

Shabbat Parashat Mishpatim/Shabbat Sh'kalim

"Give a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach him to fish and he can eat for the rest of his life."

Whenever I think about the difference between *tz'dakah*/charity and *hesed*/acts of loving-kindness, I am reminded of this famous quotation. In Jewish tradition, *tz'dakah* and *hesed* have developed two quite different definitions. *Tz'dakah* is the giving of money, while *hesed* is the giving of time, effort, and a commitment to compassionate and loving support. In the Torah, however, as we learn in this week's *parasha*/Torah portion, *tz'dakah* and *hesed* are actually intertwined. When the Torah commands the Israelites and their descendents to help the poor, it does not talk about donating spare change. First, it commands us to provide substantial enough monetary loans that the individual will be able to get back onto his or her own two feet and, second, requires that such loans to fellow Israelites/Jews be **interest free**. The intention of this system is to provide members of our community who are in need with both the financial support necessary to acquire basic needs and, perhaps, invest in starting a business or other form of employment **and** the emotional support to feel independent and have a rehabilitated self-esteem. So you see, the Torah combines both *tz'dakah* and *hesed* into one integrated support system.

This practice of support within the Jewish community has lasted from the time of the Torah until this very day. In times when Jews in need had nowhere else to turn, both individuals and agencies within the community existed in order to provide interest-free loans. In Jewish communities around the world today, including in Vancouver, the Hebrew Free Loan Association embodies and makes manifest what the Torah expects from us in terms of providing financial support to Jews in need. If you or someone you know is looking for a new or additional way to make your *tz'dakah* money count, the Hebrew Free Loan Association is one agency that brings *tz'dakah* back to its original roots in the Torah. Our community must be thankful for the existence of H.F.L.A. and do everything that it can to support its important mission. Braden Gerber, VTT Graduate from last year, was so moved by the mission and work of H.F.L.A. that he chose it as the beneficiary of his Grade 7 M.V.P. philanthropy project.

While on the subject of *tz'dakah* and *hesed*, I also want to draw your attention to VTT's combined project with KDHS and RJDS in the upcoming weeks (February 18-22): RANDOM ACTS OF CHESED (RAC) WEEK. Throughout the week, our Grade 7 students will be leading the school in spreading kindness around both within the school and in the larger community. Watch for more announcements via email and Hadashot for details of their projects and activities. We are looking forward to an amazing RAC week and hope that it will just be the beginning of being an even more kind, compassionate, and generous school community!

Shabbat Shalom!