a little sloppy or disorganized if the circumstances warrant it. Indeed, in some situations, it is the appropriate moral choice, and to do otherwise, e.g., to make *perfect* preparations, would be absolutely the wrong thing to do.

Recently someone added an extremely important phrase: “ — But do it well.” The complete principle now reads, ***(Almost) anything worth doing is worth doing poorly — but do it well!*** This means that (1) even though we recognize that not everything is laid out perfectly, and that, (2) at least for now, the flow of things may be sloppy or irregular, (3) nevertheless, within the framework of the Mitzvah-at-hand, we do not surrender any of the integrity and honesty of our work.

## TRASH

לֵכֵן כִּהְאָמַר יְהוָה...  
וְאִם־תּוֹצִיא יָקָר מִזּוֹלָל כַּפִּי תִהְיֶה

Assuredly, thus says God:...

If you produce what is noble out of what is worthless,  
You shall be My spokesperson. (*Jeremiah 15:19*)

The younger generation has taught us how limited our natural resources are. We *have* to recycle paper, glass, aluminum, and other materials. (Just today I paid 70¢ more for 100 manila envelopes made from 100% recycled materials.) We now realize how valuable these items are — things we once considered to be mere trash. Now there is a recycling industry. (I would have to check the old catalogue, but I do not think there was even a course in ecology when I entered college in 1962.) Now there are specialists in waste: industrial and chemical waste, human waste, waste management. It's quite acceptable nowadays to say that your mother is a Senior VP in a sludge company.

The trash *we* are referring to is human trash, i.e., what *some segments* of society often treat as garbage. The list is very long. I have talked with many people about Tzedakah priorities and “where the money is” — how relatively easy it is to raise funds for a child to get a kidney transplant, how much more money is given for blind people than for deaf people, etc. What is clear is that at the bottom of the list, or near the very bottom, are people who suffer from or are recovering from mental illness. (The first human beings that the Nazis gassed were mentally retarded people and mentally ill individuals. To the Nazis, they were vermin.)

Bayit Cham-בַּיִת חַם (“A Warm Home”) is a fine program in the greater Tel Aviv area. Spend a few hours with the founders, watch Shmuel Munk and Yoram Mordechai — two geniuses of the human soul — as they work with people recovering from severe mental distress, finding them jobs, and soothing their anguish. Jeremiah's words come alive. Hope wins out. Dignity lives.

Let us now re-translate the Prophet's words this way:

“If you produce what is noble out of what [some people/society think or say] is worthless, then you shall be My spokesperson.” More simply stated, the principle is: **No human being is trash.** Everyone is precious, and we must do whatever is possible to find the nobility within each person and to bring it to light.

## Tz AND Tz

When you take a stand, it shapes who you are. It sets your priorities. It wakes you up in the morning, and it dresses you. It puts you to bed at night. There's deep spirituality in that way of being.  
(Lynne Twist, *founding executive of The Hunger Project*)

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.  
(Margaret Mead)

צדקה-Tzedakah and צדק-Tzedek are perfect partners. They go hand in hand, complement each other.

If we examine the more restricted connotations of Tzedakah and Tzedek, it is clear that Tikkun Olam ought to be approached on two concurrent levels: ***Tzedakah as acts that provide benefit and well-being to people in need and Tzedek as the attempt to legislate equitable laws for all citizens in society.*** For example, the Preamble to the American Constitution is very high-sounding and idealistic: *We, the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.* The Constitution itself stands as a grand document making these ideals a reality. Some other examples include:

1. The Food and Drug Act (Pure Food Act) of 1906.
2. Various child labor laws.
3. Brown v. Board of Education, 1954, desegregating public schools.
4. The Civil Rights Act of 1964.
5. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
6. The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996, providing liability protection for donors of food to non-profit organizations feeding hungry people. The United States Department of Agriculture's 1995 statistics remind us how very important this legislation is: 96,000,000,000 pounds of food available for human consumption were thrown out at the business and consumer levels. To state it another way: *that's 365 pounds of food for every woman, child, and man in America.*

In many instances, change came about through protest against injustice. The Jewish lesson is: The letter writing — it works (sometimes, often, occasionally); the calls and visits to the legislators — they work (sometimes, often, occasionally).

A Midrashic passage in Leviticus Rabba 25:1 speaks of a person who: ולא היתה ספיקה בידו...למחות ומיחה, a phrase which has two translations/interpretations:

1. A person who did not have the means to mount a sufficiently extensive protest campaign but nevertheless protested as much as he or she could.

2. A person who protested, even though his or her protests were not listened to.

Whichever interpretation we accept, the Midrash concludes: הרי זה בכלל ברוך — that person is considered blessed.

Whether or not we succeed sometimes, often, or only occasionally, the statistics do not free us of the obligation to continue to write, call, visit, state our case about injustice and how it can be made right.

A powerful example — the protests on behalf of Soviet Jewry. Just ask anyone who demonstrated or Refuseniks.

And don't forget to ask if — while they were marching and carrying their placards — they thought that the Kremlin would Let Our People Go. They *never* thought it would happen.

## NOT OURS

The following is one of many texts that relate to “ownership” of Tzedakah money:

אַל־תִּגְזֹל־דָּל כִּי דָל־הוּא  
אמרו רבותינו במה הכתוב מדבר  
אם הוא דל מהו גוזל לו  
אלא לא דיבר אלא במתנות עניים  
שהוא חייב ליתן להם מן התורה  
לקט שכחה ופאה ומעשר עני  
והזהיר הקב"ה שלא יגזול אדם מהם  
מתנות הראויות ליתן להם כי דל הוא  
די לו עניותו  
לא דיו לעשיר שהוא עומד בריוח ועני בצער  
אלא אף גוזל ממנו מה שנתן לו הקב"ה

“Do not rob a poor person because the person is poor.”

Our Rabbis have taught:

What is this verse really speaking about?

If the person is poor, what could we possibly be robbing him of?

Rather, the verse must be speaking of

the Gifts to the Poor that the Torah requires the person to give —

the Gleanings, Forgotten Sheaves of grain,

and Corners of the Field, and the Poor Person’s Tithe.

The Blessed Holy One issued a warning

that a person should not rob the poor person

of *these gifts which rightfully belong to him or her*

because he or she is poor.

The poor person’s poverty is as much as he or she can manage.

Is it not enough that the wealthy person is comfortable.

and the poor person is in pain—

and yet people would steal from that poor person

what The Blessed Holy One gives to that poor person?!

(*Proverbs 22:22, Numbers Rabba 5:2*)

We are, therefore, Mitzvah Messengers, שליחים-Shelichim and agents of God, commanded to distribute our Tzedakah money to its rightful owners. And this means that people in need are *entitled* to receive what is given to them. We — all of us — *owe* it to them. It *belongs* to them.

Tzedakah money was *never* ours; it *always* belonged to people who are in need.

## קל וחומר-Kal VeChomer

קל וחומר-Kal VeChomer is a form of Talmudic reasoning. It works like this: since the need for *food* is such a critical element of human survival, if we should respond to the need for *clothes* for a poor person, then, Kal VeChomer, we should certainly hurry to provide food. Another example from the world of Jewish practice: if something should not be done on Shabbat, then, Kal VeChomer, it should not be done on Yom Kippur, since Yom Kippur is a much more important and weighty day in the Jewish calendar. Yet another example, from a Classical Jewish text (Mechilta, Yitro 11, end): “Do not ascend My altar by steps, whereby your nakedness may be exposed.” (Exodus 20:26) This is a Kal VeChomer: The stones of the altar have no sense of what is proper or not proper, and yet the Holy One said, “Do not treat them disrespectfully.” Is it not right, therefore, that in relation to other human beings—who are created in the image of the One Who spoke and the World came to be — is it not right that they should be treated with dignity?

A Kal VeChomer from the area of Tikkun Olam: If Mrs. Fields’ Cookies — an enormous corporation — can donate leftover cookies and brownies to hungry people, your local bakery can certainly do it. Kal VeChomer. On the other hand, if a food establishment recycles glass but does not donate leftover food to hungry people, they do not understand the Kal VeChomer.

A classic example: From *Life Worth Living: How Someone You Love Can Still Enjoy Life in a Nursing Home*, by Dr. William Thomas. In the following passage, Thomas comments on the need for pets in nursing homes: When the subject of dogs in nursing homes comes up, I often hear comments like: “We had a dog once, but it just didn’t work out.” Or, “Sure the residents would like it if we had a dog, but they are too much work.” These complaints miss the point. Nursing homes are supposed to be good at giving care — giving care is what they do. Just what is a person to think of a nursing home that cannot or will not manage the care of dogs? Should such an institution be trusted with taking care of Mother?

And most certainly, if there is a Mitzvah not to willfully waste things (known as **בל תשחית**-Bal Tashchit), then, Kal VeChomer, we should not be wasting human lives.



## 2 Weddings

Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing because he could only do a little.

(Edmund Burke)

Just do it.

(Nike)

There is a classic Yiddish phrase that relieves the stress of trying to do too many Mitzvah projects at once: With one *tuchiss* (i.e., rear-end) you can't dance at two weddings. Or, for the Yiddishists:

מיט איין תחת מע קען נישט טאנצן אויף צוויי חתונות

If you are new to this World of Tzedakah, or are just getting warmed up, pick one project for yourself, either walk yourself into it slowly or jump in, and have faith that it will lead you somewhere meaningful. *Anything* (almost) you do in the way of Tzedakah work will be of benefit. *Anything*.

Choose a starting point that feels comfortable to you: a good or bad experience you once had, a documentary about war that ate away at you long after you left the theater, something your child said to you. It can even be a quote in the newspaper that caught your eye. For example, The Reverend Cecil Williams of Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco has launched numerous programs through his congregation. I was really moved by his statement, "At Glide, we believe that the true church stays on the edge of life, where the real moans and groans are." (For Jewish people, substitute the word "synagogue" for "church".) If relieving human suffering is your point of departure and it works for you — good. If it is the need for lonely people to have a good time, choose that as a way to dig in...whatever resonates in your own soul.

Then you can always pick another. And another. And another.

## MORE PEOPLE THAN PROBLEMS

Someone once gave me the catchy quote, “There are more people than there are problems.” It is simplistic, and maybe only 89% or 76% true or possibly only 19% true. But whatever the actual figures, the point is: we can muster, organize, marshal, summon, convene, convoke, and gather more and more people to drive down the number of broken things in this world that need fixing.

A story about how we can make the numbers work: One of my most thrilling experiences last year was being invited to address the graduating class of a Jewish day school, Solomon Schechter High School on Long Island. I had spent a day with the students and faculty a couple of months before and enjoyed the give-and-take on Tikkun Olam very much. On graduation night, one of the students delivered a brief address to the faculty and administration on behalf of the graduates. It had been prepared by four students. Delivered in Hebrew, this is an excerpt from the translation.

*....The unique character of our school has given us the tools to become informed, compassionate Jews....We have learned to care about the community and to take action in the name of Tikkun Olam....We have grown as a group, but, more importantly, we have grown as informed, open-minded, caring individuals who will make a difference in the future. [My emphases.] [n.b. the Hebrew for “caring” is: תשובי לב literally “good-hearted”]*

Now, allowing for a normal life span for these students (ביז (הזנדערט און צוואנציק געזונט און שטארק they should live to be 120 in good health) — let us consider the thousands of problems in the world that they will solve, the vast quantities of fear and anguish that they will eliminate, the incalculable sum of wretchedness that will disappear — all because of these few people.

It’s simple math. Really it is.

### **Mitzvah Math: Hans Herren and The Mealybug**

Cassava is a staple in the diet of 200,000,000 people in Africa. By the early 1980’s, cassava crops were being decimated by the mealybug. Enter Hans Herren, a Swiss entomologist, who found a way to destroy the mealybug. Experts estimated that 20,000,000 people would have died of famine. Do the math. One person, 20,000,000 people.

## BRAINS

Simply stated, the Brains Principle is: There is no *necessary* connection between intellectual capabilities and Mitzvah capabilities. Why this should be The Nature of Things, lies in the upper realms of higher existential thought mixed with theology. After 25 years of studying people who are intensely involved in Tikkun Olam, it appears to me that the extent, grandeur, and intensity of an individual's work in no way depends on a person's IQ.

I would most certainly *not* say that exceptionally bright people are less apt to be involved in Tikkun Olam or to be Mitzvah heroes, but I would not shy away from saying that many intellectuals fail to excel in this all-important area of human existence. There are even a few who, in fact, sometimes wallow in their own brightness and do not partake of the majesty of Mitzvah work, and some smaller numbers who use their exceptional brain power for destructive acts rather than Mitzvahs. Of course, this is true with the entire spectrum of intelligence. But it is a particularly sad, bitter conclusion to reach when there is so much potential talent available for Mitzvahs. It hurts to record this after so many years of thinking about it and observing thousands of people going about their daily lives.

On the other end of the scale, it would be unfair to state, or even imply, that *all* people of what is all-too-commonly (and detrimentally) referred to as "average" or "below average" intelligence have a greater tendency to Mitzvah work. That simply is not true. But not having a dazzling IQ and academic record in no way affects a human being's ability to triumph in the World of Mitzvahs.

As a teacher of Jewish values, this means that, if, on the most basic-of-basic levels we would like to live in a better, more Menschlich world, our efforts must be put primarily on Mitzvahs and Mitzvah heroes and relegate the intellectual side of things to a less important position in any curriculum. Facts, figures, and scholarship should not be ignored, but they should never supersede the quest for creating a world that is Just and Righteous and Fair, pleasant, decent and peaceful.

And while we are laying out the new curriculum, let us teach passion — how we can multiply the number of people impassioned for Tikkun Olam, so that we can create a world that is Just and Righteous and Fair, pleasant, decent and peaceful, and do it sooner rather than later.

## ACHIEVEMENT

When I was younger, my dreams of what I hoped to write woke me from my soundest sleep.

*(Stephen Dobyns, poet)*

There is no Talmudic term for “achievement”, “competitive-ness”, or “excellence”. If our vocabulary and use of language reflects our set of values, then the Rabbis must have considered other aspects of life more important.

They understood and labored to understand terms and Life-concepts such as קדושה-Kedusha-Holiness, ברכה-Bracha-Blessings, מצוה-Mitzvah, תורה-Torah-Life teaching. They had no specific word for “fun” or “happiness”, nor did they have a phrase comparable to the French “joie de vivre-joy of life”, but they spoke frequently about שמחה-Simcha-Joy, and מצוה של שמחה-The Joy of Doing Mitzvahs. “Meaning” was not part of their vocabulary, yet they knew that their lives were filled with great significance.

I recall a radio interview with an investment expert who explained how, if we would only skip our morning cup of coffee at the local convenience store on the way to work — and invested that money instead — over 25 years it would equal \$1,256,798 or some such incredible retirement nest egg. I kept thinking (as I was sipping my 7-11 coffee in the car), “If we only invested that 79¢ every morning (except Shabbat and holidays) into Mitzvahs, we would have done 957,682 gallons/tons/bushels/Life-years of Tikkun Olam.”

Comparing our own value-terms with those of the Jewish tradition will allow us to redefine and focus more clearly on what makes for meaning in our lives and what we hope to achieve during our years as human beings.

The issue is not possessions, titles, or awards. They are nice things to receive and own. The question is: what do they *mean* to us and what might we have sacrificed or lost out on in pursuit of these things?

Rewording the Dobyns quote at the beginning of this chapter, we can now redefine “achievement”: “When I was younger, the dreams of Tikkun Olam I had hoped to do woke me from my soundest sleep.” We would all do well to recall those dreams from the past and to make them a more prominent aspect of our lives.

## CATS

It is time to pay more attention to the fish in the aquarium and the dogs and the cats, and to listen to the birds. This is a long-neglected Mitzvah topic, and it astonishes me that it has not become a much more central aspect of תיקון עולם—Tikkun Olam. Wherever I give my talks, whenever I ask, “Who has a dog?” or “Who has a cat?”, you can feel the electricity in the room. The people in the audience — all ages — spill out exclamatory sentences with the words “love”, “companionship”, “friendship” so rapidly, I often have to cut the discussion short. Otherwise I would never finish my talk. Examples:

1. Guide dogs for blind people are common.
2. Dogs that benefit deaf people and people who use wheelchairs are becoming more common.
3. Capuchin monkeys have been trained to perform a number of vital tasks for people with disabilities.
4. There are programs that have dolphins and giant sea turtles as part of essential therapy for disabled people.
5. Petting a cat lowers blood pressure. Let’s get cats to everyone who has high blood pressure and who wants a cat.
6. Owning a pet is a significant factor in long-term survival after a heart attack. Therefore, it makes sense to launch a campaign to provide pets to survivors of heart attacks!

6a. A judge keeps Spooky, his cat, in his chambers. Spooky has been known to calm down opposing attorneys who were (before petting the kitty) at each other’s throats. Big-time Mitzvah!!!

6b. In November, 1989, *Smithsonian Magazine*, had an article about truck stops around America. The author noted that the Triple T Exxon (Tucson Truck Terminal), Exit 268, off I-10 east of Tucson, had a resident cat and a permanent rocking chair, supplied by the proprietor, a certain Ira Morris. Knowing how lonely the truckers could be on the long haul, Mr. Morris would let the drivers come in, plunk themselves down in the rocking chair, and just pet the cat for a while. A real Mitzvah cat.

7. Dr. William Thomas’s *The Eden Alternative* program radically changes the nature and essence of nursing home life. And yet, 75% of his ideas could have been figured out by any 11-year-old. As the Good Dr. Thomas sees it, the three worst plagues for our Elders are loneliness, helplessness, and boredom. One of the many aspects of his multi-faceted program to change the happiness-quotient of the residents is to introduce a multitude of pets into the homes: cats, dogs, and so many birds you

can't believe it until you see it (or hear it). Formerly, New York State law, limited the number of pets to one/nursing home. In 1992, Dr. Thomas obtained a variance because he needed 100 birds for the first home he was Edenizing. Finally, in 1995, Governor Pataki signed legislation (A.2906/S.4232) that eliminated the quota. By October, 1996, Tioga Nursing Facility in Waverly, NY, reported the following population: 211 residents, 350 birds, 1 chinchilla, 6 dogs, 8 cats, 1 pot-belly pig, thousands of indoor plants, and 94 kindergarten children. (The on-site pre-school program is another critical element of The Eden Alternative.) Reporting to Dr. Thomas, one staff member stated, "It's chaos, it's hubbub, and it's good — *that's what's probably different about Tioga.*" (Author's commentary: until we get more nursing homes to be like Tioga.)

Bring on the birdies, kitties, purebreds, hounds, and mongrels, and multitudes of tropical fish of every shape, size, and color!

8. In interviews with 128 Elders in a Chicago park, 75% of men and 67% of women reported that their dogs were their only friends. As Jewish tradition states, **לְחַכְמָא בְּרַמְיָא**-A word to the wise. (Midrash Mishlay 22)

9. So many dentists' offices have an aquarium. Watching fish in an aquarium reduces stress. In 100% of all stressful situations in Life where fishbowl solutions are appropriate, let's provide aquariums.

And you don't have to be a cat person or dog person or bird or fish person to make it happen.

There is so very much more that can be done in this area of Tikkun Olam, and of that "so very much more", a high percentage of those Mitzvahs are easy to do.

It is time to just do it.

## BUMPER STICKERS

I would like everyone to read serious books about Tikkun Olam. Of course. I want everyone to read pages and pages of beautiful, well-thought-out material and extract and ponder the inspiring gems recorded in Torah and the world's great literature. Unfortunately, it doesn't happen as much as I would like it to happen. Too many people move too quickly, or don't have the patience to read long books or books at all. So, much as I do not prefer Torah-by-bumper-sticker (-or-T-shirt or -refrigerator-magnet), I offer a selection of useful Tikkun Olam material from less-than-university-level sources. My collection of bumper stickers keeps growing. All the quotes are concise, some are clever, a few are profound. The rest are cynical, scary, or merely cute. The best of them allow me to pause and think, sometimes with a smile. If I read them with Mitzvahs in mind, I learn a great deal about Tikkun Olam. The same unscientific study can be done with billboards, TV commercials, newspaper and magazine advertisements, and, of course, T-shirts and refrigerator magnets.

Here are a few bumper stickers from my collection —

From the '60's: (1) Give Peace a Chance, (2) Flower Power, (3) Make Love Not War, and (4) It will be a great day when our schools get all the money they need and the Air Force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber. A contemporary bumper sticker based on those astonishing years reads: commit random acts of COOLNESS.

A Miscellany, with my comments in Italics.

Quit yer whining. (*Do something about it!*)

Stop Global Whining. (*More universal.*)

Thou Shalt Not Snivel. (*A T-shirt, soon to become a bumper sticker...brings the message home to the younger kids.*)

Superman had foster parents. (*Truth in striking brevity.*)

Real men love cats. Real men don't ask directions. (*Two Ultimate Truths.*)

Your Cat Eats Dog Food. (*Is that good or bad? Is it the same as steroids for athletes? Will the little kitties begin to fetch the morning paper from the front porch?*)

If Momma Ain't Happy, Ain't Nobody Happy. (*Another Ultimate.*)

I DO WHATEVER MY RICE KRISPIES TELL ME TO. (*Very weird. Not the only one I've seen that's warped.*)

You Nonconformists Are All Alike. (*Commendable for its terse humor. People are paid big bucks to come up with these things.*)

Money isn't everything, but it sure keeps the children in touch. *(Clever.)* And My Child and My Money Are At the University of Michigan. *(True, but not particularly profound.)*

Six relating to Tikkun Olam:

IF YOU'RE NOT OUTRAGED, YOU'RE NOT PAYING ATTENTION.

EQUAL RIGHTS ARE NOT SPECIAL RIGHTS.

AGEISM Will Catch Up With You.

BE NICE TO YOUR CHILDREN. They'll choose your nursing home. *(Grisly. Clearly a symptom of our society's shortcomings.)*

Better a bleeding heart than none at all. *(Ah! Very nice!)*

Practice random acts of kindness. *(Rabbi Donald Rossoff's comment [relating to an identical phrase on a T-shirt]: It should read instead "Do planned acts of **תדן**-Chessed. [Acts of **תדן**-Chessed are deeds of deep-and-enduring lovingkindness.]*

The most talked-about items:

My child is an honor student at... *(Many parents in the audience do not like this one because it establishes a flawed criterion for the true value of human beings. Someone once told me an interesting response, "All these brilliant children — where do all the stupid adults come from?")*

My Child Is. *(Very nice.)*

My Mensch Learns at Congregation Beth Am. *(From a Synagogue in Buffalo Grove, IL. That one word — "Mensch" — says so much.)*

My Kid Is a Mensch. *(It's now also a refrigerator magnet!)*

I Caught You Caring. *(Stickers given to students at a Jewish day school at those magic moments when they radiate moments of Menschlichkeit.)*

And, finally, the best one of all: **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN BUMPER STICKERS.**



## OTHERS

Perhaps for another book, sometime in the future:

1. (Almost) Anything that can be achieved by being overbearing or mean can be achieved with gentleness and kindness.

2. The Oxygen Mask Test: Before every flight, a crew member reviews the safety measures. Among them, the most shocking of all: in case of loss of oxygen, put on *your* mask first, then the child's. When we first hear it, it upsets us; it sounds so illogical. Only after thinking about it for a while do we see the wisdom of the rule. So, too, with Tikkun Olam: we should always check to see if there isn't another way — one that tears us out of our "normal" patterns of thinking — to make all the difference in the world.

3. Mitzvahs → Menschlichkeit: While the Way of Mitzvahs does not *automatically* make people into Menschen, it (1) shows us that it *is* the desirable goal in Life, and (2) it *is* a constant reminder that we *can* become better people. William James stated this most eloquently: "No matter how full a reservoir of *maxims* one may possess, and no matter how good one's *sentiments* may be, if one has not taken advantage of every concrete opportunity to *act*, one's character may remain entirely unaffected for the better. With mere good intentions, hell is proverbially paved."

4. "Social action" and "community service" are not exactly the same as צדקה-Tzedakah, מצוה-Mitzvah, and תיקון עולם-Tikkun Olam. They overlap in many ways, but Judaism's unique contribution to fixing the world needs to be taught in the general community. (Many of my non-Jewish Mitzvah heroes love the terms and adopt them immediately into their own work.)

5. (Almost) any thing can be either a *tchatchka* (a toy, a knick-knack, a bauble) or a vehicle, instrument, or tool for Mitzvahs. For example, a private jet is not in-and-of-itself in any way of negative value. Indeed, many are used in the off hours to transport people cross-country for medical treatments.

6. In my opinion, it is unJewish *to assume* there will always be as much human misery, waste, and destructiveness as there is today. It is equally unJewish *to live our lives* as if there will always be as much human misery, waste, and destructiveness as there is today. The Talmud (Ketubot 17a) states: מעברין את המת מלפני הכלה, [If a funeral procession and a wedding procession meet at a crossroads,] the wedding procession has the right of way.

Good wins out. Life wins out. לחיים-To Life!

## APPENDIX I

### The Restaurant of Broken Dreams

It came to seem that  
wherever he went  
everything was broken.  
Even when he chanced upon a place,  
it was a matter of most everything in pieces,  
the largest thing whole being no bigger than a vase  
or a small handbag without a tear or scratch.  
As he spoke to people,  
he heard there, too, lines like,  
“This is the street of broken dreams.”  
“This is the restaurant of broken dreams.”  
“There is the car of broken dreams.”  
And so he set himself to find the best carpenters,  
experts in porcelain and ceramics, insulation and leather,  
people who knew how to mend garden hoses  
as well as surgeons fixed arteries, plumbers.  
He learned each trade in turn  
and drew each of his teachers into  
what came to be known as  
The Great Fixing in the Land.  
When he died,  
bits and splinters had become endangered species,  
and little children with glue and tape and nails in their hands  
surrounded his bed and promised to carry on his work,  
and their parents awoke each morning,  
their dreams still whole.

## APPENDIX II

### To Fashion Holiness

O God —  
Show us how to fashion  
holiness from waste,  
discovering sparks in the broken shells  
of people beaten down by circumstance  
and mired in the boredom of hollowness.

Teach us to take  
the neutral substance of reality  
and create the sublime,  
forming shapes of blessings  
with a sacred touch.

Instruct us in sympathy,  
so we may learn to tear away at hopelessness  
and the groan and *oy* of despair  
by stories, jokes, and astonishing embraces.

Remove shallowness from our lives  
and destroy senselessness,  
that we may discover Your plan  
and fulfill Your purposes.

Give us insight and vision,  
and we will perform signs and wonders  
in the sight of all humanity  
as You Yourself once did  
in the Land of Egypt and at Sinai.

Show us Life in all its glory,  
and we will glorify Your name,  
here and now, everywhere and forever.

## Appendix III

### Everything I Really Needed To Know About Life, I Learned in Synagogue by Rabbi Steven M. Rosman

I write this as school buses shuttle to and fro through the streets of our town, bringing our children to school to begin a new year. In the world out there, school starts and stops, begins and ends. In my world, here in the synagogue, school is never out. Learning never ends. Some speak about the relative value of one degree versus another. In the synagogue we teach about the absolute value of education. After fifteen consecutive years of graduate school and four advanced degrees, I have come to the conclusion that everything I really needed to know, I learned in synagogue.

It was in the synagogue that I learned not to kill, not to lie, not to steal, not to envy that which belongs to others. It was here, I learned to honor my parents, to honor my teachers, to honor those who devote their lives to simple, unheralded mitzvot. I learned that the reason our world turns is not because of oil or nuclear energy, but because of “children in the schoolhouse,” whose every breath sustains our world. I learned to sanctify time and not space, to revere wisdom and not wealth, and to esteem humility and not hubris. I learned that the world is sustained “not by might and not by power,” but by “Torah, worship, and acts of loving kindness.” I also learned not to think in global terms, but rather to think in individual human terms; that I do not have to try to save the world, but if I save one life it is as if I had. I learned not to separate myself from the community, not to stand by indifferently while a neighbor bleeds, not to place obstacles before the blind, and not to curse the deaf.

I was taught that we all - whether young or old, black or white, from here or from there, whether literate or illiterate, rich or poor, this shape or that, whether thinking like me or not, whether praying like me or not - share a common spark of divinity, a common Parent, and a common destiny. I was taught to remember that I too, was once a stranger, an alien, an outsider, so were my parents, and so were my grandparents. I was taught that to love others, I first had to love myself. But to be “only for myself” was not enough.

It was in the synagogue that I learned that days begin in darkness and move to light, and that life flows from darkness to light. I learned that Adonai called the darkness “good,” too. I learned that “choice” is mine, and so is the responsibility for my choices. I learned that change is possible and that the “gates of repentance are always open.”

It cost me a great deal to obtain my degree, but that the synagogue is a relative bargain. To enter universities, one has to qualify, while synagogues accept everyone. Universities measured me by my grades, while my synagogue measured me by my deeds. In the universities, I studied a particular subject in a particular classroom, while in synagogue, the world is my classroom and life is my curriculum.

I once thought that my university degrees would be all that I needed. I have come to understand that, everything I really needed I learned in the synagogue.

I add: As Dr. Abraham J. Gittelson — my Rebbi in Jewish Education — adds...no small part of which may be attributed to the values taught in the religious school.

To which I also add: Values. It’s all about values. **(Duh!)**

## Appendix IV

Danny Siegel's List of Mitzvah Phone Numbers  
E-Mail Addresses, and Websites  
(Visit My Website at [dannysiegel.com](http://dannysiegel.com) for Links To  
Many Mitzvah Websites)

### *Saving Lives*

- 1. Bone Marrow Testing:** Arlene Feinberg, 1-800-9-MARROW, [registry@hلامatch.org](mailto:registry@hلامatch.org), [www.hلامatch.org](http://www.hلامatch.org)
- 2. What It's Like to Be a Bone Marrow Donor:**  
Joyce Juda, 617-964-8210
- 3. Infant Car Seat Drive:** Merrill Alpert, 818-788-6000,  
[alpy one@aol.com](mailto:alpy one@aol.com)
- 4. Personalized Songs Written for Children with Life Threatening Diseases:** John Beltzer, Songs of Love, 1-800-960-SONG, [songslove@aol.com](mailto:songslove@aol.com), [www.songsoflove.org](http://www.songsoflove.org)
- 5. International Relief, Saving the Lives of Children:**  
Ray Buchanan, Stop Hunger Now, toll-free phone: 1-888-501-8440, [shnraleigh@aol.com](mailto:shnraleigh@aol.com), [www.stophungernow.com](http://www.stophungernow.com).

### *Donating Leftover Food and Other Usable Items*

**The Federal food liability law = The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.** This legislation essentially states that the donor of food to a non-profit organization to people in need is free of liability. This act provides uniform coverage for the entire country.

*(c) Liability for damages from donated food and grocery products. (1) Liability of person or gleaner. A person or gleaner shall **not** be subject to civil or criminal liability arising from the nature, age, packaging, or condition of apparently wholesome food or an apparently fit grocery product that the person or gleaner donates in good faith to a nonprofit organization for ultimate distribution to needy individuals. (My underlining and bold.)*

- 1. Everything You Need to Know About Getting Leftover Food Donated to Worthy Recipients:** Food Chain, Christina A. Martin, 816-842-6006, [rescuefood@aol.com](mailto:rescuefood@aol.com), [www.foodchain.org](http://www.foodchain.org)
- 2. Leftovers — Jewish Day Schools:**  
Victoria Ginsberg, (212)774-8040, X 6266, [vg238@aol.com](mailto:vg238@aol.com)

**3. Leftovers — Fast Food Restaurants:**

W. “Sandy” Silvers, 847-480-7911, silver7@aol.com

**4. Leftovers — Public Schools:**

David Levitt, 727-398-1766, celebrate9@aol.com

**5. Leftovers — University Cafeterias:**

Gloria Cahill, 212-998-2439, Don Koszuta, 210-736-8475

**6. Leftovers — Professional Sports Stadiums:**

Steve Chaikin, 301-983-0816

**7. Leftovers — Rock Concerts:**

Syd Mandelbaum, Rock and Wrap it Up!, 516-295-0670,  
sydmandelbaum@worldnet.att.net, www.rockandwrapitup.org

**8. The Bagel King of California:**

Herman Berman, 818-788-4230

**9. The Shoe Woman of Denver:** Ranya Kelly, 303-431-0904

**10. Hotel Shampoo and Soap Drive:**

Elana Erdstein, 248-541-6997

**11. Truckloads of Potatoes:** Ken Horne, The Potato Project,  
1-800-333-4597, sosausa@mindspring.com, www.endhunger.org

**12. Getting Unused Items from the Operating Room Shipped to Third World Countries:** Dr. Will Rosenblatt or Darryl Kuperstock,  
203-785-2802 or 203-785-4242 x 3-9553,  
remedy@biomed.med.yale.edu

*How to Find Your Nearest Mitzvah Heroes*

**1. Giraffes (people who stick their necks out):** Ann Medlock, The Giraffe Project, 360-221-7989, office@giraffe.org, <http://www.giraffe.org/giraffe/>

**2. Mitzvah heroes, also:** The Caring Institute, Alana Calfee, 202-547-4273, acalfee@caring-institute.org, www.caring-institute.org

**3. More Mitzvah Heroes:** Hope Magazine, 207-359-4651, info@hopemag.com, www.hopemag.com

*Having an Astonishing Impact  
On the Lives of Our Elders*

**1. How to Make Your Old Age Home a More Menschlich Place (While Reducing the Medications by 50%, Cutting the Infection Rate Dramatically, and Offering the Residents The Opportunity to Live Longer, More Fulfilling Lives):** The Eden Alternative, Dr. William and Judy Thomas, 607-674-5232, info@edenalt.com,

www.edenalt.com

**2. Making Nursing Home Residents' Dreams Come True: Second Wind Dreams, P.K. Beville,** 770-977-3528, gatric@aol.com, www.secondwind.org.

**3. Inviting Harley-Davidson Bikers to Share a Party at a Nursing Home:** Beth Huber, Robin Moose, 704-982-0770, LMOOSE@CTC.NET

**4. Programming Astonishing, Off-Beat, and Fun Activities in a Nursing Home:** Neila Houghton-Daggett, 603-645-6500

**5. Establishing a Transportation System for Elders Who Are No Longer Able to Drive:** Independent Transportation Network (ITN), Kathy Freund, 800-764-3486 or 207-828-8608, kfreund@itninc.org, www.itninc.org

### *The Big Time*

**1. Religious School Curriculum that Answers the Question, "What Do We Want to Be When We Grow Up?" – A Mitzvah Hero:** Naomi Eisenberger, 973-763-9396, naomike@aol.com

**2. Incredible Poster: Wilderness Inquiry, Corey Schlosser-Hall,** 800-728-0719; wiinquiry@aol.com, www.wildernessinquiry.org. **Inviting Erin Broadbent (The Poster Woman) to Lecture in Your Community:** 703-691-1477, erin-broadbent@nps.gov

**3. Holding a Synagogue Mitzvah Day:** Rabbi Alan Litwack, 518-436-9761, rabel@aol.com; Alina Gerlovin, 716-461-0490, Agerlovin@jewishrochester.org

**4. Starting a Jewish Community Food Bank:** Bobbie Carr, 303-691-6136

**5. Starting a Jewish AIDS Project:** 213-653-8313

**6. Starting a Jewish Pro Bono Legal Service:** Joy Rothenberg, 513-984-6768, jhr@unidial.com; Bet Tzedek in LA: 213-939-0506, www.comquest.com/bet-tzedek

**7. Starting a Jewish Battered Women's Shelter:** Shelly Hettleman, CHANA, 410-234-0030, chana@jcfb.org

**8. Starting a Group for Jewish Substance Abusers:** 212-397-4197 (JACS), webmaster@jacsworld.org, www.jacsworld.org

**9. Starting a Jewish Free-Loan Society:** Ruth Marcus, 248-723-8184, rmmarcus@jfm.org, www.freeloan.org

**10. Everything You Need to Know About Low-Income Housing:** Alec Roberts, 914-683-1010 X 27, alecroberts@communityhousing.org



### *Unusual Mitzvah Projects*

- 1. Mitzvah Crib:** Merrill Alpert, 818-788-6000, alpy one@aol.com
- 2. Mitzvah Clowning:** Sweet Pea and Buttercup (Mike and Sue Turk), 973-376-2885
- 3. Black Dolls (and So Much More):** Linda Tarry, The Project People Foundation, , 212-415-2280, ltdolls@aol.com
- 3. Gathering Millions of Pennies for Tzedakah:** Teddy Gross, Common Cents, 212-PENNIES; Whitney Taxman: 402-397-5816
- 4. Mitzvah Mall (Chanukkah Mitzvah Gifts):** Sharon Halper, 914-238-5641, sharondin@aol.com
- 5. Planting a Mitzvah Garden:** Rabbi Stephen Pearce at 415-751-2541, sspearce@aol.com

### *Hats and Hair*

- 1. Encouraging Your Hairdresser to Provide Free Haircuts for People Losing Their Hair Due to Cancer Therapy:** Jane Kemp, Welcome Back, 510-849-0306, jckemp@earthlink.net
- 2. Hats for Kids With Life-Threatening Diseases:** Melinda Nussbaum, 818-881-3365, satokid@juno.com

### *The Mitzvah Menagerie*

- 1. Mitzvah Animals—Absolutely Everything You Need to Know About Animals And How They Can Be of Benefit to Human Beings:** Delta Society, 1-800-869-6898 (voice), 1-800-809-2714 (TTY/TDD), deltasociety@compuserve.com, www.deltasociety.org
- 2. How To Become a Mitzvah Locksmith — Using Animals and Nature to Reach Supposedly Unreachable Human Beings:** Rebecca Reynolds, 978-369-2585, aaiseabury@aol.com
- 3. Getting Pets into Hospitals:** Cindy Neimitz, 626-397-3495 (Huntington Memorial Hospital, Pasadena, CA): **Infectious Disease Coordinator:** Dr. Sandra Wallace, 626-793-6912; Dr. Alan Lavitt, 847-265-2810, alavt@aol.com
- 4. Mitzvah Dog Program For People With Disabilities:** Bob Henning, Canine Companions for Independence, 707-579-1985, info@caninecompanions.org, www.caninecompanions.org
- 5. Getting Birds into Nursing Homes or Synagogues:** Carol Hutton, (The Bird Woman of Indianapolis), 317-630-3063 (day), 845-8829

- 6. Mitzvah Horses (to locate your nearest therapeutic riding group):** NARHA: 1-800-369-7433, narha@frii.com, www.narha.org
- 7. Dolphins and Kids with Disabilities:** Scott Swaim, 727-441-1790, CMA@CFTNET.COM, www.cmaquarium.org
- 8. Kids bring Pets to Synagogue for Program About Animals and Mitzvahs:** Janis Knight, 407-786-3803, tuckerlair@aol.com
- 9. The Great Stuffed Animal Mitzvah:** Aviva Kieffer, 954-384-7984. Just gather 100 teddy bears and other stuffed animals from friends, then distribute them to kids whose families cannot afford to buy them toys.

### *Synagogue Projects*

- 1. Posting Phone Numbers of Domestic Violence Hotlines in Bathroom Stalls:** Rabbi Gordon Tucker, 914-948-2800, gotucker33@aol.com
- 2. Sell a Torah, Use the Proceeds for Tzedakah:** Naomi Eisenberger, 973-763-9396, naomike@aol.com
- 3. Establishing a Synagogue Mitzvah Committee:** Mindy Agler, 561-395-2721
- 4. Having Your High School Students Take Their College Board Exams on Sunday:** Rabbi Neal Gold, 732-545-6484, goldnd@aol.com
- 5. Establishing a Telephone Reassurance Program in the Synagogue:** Naomi Eisenberger, 973-763-9396, naomike@aol.com
- 6. Establishing a Wheelchair-Lending Service Through Your Synagogue:** Rabbi Gerry Walter, 513-791-1330, rebghw@tso.cin.ix.net
- 7. Getting Jewish Groups Involved in Building Habitat for Humanity Houses:** Mark Ackerman, 614-338-1417

### *Mitzvah Projects for Bar and Bat Mitzvah People*

- 1. Website With Suggestions for Bar/Bat Mitzvah Mitzvah Projects:** <http://members.aol.com/mitzvah99/mypage/>, Alex Rosenthal, Mitzvah99@aol.com (You need to unlock parental controls — standard on aol members postings).
- 2. The A to Z of How to Choose a Project for Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah:** Thomas Cohen, 215-765-1320, janetcohen@compuserve.com
- 3. Gathering Sports Equipment at a Bar/Bat Mitzvah to Be Donated to Kids In Need:** Mark Guterman, 973-379-2274
- 4. Program for Bar/Bat Mitzvah People to Invest/Donate Their Money to Worthy Mitzvah Projects:** Rob Katz, Harold Grinspoon Foundation, 413-732-9994, jfgs18@aol.com

- 5. Designing Your Own Bar/Bat Mitzvah Invitations:** Carol Katzman, 402-397-9935, Jshpress@aol.com
- 6. Bat Mitzvah Person Doing Mitzvathon to Raise Tons of Money for Tzedakah:** Ilana Gildenblatt, 513-984-4415, IRGPLH@aol.com
- 7. Bat/Bar Mitzvah with Tzedakah Fair:** Sarra Alpert, 818-996-1360, bigabba@aol.com

*Projects That Would Benefit People With Disabilities*

- 1. Astonishing Book (and Video) About People with Learning Disabilities=Human Beings:** (*Reach for the Moon* by Samantha Abeel), 1-800-247-6789, books1@phpublisher.com
- 2. Information and Resources about Jewish People with Mental Illness:** Beulah Saideman, 215-947-7031, BeulahSaid@aol.com
- 3. Astonishing Project in Israel Dedicated to Finding Employment for People Recovering from Severe Mental Distress (Bayit Cham):** Shmuel Munk, 011-972-51-598-660, or Yoram Mordechai, 011-972-51-598-662
- 4. Large Print Siddurim:** Rabbi Matthew Simon, 301-881-6550, mhsimon@erols.com
- 5. Sound System in Jewish Communal Buildings for Hearing Impaired People:** Dr. Mark Ross, 860-429-6688
- 6. Organizing a Drive to Gather Used Hearing Aids:** Dr. Mark Ross, 860-429-6688
- 7. Getting a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TTY) into Jewish Communal Buildings:** Dr. Mark Ross, 860-429-6688
- 8. Almost Anything You Need to Know About Jewish Hearing Impaired People:** Rabbi Dan Grossman, 609-896-4977 (o)
- 9. Building Ramps/Purchasing Lifts to the Bima (Even High Ones):** Rabbi Carl Astor, 203-442-0418, Glenn Easton, 202-362-4433, adasisrael@aol.com
- 10. Adopting Children with Down Syndrome:** Janet Marchese, 914-428-1236, angel2u123@aol.com

*Miscellaneous Projects*

- 1. Becoming a Volunteer Dentist in Israel:** Trudi Birger, 011-972-2-643-6628, fax: 643-3623, dvi@internet-zahav.net, www.interdent.co.il/clinics/dvi/dvi.html
- 2. Becoming a Volunteer Ophthalmologist in Israel:** Project Vision, Dr. Stephen Kutner, 404-870-1865, skutner@atljf.org
- 3. Information on Late Onset Tay-Sachs Disease:** Flori Schwartz, 781-595-7036, avraabby@gateway.net

# GLOSSARY

(H=Hebrew; Y=Yiddish)

Challah (H): The twisted loaves of white, egg bread traditionally eaten on the Sabbath and holidays.

Chassidic (H): referring to a Jewish religious movement founded in Eastern Europe in the 18th century by the Baal Shem Tov. Chassidism is known for its sense of joy and ecstasy, particularly manifested in prayer, song, and dance.

Havdalah (H): the ceremony at the end of the Sabbath and holidays that makes a separation between holy and secular days.

Kvetch (Y): complain.

Mensch (Y; pl.-Menschen, adj.-Menschlich; abs.-Menschlichkeit): a decent, responsible, upright, caring, compassionate person.

Midrash (H): Jewish literature from the first 7 or 8 centuries of the Common Era containing stories, aphorisms, and narratives. Also, any non-legal portion of the Talmud. Also, a specific story.

Mitzvah (H): literally “commandment” or “instruction” — good deeds done by people according to the prescriptions of traditional Jewish texts, such as visiting sick people, and giving Tzedakah.

Rosh HaShana (h): the Jewish New Year holiday.

Shabbat (H, Y=Shabbas): the Sabbath.

Shofar (H): ram’s horn, sounded on the High Holidays.

Talmud (H): an immense compendium of discussions, tales, aphorisms, legal give-and-take, and insights about Judaism, developed in Jewish academies (Yeshivas) during the first five centuries of the Common Era.

Tchatchka (Y): a toy, knick-knack.

Tikkun (H): fixing up, repairing. Tikkun Olam=repairing the world.

Torah (H): literally “teaching”. Originally meaning the Five Books of Moses, expanded to include the entirety of Jewish study and learning. “To talk Torah” is to discuss these texts.

Tuchiss (Y, not for polite company): rear end.

Tzedakah (H): the distinctly Jewish method of performing charitable acts. From the same root as “Tzedek,” Justice.

Yom Kippur (H): The Day of Atonement.

Ziv (H): radiance.

Zohar (H): major book of Jewish mysticism.

**DANNY SIEGEL**  
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Danny Siegel is a well-known author, lecturer, and poet who has spoken in more than 350 North American Jewish communities, to synagogues, JCC's, Federations, and other communal organizations on Tzedakah and Jewish values, besides reading from his own poetry. He is the author of 29 1/2 books on such topics as Mitzvah heroes and practical and personalized Tzedakah, and has produced an anthology of 500 selections of Talmudic quotes about living the Jewish life well called *Where Heaven and Earth Touch*.

Siegel is sometimes referred to as The Most Famous Unknown Jewish Poet in America — among his not-well-enough-known poetry books are *A Hearing Heart* and *Unlocked Doors* — as well as, *Mitzvah Maniac*, *The World's Greatest Expert on Microphilanthropy*, *The Feeling Person's Thinker*, and the *Pied Piper of Tzedakah*. His volume *Healing: Readings and Meditations* combines poetry and prose and classical Jewish texts for those in need of healing words.

His most recent books in prose include *Heroes and Miracle Workers* and *Good People*, collections of essays about everyday people who are Mitzvah heroes and great Menschen, *Tell Me a Mitzvah*, Tzedakah stories for children ages 7-12, *The Humongous Pushka in the Sky*, a story book for little children, and *After the Rain, The Book of Mitzvah Power for Adults and Teens*.

Ziv Tzedakah Fund, the non-profit Mitzvah organization he founded in 1981, has distributed more than \$13,500,000 to worthy individuals and projects.

Danny has a B.S. in Comparative Literature from Columbia University's School of General Studies, and a Bachelor's and Master's of Hebrew Literature from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

He is one of three recipients of the prestigious 1993 Covenant Award for Exceptional Jewish Educators.