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## **Abba Chilkiyah, His Wife, and the Testing of Rabbinic Boundaries BT Taanit 23a-b and its parallels**

BT Taanit 23a-b presents the story of Abba Chilkiyah, a non-sage of impressive lineage (he is the grandson of Choni the Circle-Maker), who, like other members of his family, is known to have the talent to pray for rain and to be answered. The story tells of two rabbis who come to ask Abba Chilkiyah to pray for rain on the world's behalf and who find that every action Chilkiyah takes runs contrary to their expectations. When Chilkiyah does eventually pray for rain, his wife prays as well, and it is her prayers that are answered first. In answer to the rabbis' many questions, Chilkiyah finally explains all that has occurred, and he reveals what his wife has done to make her more worthy than he to have merited the rainfall.

Several clear parallels to various elements of the story exist elsewhere in rabbinic literature. One, in the Yerushalmi, describes a chasid and his wife who have a nearly identical set of interactions with rain-seeking rabbis. Another, one of the stories about Beruriah, features an incident parallel to the description of the deeds of Abba Chilkiyah's wife.

Additionally, there are thematic similarities between this story and others in Taanit and across rabbinic literature: stories in which, as we find here, non-sages are meritorious or are granted rain, the protection of women's chastity is honored, and women are portrayed as being primary givers of charity.

What all of these stories have in common is that they deal with outsiders to the normative rabbinic worldview. The pious non-rabbis and the righteous women who are rewarded in these tales do not fit into typical rabbinic, male, scholarly categories. How the rabbis deal with the good deeds and the rewards of these Others reveals much about rabbinic self-definition and self-assessment.

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<sup>1</sup>Abba Chilkiyah was the grandson of Choni the Circle-Maker. When the world needed rain, the rabbis would send for him, and he would ask for mercy, and rain would come.

אבא חלקיה בר בריה דחוני המעגל הוה,  
וכי מצטריך עלמא למיטרא הוו משדרי  
רבנן לגביה ובעי רחמי, ואתי מיטרא.

Analysis

Setting the stage for this tale of a man with an extraordinary talent, we are alerted immediately that Abba Chilkiyah is not a rabbi. Meir Bar-Ilan argues that the title “Abba” indicates that a figure is not a “rav” but, rather, one who is a chasid or “exceptional in miracles”: a miracle- or wonder-worker.<sup>2</sup> From this introduction of the story, we see that the rabbis

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1. BT Taanit 23a-b. Translation mine.
  2. Meir Bar-Ilan, “Exorcism by rabbis: Talmudic sages and magic,” in *Da’at* 34 (1995), pp. 17-31, as appears at <http://faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/mag.html>, Hebrew. Bar-Ilan lists six figures from rabbinic literature, including Chilkiyah, who are referred to by the title Abba:

Abba Chilkiyah, son of the daughter of Honi the Circle-Maker: when the world needed rain, he would pray to Heaven and rain would fall (Taanit 23a);

Abba Umna was brought greetings from the Heavenly Yeshivah (Taanit 21b);

Abba Shaul tells that he entered the thigh bone of Og, King of Bashan, which was longer than three *parsa*’s (Niddah 24b);

Abba Yehudah of Antioch used to give much *tzedakah*, and when his property decreased, Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu opened his eyes and revealed a buried treasure (YT Horayot ch. 3, 48a);

For Abba Tachneh the Chasid, Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu made the sun shine (Kohelet

themselves recognize that they sometimes need to go “elsewhere” to find a rain-bringer. They are not always capable of being answered in their prayers for rain, despite their learning; as Tal Ilan writes, “it is obvious that their Torah proficiency is useless in the process of rainmaking.”<sup>3</sup> Although there are tales in *Massekhet Taanit* of rabbis who are fully capable of bringing rain, the immediate string of stories in which Chilkiyah is found—which focus on Choni and his line—suggests that it is not one’s learning that makes one a rain-bringer, nor even one’s piety, but some inborn favor. Choni himself—whom David Daube calls an “enfant terrible”<sup>4</sup> for his God-chastising, “petulant” tactics<sup>5</sup>—is almost certainly not a rabbi, and yet he is granted rain simply for being Choni (BT *Taanit* 23a); likewise, Chanin the Hidden, another of Choni’s rain-bringing grandchildren, is so awkward or shy that he only responds to requests from schoolchildren and customarily hides himself in the outhouse (BT *Taanit* 23b). These are not great scholars but inheritors of some divine favor.

Chilkiyah, then, is an Other to the rabbis who come to seek his aid—and to the rabbis who have recorded the story. His rain-making talent is vital to the world at large—and thus to the

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Rabbah 9:4);

When Abba Hoshayah of Tiri died “they saw his bed hover in the air (Vayikra Rabba 30:1, amud תרץ). In that same source the *tzadik* is also referred to as “Rabbi,” but see the change in the versions there) (ibid., n. 31).

3. Tal Ilan, *Massekhet Ta’anit: A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 217.
4. David Daube, “Enfant Terrible,” in *Harvard Theological Review* 68:3/4 (July-Oct., 1975), 371.
5. Ibid., 373.

rabbinic community—but from *that* community he is set-apart.

Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Abba Chilkiyah, who seems to be a character of general renown because of his lineage, the Chasid of K'far Imi is only discovered by way of a rabbinic dream.

Like Chilkiyah, the Chasid is a non-rabbi (here, a “Chasid” rather than an “Abba”). We learn nothing else of his lineage or life, only that he has the extraordinary ability to pray *u'mitra nachat* (“and rain would fall”).

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Once, when the world needed rain, the rabbis sent a pair of rabbis to him so he would ask for mercy that they might be given rain. They went to his house but did not find him there.	זימנא חדא איצטריך עלמא למיטרא, שדור רבנן זוגא דרבנן לגביה למבעי רחמי דניתי מיטרא. אזול לביתיה ולא אשכחוהו.
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Analysis

The point is made here that the normative world—the whole world, in fact—is the rabbinic one. Chilkiyah, we will find, is busy hoeing someone else's land, not in particular need of rain himself (since, presumably, if he needed it, he would have already have prayed for it). The discrepancy between an individual's needs and the needs of the whole world is reminiscent of the tale of R' Chanina b. Dosa, who is distressed when it rains on him at a time when he acknowledges that the world, unlike himself, does need the rain (BT Taanit 24b); likewise, we learn that “the whole world is fed only on account of Chanina,” but Chanina himself is satiated

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6. For full text, see appendix, below.

by only a *kav* of carob from one *Erev Shabbat* to the next.<sup>7</sup> The needs of an individual, we learn, are not necessarily the needs of the world.

We learn here, too, that the rabbis see themselves as responsible for looking out for the world's best interests; they take upon themselves the role as the guardians of the world. Though it is Chilkiyah who is called "Abba," it is the rabbis who take a parental or proprietorial position, acting as lords over an world-wide manor. In Daube's words, the rabbis see themselves as the true adults, caring for an world of children. In their view, they are the only "men," the only ones who "grasp the totality," whereas "Honi and his likes" (presumably this would include Chilkiyah) "stay children even when, by rights, they ought to have grown up."<sup>8</sup>

Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

The story as told in the Yerushalmi has the additional component of the rabbis speaking with *b'nei beitei* of the Chasid (literally "the children of his house," but most likely meaning "his wife"<sup>9</sup>). Unlike this point in the Chilkiyah story, here the Chasid's wife has a speaking role. Looking back at the Chilkiyah translation, it seems that *beitei* might mean "his wife" there as well, but it seems unlikely given the passive nature of the language in that context.

With regard to the story as told in both sources, the rabbis' lack of interest in the wife at

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7. Interestingly, Chanina b. Dosa is a figure who, along with Choni, was "'rabbimized' in later rabbinic tradition," presumably in an attempt to close "the divide between the rabbis and these charismatics" (Stuart Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 209, n. 225).

8. Daube, 374.

9. See Ilan, *Massekhet Ta'anit*, 218.

this point suggests, according to Jan Fokkelman, that the rabbis are so intent upon finding the rain-bringer that they essentially “overlook his wife.”<sup>10</sup> We will discover later, however, that in the story of the Chasid of K’far Imi, the rabbis were well aware of the wife’s appearance, though no mention of those details are made at this point in the narrative.

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They went to the field and found him there, hoeing. They asked him how he was, but he did not turn his face to them. At evening, when he took up the wood, he carried the wood and rake on one shoulder and his cloak on the other shoulder. All along the way, he did not put on shoes; [yet] when he arrived at water, he put on his shoes. When he arrived at thorns and thistles, he lifted up his garments [rather than keeping his legs covered].

אזול בדברא ואשכחוהו דהוה קא רפיק.  
יהבו ליה שלמא ולא אסבר להו אפיה.  
בפניא, כי הוה מנקט ציבי, דרא ציבי  
ומרא בחד כתפא, וגלימא בחד כתפא.  
כולה אורחא לא סיים מסאני, כי מטי  
למא - סיים מסאניה. כי מטא להיזמי  
והיגי - דלינהו למניה.

#### Analysis

Chilkiyah’s actions are incomprehensible to the rabbis. We are led to believe that the man whom the wise ones have sought out is either crazy or a fool. Whereas even the most profane acts of a rabbi are viewed as Torah, and his disciples can learn from him simply by watching,<sup>11</sup> the actions of Chilkiyah are at best opaque. Even the great rabbinic powers of deduction can be of no aid, nor is there any reason for a logical person to try to figure out what these ridiculous

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10. Jan Fokkelman, “Every-Day Life as Creation: A Stylistic Analysis of B. Ta’anit 23a-b,” in *Ex Orient Lux* 29 (1981), 77, as cited in Ilan, *Massekhet Ta’anit*, 220.
  11. This is evident in the tales of BT B’rachot 62a, in which students follow their teachers even into outhouses and bedrooms. As Dvora Weisberg writes, for the rabbis, “a good student, a student who wants to immerse himself in his teacher’s Torah, absorbs not only the teacher’s formal lessons but also the lessons conveyed through the teacher’s behavior” (Dvora Weisberg, “Women and Torah Study in *Aggadah*,” in Frederick E. Greenspahn, ed., *Women and Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 41).

actions mean. At this point in the narrative, then, the power structures remain intact.

Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

The actions of the Chasid of K'far Imi are similar, though not identical, to Chilkiyah's actions at this point in the narrative. The setting is slightly different: field vs. mountain,<sup>12</sup> the latter conjuring up images from elsewhere in world literature of the hermit or wise man on a mountain.

The food-sharing incident which occurs in Chilkiyah's home, in the Chasid's story occurs on the mountain. The placement of the cloak is different, but intended to be similarly incomprehensible.

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When he arrived at the city, his wife (lit., his house) came out towards him, well-dressed. When he arrived at home, his wife entered their house first, and he entered after her, and then the rabbis entered. He sat and broke bread and did not say to the rabbis, "Come eat!" He shared the bread with the children: he gave the older one one [piece] and the younger one two [pieces].

כי מטא למתא נפקה דביתהו לאפיה כי מיקשטא. כי מטא לביתה עלת דביתהו ברישא, והדר עייל איהו, והדר עיילי רבנן. יתיב וכריך ריפתא, ולא אמר להו לרבנן תו כרוכו. פלג ריפתא לינוקי, לקשישא - חדא, ולזוטרא - תרי.

Analysis

As Abba Chilkiyah enters his home area, we find that the members of his household—his wife and sons—behave in the same perplexing manner that he does. No words pass between Chilkiyah and his family, and yet they all participate with him without confusion. As we see the

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12. Miller argues that the "tura" on which the Chasid is found is a field, which puts Chilkiyah and the Chasid in identical locations as well. "Either way," Miller says, "a rural setting is evident" (Miller, 209, n. 226).

family joining in Chilkiyah's seemingly illogical ways, as readers we begin to wonder whether his actions might, after all, have some meaning behind them. It is unlikely that the whole family is crazy. It seems instead that the whole family—according to the rules of *their* world—shares in a hidden code that the rabbis are unable to break. The humor of this story, which until now appeared to poke fun at the rustic Chilkiyah, begins to turn on its first protagonists—and its authors. Perhaps there is a grand joke of which the rabbis in the story are not a part.

Meanwhile, Chilkiyah's feeding and care-taking of his children, though odd, disrupts our notion of Chilkiyah as childlike. Whereas before this, the rabbis assumed the adult role in the narrative, here Chilkiyah is the parent and the *ba'al ha-bayit* ("master of the house"). However, the craziness of his actions continue to make us question his "adulthood." His parenting and hosting seem to be upside down: he not only feeds the children in reverse proportion to their ages but ignores his guests completely—leaving them as the unspeaking, unserved children at this table.

Yet, is there an echo of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Menashe in Chilkiyah's swapping of portions? The text begins to hint at this turning point in the narrative that perhaps there is wisdom behind the rain-bringer's actions. As the rabbis move from being adults to children in this tale, Chilkiyah begins to move from being the child to the adult.

As to the designation of his wife as "*beiteihu*" ("his house"): this nomenclature is used "unquestioned"<sup>13</sup> throughout rabbinic literature, though often to odd effect. For example, in an early instance of this usage, the Mishnah claims:

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13. Ibid., 48.

For seven days before the Day of Atonement they separated the high priest from his house into the counselors' apartment, and they made ready for him another priest in his place in case there should befall him some ineligibility. Rabbi Judah says, "Also another wife they made ready for him in case his own wife were to die, as it is said, 'and he shall atone on his own behalf and on behalf of his house'; 'his house'—that is, his wife." They said to him, "If so, there would be no end to the matter!" (Mishnah Yoma 1:1)<sup>14</sup>

Cynthia Baker observes, "In the broadest terms, then, we find a general equation of person and place: woman/wife = house/household. Present in this equation are aspects of sex and purity, relationship and responsibility" (ibid., 49). We will see, later, the extent to which questions of sexuality are indeed at play in this passage.

Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

The story of the Chasid of K'far Imi does not contain parallels to this part of the narrative. However, the incident of the wife coming out in beautiful clothing will be referred to in flashback later in the tale.

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He said to his wife, "I know that these rabbis have come for rain. Let us go up to the roof and ask for mercy. It is possible that God will desire it and bring us rain—though let us not hold that it is because of our own merit." They went up on the roof: he stood in one corner and she stood in one corner. Clouds went up from his wife's corner.

אמר לה לדביתהו: ידענא דרבנן משום מיטרא קא אתו, ניסק לאיגרא וניבעי רחמי, אפשר דמרצי הקדוש ברוך הוא וייתי מיטרא, ולא נחזיק טיבותא לנפשין. סקו לאיגרא, קם איהו בחדא זויתא ואיהי בחדא זויתא, קדים סלוק ענני מהך זויתא דדביתהו.

Analysis

Presumably, Chilkiyah's words to his wife are to be understood as an aside that the rabbis

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14. Translation Miller, 48.

do not hear. However, the humor of the story is further increased if we imagine the couple having this conversation in front of the rabbis, as if they are not there. Until now, the rabbis were the protagonists of the tale; it was their search for Abba Chilkiyah that brought us here in the first place. However, now as readers we begin to fully sympathize with Chilkiyah and his family. The rabbis have been following Chilkiyah around, even entering his home without an invitation, and yet, while Chilkiyah's actions have been incomprehensible to them, their actions, it seems, have been totally transparent to him. Not only does he understand what they want, but he seems to understand the implications of asking for rain better than they do. Though they are the scholars, he is the one in the position to teach them a lesson. Now, we fully see that Chilkiyah and his wife are the adults in this situation and that the rabbis are the children who are seen but not heard, or who hear but are assumed not to understand.

Meanwhile, the final significant "flip" of this story occurs: the clouds going up from Chilkiyah's wife's corner indicate, in Ilan's words, that "even though it is Abba Hilqyah who has the illustrious pedigree, it is his wife who is the real rainmaker."<sup>15</sup> Looking back on the moment when the rabbis first came seeking Chilkiyah for his rain-bringing abilities ("They went to *beitei* ['his house/wife'] but did not find him"), we find that in overlooking *beitei*, they were overlooking the one they actually sought.

Regarding Chilkiyah's reasoning for not taking credit for the rainfall, it seems that he is both modest (like his cousin, Chanin the Hidden) and desirous of reminding all present of the true hierarchy of the universe; regardless of his and his wife's actions, it will only rain if God so

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15. Ilan, *Massekhet Ta'anit*, 221.

desires.

Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

Two major differences exist in the Yerushalmi version of this tale.

First, the Chasid's reasoning for not taking credit for the rainfall is spelled out. Here, unlike what is implied by Chilkiyah's statement, the primary concern is allowing both the rabbis and God to retain their due honor. Thus, the Chasid does what he can to save the rabbis from the shame of knowing that he, who is unlearned, can do what they cannot—and this despite the fact that they came looking for him for just this purpose. Thus, the Chasid is portrayed as essentially upholding the hierarchy of rabbis-above-chasidim, even as he proves that he does have a power that they do not. Here, the Chasid treads gently around his own “potentially destabilizing force in society.”<sup>16</sup> Where the Bavli's account is humorous, the Yerushalmi instead offers a mini-didactic on the importance of honor.

Likewise, here there is expressed a grave concern over profanation of the name of heaven (*chilul shem shamayim*), whereas in the Bavli, in the story of Chilkiyah's grandfather, Choni, the fear of *chilul shem shamayim* gives way before the charms of this childlike trickster:

שלח לו שמעון בן שטח: אלמלא חוני אתה - גוזרני עליך נידוי. שאילו שנים כשני אליהו  
שמפתחות גשמים בידו של אליהו לא נמצא שם שמים מתחלל על ידך? אבל מה אעשה לך  
שאתה מתחטא לפני המקום ועושה לך רצונך, כבן שמתחטא על אביו ועושה לו רצונו.

Shimon b. Shetach sent to him, saying: “If you weren't Choni, I would excommunicate you myself! For, if this time were like the time of Elijah, who held the keys of the rains in his hands, wouldn't the name of heaven have been profaned by

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16. Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz, eds., *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 5.

you? But, what can I do to you, given that you have sinned before God and He has done what you asked, like a child who sins against his father but he does what was asked?"

What Shimon—and the Chasid—regard as a serious offense, in the world of Choni and his descendants becomes a matter for parental indulgence.

Second, of course, is the matter of whose prayers for rain are answered. While in the Bavli's story, it is explicitly Chilkiyah's wife who elicits the first clouds, in the Yerushalmi's narrative, we have, simply: "וסלקון וצלון ונחת מיטרא" – They went up and prayed, and rain fell." As Ilan points out, in the Yerushalmi's telling, "the wife's role is neither more nor less significant than that of her husband, but because we know the rabbis expect Abba Hilqyah to pray for rain and bring it, we naturally assume that it was his prayer that was decisive in this case."<sup>17</sup> The Chasid's wife is an integral part of the Yerushalmi's tale, but she is merely there as "an enabler," who helps make her husband "into an individual worthy of praying for rain on behalf of the community."<sup>18</sup> In the Yerushalmi's tale, she is stage prop (and the Chasid's property) rather than subject (and a person).

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When he came down, he said to them, "Why did you come, rabbis?" They said to him, "Our rabbis sent us to you in order that you might ask for mercy for rain." He said to them, "Blessed is God who did not require you to come to Abba Chilkiyah [in order to make it rain]." They said to him, "We know that the rain came because of you..."

כי נחית, אמר להו: אמאי אתו רבנן? -  
אמרו ליה: שדרי לן רבנן לגבי דמר  
למיבעי רחמי אמיטרא. אמר להו: ברוך  
המקום שלא הצריך אתכם לאבא  
חלקיה. אמרו ליה: ידעין דמיטרא  
מחמת מר הוא דאתא.

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17. Ilan, *Massekhet Ta'anit*, 218.

18. Ibid., 220.

### Analysis

These are the first words that Chilkiyah speaks to the rabbis. At last, they engage in dialogue. By now, the tables in the tale have been fully turned. By acknowledging the rabbis' presence only now, after all that has occurred and after the rain has already fallen, Chilkiyah asserts his authority and lets the rabbis know that he has, essentially, granted them an audience (while at the same time claiming that he did not bring the rain!).

Indeed, the question of hierarchy is brought to the fore in these few lines. The rabbis refer to their own masters, to whom they are subordinate. Chilkiyah, in turn, reminds them that there is a power to whom they are all subordinate. No mention is made of Chilkiyah's wife, who has just been responsible for bringing the rain, placing her below or outside of the system of hierarchy altogether.<sup>19</sup>

However, while Chilkiyah asserts his position, his placement on this organizational chart of the Jewish people is unclear. The rabbis defer to Chilkiyah's abilities as a rain-bringer, yet they emphasize that they are part of an authoritative system in which he has no share. They have required his services in a job they could not do themselves: like a servant, he is at once below them and needed by them. Essentially, the rabbis claim that Chilkiyah and his abilities have been domesticated by them. In the words of Richard Kalmin, they have placed him "under the jurisdiction of more conventional religious figures."<sup>20</sup> And yet, Chilkiyah's power is not lost in

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19. I find it humorous that only Abba Chilkiyah is mentioned as coming down from the roof, especially after his wife plays such a significant role. This is reminiscent of Genesis 22, when, after the Akedah, only Abraham explicitly descends the mountain. What room for midrash might there be here? Perhaps, Mrs. Chilkiyah remained on the roof or, like Isaac, went off to study in the yeshivah of Shem and Ever!

this exchange, and it is asserted even more clearly in the question-and-answer that follows. Try as they might, the rabbis cannot fully claim authority over Chilkiyah, and the fact that they respond when he at last addresses them proves that point. It is just this type of passage that Michael Satlow refers to when he writes of the “dynamic of discomfort, ambivalence, aversion, and appropriation” at the heart of rabbinic stories like this one:<sup>21</sup> the rabbis can’t live with and can’t live without Chilkiyah and other non-rabbinic figures who capture the popular imagination.

Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

The hierarchical structure is much simpler in this version of the story. Though here, too, this is the first time that the rain-bringer addresses the rabbis, he does so here more clearly with respect.

Like Chilkiyah, the Chasid points the rabbis to the ultimate source of the rain, but, unlike Chilkiyah, he takes the opportunity to teach a lesson: rain, itself, is a miracle.

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“...but tell us about these things that made us wonder: What did it mean that when we asked you how you were, you did not turn your face to us?” He said to them: “I was hired for the day, and I thought that I should not be idle.”

“And what did it mean that you carried the wood on one shoulder and the cloak on one shoulder?” He said to them, “The garment was borrowed: I had borrowed it for this [purpose] not for that [purpose].”

אלא לימא לן מר הני מילי דתמיה לן:  
מאי טעמא כי יהבינא למר שלמא לא  
אסבר לן מר אפיה? - אמר להו: שכיר  
יום הוא, ואמינא לא איפגר.  
ומאי טעמא דרא מר ציבי אחד  
כתפיה וגלימא אחד כתפיה? - אמר להו:  
טלית שאולה היתה, להכי - שאלי, ולהכי  
- לא שאלי.

20. Kalmin, “Holy Men, Rabbis and Demonic Sages,” in Kalmin and Schwartz, 227.

21. Michael L. Satlow, “‘Fruit and the Fruit of Fruit’: Charity and Piety among Jews in Late Antique Palestine,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 100:2 (Spring 2010), 255.

"What did it mean that the whole way you did not put on shoes, yet when you came to water, you put on your shoes?" He said to them: "I could see the whole path, but in the water, I couldn't see."

"What did it mean that when you came to thorns and thistles, you lifted up your garments from them?" He said to them: "*This* will heal up [if torn], and *that* won't heal up [if torn]."

- מאי טעמא כולה אורחא לא סיים  
מר מסאניה, וכי מטי למיא סיים  
מסאניה? - אמר להו: כולה אורחא  
חזינא, במיא - לא קא חזינא.  
- מאי טעמא כי מטא מר להיזמי  
והיגי דלינהו למניה? - אמר להו: זה  
מעלה ארוכה וזה - אינה מעלה ארוכה.

### Analysis

With the ice finally broken by Chilkiyah's greeting, the rabbis express their confusion about all that has occurred. Having seen that Chilkiyah is indeed capable of calling the rain, they now take the stance that his actions must have logic behind them, even though they are incapable of deducing his reasoning. Chilkiyah's answers are extremely practical, to the point that they seem nearly obvious in retrospect. Fully flipping the tables on the assumptions at the beginning of the story, it is the rabbis who are shown to be fools.

### Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

The Chasid's answers to the rabbis are largely parallel to Chilkiyah's, but whereas Chilkiyah answers their questions in a straightforward manner (using "I-statements," as it were), the Chasid responds with rhetorical questions. Kalmin sees in this a signal of antagonism between the Chasid and the rabbis and argues that the Chasid's responses indicate that the meanings behind his actions were "self-evident and [that his] behavior should not have been questioned to begin with."<sup>22</sup>

I believe that the Chasid's rhetoric can just as easily be understood as gentle and intended

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22. Kalmin, 226.

to educate. Just as he has reminded the rabbis of the true source of rain, so too he shows them what it means to take vested and careful interest in one's responsibilities. They may see themselves as the caretakers of the world, but he will take care even of the smallest things under his control: his work, the accuracy of his words, the objects he has borrowed. In the words of Jacob Neusner, the Chasid has concerned himself with "acts of punctiliousness of a moral order."<sup>23</sup> To Neusner, the Chasid's tale is one first and foremost about *zechut* ("merit").<sup>24</sup>

### - 8 -

"What did it mean that when you arrived at the city, your wife (lit. your house) came out towards you, well-dressed?" He said to them: "So that I wouldn't turn my gaze on another woman."

"What did it mean that she entered first, and then you entered after her, and then we entered?" He said to them, "Because you hadn't been authorized by me."

"What did it mean that you broke bread but did not say to us, 'Come eat!'"? "Because there wasn't enough, and I thought, 'I won't cause these rabbis to be beholden to me for nothing.'"

"What did it mean that you gave the older child one piece of bread and the younger two?" He said to them, "This one was at home [all day], and that one was at the synagogue."

- מאי טעמא כי מטא מר למתא נפקא דביתהו דמר כי מיקשטא? אמר להו: כדי שלא אתן עיני באשה אחרת.

- מאי טעמא עיילא היא ברישא והדר עייל מר אבתרה, והדר עיילין אנן? - אמר להו: משום דלא בדקיתו לי.

- מאי טעמא כי כריך מר ריפתא לא אמר לן איתו כרוכו? - משום דלא נפישא ריפתא, ואמינא לא אחזיק בהו ברבנן טיבותא בחנן.

- מאי טעמא יהיב מר לינוקא קשישא חדא ריפתא ולזוטרא תרי? - אמר להו: האי קאי בביתא, והאי יתיב בבי כנישתא.

### Analysis

As the chain of questions and answers continues, attention turns to the attire and location of Abba Chilkiyah's wife. Her clothing has been noted, as has the seeming honor of allowing her to

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23. Jacob Neusner, "From Mishnaic Philosophy to Talmudic Religion: The Transformation of Judaism between 200 and 400 AD," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58:4 (Winter, 1990), 648.

24. Ibid.

enter the house first. Chilkiyah's responses indicate that he and his wife are engaged in the shared task of protecting her sexuality and controlling his *yetzer ha-ra* ("wicked impulse"):<sup>25</sup> Chilkiyah's wife dresses up so that her husband won't turn his gaze on other women, and he allows her to enter the house first, followed by him, so that unknown men won't turn their gaze on her.

The importance in the rabbinic imagination of protecting a woman's chastity is highlighted by other stories in BT Taanit in which otherwise problematic figures are deemed meritorious because of such acts of protection. Thus, Abba Umana, a bloodletter who separates men from women in his practice and preserves women's modesty with a special garment during his ministrations, is worthy of receiving daily greetings from heaven (BT Taanit 21b), despite the notoriety of his profession (see BT Kiddushin 82a); likewise, the jailer with black shoes who frequents with gentiles will merit a place in the world to come because he endangers his own life to protect *b'not Yisrael* ("daughters of Israel") in his prison from the interests of gentile men (BT Taanit 22a).

It is taken for granted in all of these stories that men—gentile or otherwise—are naturally inclined to turn their gaze on women who cross their path. Women, meanwhile, are generally no help, since—in the words of Rachel Adler—their hair, movements, voices, and garments "are all enticements to sexual license."<sup>26</sup> Their very presence is capable of overturning the social order:

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25. See Ilan, *Massekhet Ta'anit*, 219.

26. Rachel Adler, "The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah," in *Tikkun* 3:6 (Nov.-Dec., 1988), 29

their perceived “rampant sexuality... represented to the rabbis all that is untamable, unpredictable, and lawless in human beings.”<sup>27</sup>

Chilkiyah’s act, then, of preserving his wife’s chastity indicates his exceptional discipline, and her act of aiding him in this endeavor speaks well of her (or, at least, of how well Chilkiyah runs his household).

All this is further underscored when we return to the topic of the rabbinic use of “*beiteihu*” to mean “his wife.” In this scene, we have Chilkiyah’s wife (“*beiteihu*”) crossing back and forth over the threshold of Chilkiyah’s house (“*beiteihu*”), and she has dressed the part in order to maintain the emphasis on his exclusive rights to house and wife. The doorway itself, then, as Baker writes, appears in this story as “a place fraught with all manner of gendered meanings and requirements.” It is space across which Chilkiyah’s wife “refashions her body—her dress and carriage—to conform to demands regarding her accessibility”<sup>28</sup> and across which Chilkiyah makes known that though the rabbis may enter *beiteihu* (“his house”), they will have no access to *beiteihu* (“his wife”).

Parallel: YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

The Yerushalmi’s tale embodies similar issues. But in this version there is a further shared responsibility that does not appear in the Bavli’s narrative: just as the Chasid’s wife goes out to greet him in beautiful clothes so that his eyes will not stray, when she is home without him, she

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27. Ibid., 102.

28. Baker, 64.

wears rags so that other men will not look at her.<sup>29</sup>

The story of the Chasid of K'far Imi ends at this point, and it ends with a granting of a rabbinic sanction that does not occur in the Bavli's version of the tale. Here, when the rabbis have finished with their questions, they dub the Chasid "worthy of praying and being answered." This is striking in that, whether or not the rabbis offered him this boon, the Chasid has *already* prayed and been answered—and his ability to do so is why the rabbis sought him out. The approbation is not theirs to offer.

What we have here, then, is a rabbinic stamp of approval on behavior that is already taking place: having been found out by the rabbis in a dream, the Chasid is "sanctioned by them only after [he] assures them that his behavior conforms to rabbinic standards of proper conduct."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, by transmitting this story—by including it in the Yerushalmi's canon—the rabbis are sending the clear signal that all such behavior requires their rubber stamp. The Chasid may be powerful, but he has been licensed to act under rabbinic jurisdiction.<sup>31</sup> Like a wife who has the power to attract men's gaze—and even to help in the bringing of rain—the Chasid's faculties must be harnessed by those who have the ultimate rights and responsibilities, in the house and over the land.

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29. Ilan, *Massekhet Ta'anit*, 221.

30. Kalmin, 227.

31. Ibid., 227.

"And what did it mean that clouds went up first from the corner where your wife stood, rather than your [corner]?" "Because she can [typically] be found at home, and she gives bread to the poor and [thus] brings about direct benefit, whereas I bring [home] money and do not bring about direct benefit.

ומאי טעמא קדים סלוק ענני מהך זוינא דהוות קיימא דביתהו דמר, לעננא דידיה? - משום דאיתתא שכיחא בביתה, ויהבא ריפתא לעניי ומקרבא הנייתה [ואנא יהיבנא] זוזא, ולא מקרבא הנייתה.

### Analysis

Stories in which women are shown as being rewarded because of their acts of giving *tzedakah* abound in rabbinic literature.<sup>32</sup> Although men give *tzedakah* as well, this passage highlights that women have the opportunity to do so directly, because of their presence at home when beggars come to their door.

In some contexts in rabbinic literature, it is taken for granted that women give charity.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>34</sup>In the case of a woman who went inside to bring out bread for a pauper and came back and found him standing next to loaves of תרומה (i.e. a portion set aside for the priests. This suggests that he may have conveyed impurity to them)... Rabbi Aqiva declares these impure and the sages declare them pure. (M. Toharot 7:9)

However, in the story of Abba Chilkiyah and his wife, a woman who does so appears to be worthy of special note.

Instead of generally assuming that women *do* give *tzedakah* to all who come to their door, the rabbis more often attempt to contain the unruly and Other female by setting up an image of a woman who is ideal. Chilkiyah's wife, then, when she "feeds the needy, is typical of the vision

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32. See, for instance, M. Toharot 7:9, BT Shabbat 156b, BT Baba Metzia 59b, YT Avodah Zara 2.2 (41a).

33. Ilan, *Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women from Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 1997), 265.

34. Translation, Ilan's.

of charitable women the rabbis had in mind.”<sup>35</sup> A woman who fits this mold can remain largely two-dimensional, “apportioned [to] separate spheres and separate responsibilities” than men.<sup>36</sup> Once so classified and categorized, the fact that she may be a wonder-worker and rain-bringer ceases to be of concern; certainly the rabbis would never come looking for her to ask *her* to pray for rain, because she is simply a typical woman, doing what a typical woman is ideally supposed to do.

Parallel: Ketubbot 67b<sup>37</sup>

The story that appears in Ketubbot 67b is not exactly a parallel, but it contains language similar to this depiction of Abba Chilkiyah’s wife: both women are able to give “direct benefit” to the poor because they are “typically at home,” while their husbands are not. Apparently, as women, these figures have inherent opportunities that men do not; their tie to the home becomes their route to merit. They themselves are marginal figures, neither rounded nor complex,<sup>38</sup> and their capacity to give directly gives them the indirect reward of saving their husbands’ feet (Ukba) or fame (Chilkiyah).

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35. Ilan, *Massekhet Taanit*, 221.

36. Judith Baskin, “Women and Judaism,” in Jacob Neusner, et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Brill and Continuum, 2000), vol. 3, 1478.

37. For full text, see appendix, below.

38. Adler, 29.

Or perhaps [it is because of] these bandits who were in our neighborhood: I asked that they die, and she asked that they return in *teshuvah*—and they returned [in *teshuvah*].

אי נמי הנהו ביריוני דהוו בשיבבות, [אנא] בעי רחמי דלימותו, והיא בעיא רחמי דליהדרו בתיובתא, [ואהדרו].

### Analysis

Throughout this narrative, Abba Chilkiyah has been portrayed as Other for being a non-sage, for using non-rabbinic logic, and most of all, for having a talent for prayer that stands outside the normative rabbinic spectrum. In the words of Stuart Miller, “it is not Torah learning and certainly not facility with halakhic argument that enables him to produce the rain”—rather it is the sincerity he brings to prayer as a “pious rustic.”<sup>39</sup>

If Chilkiyah is such an Other, then all the more so is his wife. Although she is a rustic woman, tied to the home, without access to learning or rabbinic culture, we learn that she has a capacity for strength of prayer that surpasses even her husband’s. In the end, her generously-spirited prayer for the wicked bandits in their neighborhood, outstrips her husband’s wish that they die. She preserves their home—and its extension, their neighborhood—as a symbol of house and generous spirit herself.

### Parallel: BT Brachot 10a<sup>40</sup>

The framework of this short tale in BT Brachot is nearly identical to this final portion of the text in BT Taanit. In both renditions of the story, the husband (here, Rabbi Meir) desires the death of a group of bandits and the wife (here, Beruriah) desires their *t’shuvah* (“repentance”). In

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39. Miller, 209.

40. For full text, see appendix, below.

both stories, the bandits do return in *t'shuvah* ("repentance"). However, the middle of the Brachot tale makes clear that the difference between the versions is significant; this is because of who Beruriah and Meir are, what Beruriah says, and what results.

The story of Chilkiyah and his wife is the story of rustics whose talent is for prayer and who are gifted with some inborn divine favor. The story of Meir and Beruriah, in contrast, is the story of "a couple of sages approaching the same problem."<sup>41</sup> Where Chilkiyah prays and his wife prays harder, Meir reasons, and Beruriah reasons *better*. Beruriah uses the tools of the rabbinic toolbox to best her husband and win him over to her side. Her triumph here is not in the bandits' *t'shuvah* ("repentance")—which Meir, not she, ultimately prays for—but in her using the very program that designates her Other as a woman to out-reason an esteemed sage. Essentially, Meir gains the bandits' salvation because he has been out-smarted.

With this final parallel to the story of Chilkiyah, the intricacies and complications of Otherness come to their fullest circle—

Chilkiyah's wife is Other because she is not a man.

Chilkiyah is Other because he is not a sage.

The rabbis are normative but need Chilkiyah and his wife, who have the ear of heaven.

These rabbis can be represented by Meir, one of the greatest of sages.

Yet Meir is bested by Beruriah, whose very existence is a source of fascination and deep discomfort to the rabbis. As the Other who is too close in—too like the (normative) sages to be

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41. Ilan, 223.

dismissed; too like all they hold distant from themselves to be included in their (normative) structures—Beruriah symbolizes the haziness of the boundaries of rabbinic Judaism herself. She—*beiteihu* (“the house/wife”) of Rabbi Meir—stands in the doorway, neither in nor out, and challenges those who find her there on the threshold.

From a prayer for rain, we arrive at the most troubled waters of rabbinic boundaries. The story of Chilkiyah, which was merely humorous at its outset, contains within it ironies that challenge and demand a questioning of the very volumes that contain it.

Yet, the final irony lies in the fact these stories have been included in the Talmud at all. As the recorders of the tales, the rabbis have contained these discomfiting characters by printing them in a rabbinic context, passing them on only to those like them who can read them. It is our privilege now, with boundaries blurred anew in our own time, to reopen these doors, climb again onto these roofs, and see what rain will fall.

## Appendix: Parallel Texts

### YT Taanit 1:4 (60b-c)

#### - 1 -

<sup>42</sup>The *chasid* of K'far Imi appeared to the rabbis [in a dream]. He would pray and rain would fall.

איתחמי לרבנן חסידא דכפר אימי יצלי ומיטרא נחת.

#### - 2 -

The rabbis went to him. His wife (lit. the people of his house) said to them, "He is on the mountain."

סלקון רבנן לגביה. אמרה לון בני בייתיה בטורא הוא יהיב.

#### - 3 -

They went to him. They said to him, "Good day," and he did not answer them. He sat and ate and did not say to them, "You break bread." When he was going home, he made a bundle of wood and carried his cloak over the load.

נפקון לגביה. אמרון ליה אישר ולא אגיבון יתב מיכול ולא אמ' לון אתון כריכין מי עלל עבד חד מוכל דקיסין ויהב גולתא מרום מובלה.

#### - 5 -

He entered [his house] and said to his wife, "These rabbis here want us to pray so that rain will fall. If I do pray and rain falls, they will be shamed. But if it does not [rain], it will be a profanation of the name of Heaven. Instead, come, let's you and I go up [to the roof] and pray. If rain falls, we will say to them, 'Heaven has already made miracles!' And if it doesn't, we will say to them, 'We are not worthy to pray and be answered.'" They went up and prayed, and rain fell.

עאל ואמר לבני בייתיה אילין רבנן הכא בעי ניצלי וייחות מיטרא. ואין אנא מצלי ומטרא נחת גנאי הוא לון. ואין לא חילול שם שמים הוא. אלא אייתי אנא ואת ניסוק ונצלי. אין נחת מיטרא אנן אמרין לון כבר דעבדון שמייא ניסין. ואין לא אנן אמרין לון לית אנן כד' מצלייא ומתענייא. וסלקון וצלון ונחת מיטרא.

#### - 6 -

He came down to them. He said to them, "Why have the rabbis taken the trouble to come here today?" They said, "We wanted you to pray and ask for rain." He said to them, "Do you need my prayers? Heaven has already made miracles."

נחת לגבון. אמר לון למה איטרפון רבנן להכא יומא דין. אמרין ליה בעיי תצלי וייחות מיטרא. אמר לון ולצלתי אתון צריכין כבר דעבדון שמייא ניסין.

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42. Translation mine.

- 7 -

They said to him, "Why, when you were on the mountain, we said to you, 'Good day,' and you did not answer us?" He said to them, "I was busy in my work. Should I turn my mind from my work?"

[They] said to him, "And why, when you sat down to eat did you not say to us, 'You break bread'?" He said to them, "I only had enough for my portion. Should I have spoken to you insincerely?"

They said to him, "Why, when you came down did you carry your cloak over your load?" He said to them, "It is not mine: it is borrowed for me to [use it] while praying. Should I [risk] tearing it?"

- 8 -

They said to him, "And why, when you were on the mountain, did your wife wear dirty clothes, but when you came in from the mountain, she wore clean ones?"

He said to them, "When I am on the mountain, she wears dirty clothes so that no man will turn his gaze on her. And when I come in from the mountain, she wears clean clothes so that I won't turn my gaze on another woman.

They said to him, "You are worthy of praying and being answered."

**Ketubbot 67b**

- 9 -

<sup>43</sup>There was a poor man in Mar Ukba's neighborhood, and every day he [Mar Ukba] would put four zuz in his door socket. One day, he [the poor man] said, "I will go and see who is doing this good thing for me." That day, Mar Ukba was late at the beit midrash. His wife (lit. his house) came with him. When he [the poor man] saw them moving the door socket, he went out after them. They ran from him and entered into a furnace [just] cleared of ashes. Mar Ukba's feet were burning. His wife said to him, "Lift your feet and place them on my feet." He was distressed. She said to him, "I am [typically] found at home, and [thus can give the poor] direct benefit."

אמרין ליה למה כד הויתא בטורא  
אמרין לך אישר ולא אגיבתינן. אמר לון  
דהוינא עסיק בפעולותי. מה הוינא  
מסעה דעתי מן פעלותי.

אמר ליה ולמה כד יתבת למיכול לא  
אמרת לן איתון כריכין. אמר לון דלא הוה  
גביי אלא פלחי מה הוינא מימור לכון  
בחנפין.

אמרין ליה למה כד דאתיה למיעול יהבת  
גולתה מרום מובלה. אמר לון דלא הוות  
דידי, שאילה הוות דניצלי בה מה הוינא  
מבזעא יתה.

אמרון ליה ולמה כד הווי את בטורא  
איתתך לבשה מאנין צאין, וכד דאת  
עליל מן טורא היא לבשה מאנין נקיין.

אמר לון כד דאנא הוי בטורא היא לבשה  
מאנין צאין דלא יתן בר נש עיניו עליה,  
וכד דאנא עליל מן טורא היא לבשה  
מאנין נקיין דלא יתן עיניי באיתא אוחרי.  
אמרון ליה יאות את מצליא ומתענייא.

מר עוקבא הוה עניא בשיבבותיה, דהוה  
רגיל כל יומא דשדי ליה ארבעה זוזי  
בצינורא דדשא. יום אחד אמר: איזיל  
איחזי מאן קעביד בי ההוא טיבותא.  
ההוא יומא נגהא ליה למר עוקבא לבי  
מדרשא, אתיא דביתהו בהדיה, כיון  
דחזיוה דקא מצלי ליה לדשא נפק  
בתרייהו, רהוט מקמיה עיילי לההוא  
אתונא דהוה גרופה נורא, הוה קא  
מיקליין כרעיה דמר עוקבא, אמרה ליה  
דביתהו: שקול כרעיק אותיב אכרעאי.  
חלש דעתיה, אמרה ליה: אנא שכיחנא  
בגויה דביתא ומקרבא אהנייתי.

## Brachot 10a

### - 10 -

<sup>44</sup>There were bandits in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir, and they distressed him very much. Rabbi Meir would ask for mercy over them that they would die. His wife, Beruriah, said to him, "What is your reasoning? —Because it is written: *Let sinners [חטאים] be wiped out [from the land]* (Ps. 104:35). Is it written 'sinners' [חוטאים]? [No,] it says 'sins' [חטאים]. And, too, drop to the end of the verse: *And wicked ones will be no more.* Since 'sins will be wiped out,' 'wicked ones will be no more.' [Thus,] instead, ask for mercy over them that they may return in *teshuvah* and be wicked ones no more." He asked for mercy over them, and they returned in *teshuvah*.

הנהו בריוני דהוו בשבבותיה דרבי מאיר והוו קא מצערו ליה טובא, הוה קא בעי רבי מאיר רחמי עלויהו כי היכי דלימותו. אמרה ליה ברוריא דביתהו: מאי דעתך? - משום דכתיב: (תהלים ק"ד) יתמו חטאים, מי כתיב חוטאים? חטאים כתיב ועוד, שפיל לסיפיה דקרא: ורשעים עוד אינם, כיון דיתמו חטאים - ורשעים עוד אינם? אלא, בעי רחמי עלויהו דלהדרו בתשובה - ורשעים עוד אינם. בעא רחמי עלויהו והדרו בתשובה.

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43. Translation mine.

44. Translation mine.

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*L'tahkain Olam b'Malchut Shaddai*  
*To Repair the World within the Majestic [Guidelines] of God*  
Aleinu (Concluding Prayer)

**A (humble) Guide to Teaching and Inspiring Others**

Merrill Alpert  
Final Project  
Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Summer, 2005

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*L'takhain Olam b'Malchut Shaddai*

*To Repair the World within the Majestic [Guidelines] of God*

Aleinu (Concluding Prayer)

*If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of becoming, then I warn you that you'll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capabilities, your own possibilities.*

Abraham Maslow

*The Mitzvot were given in order to refine human beings.*

Leviticus Rabba 13:3

### Section I – Introduction, Project Description and Setting

From the three daily exhortations of the Aleinu to Maslow's warning, there would seem to be no question as to what the mission of a Jew is. And if it were unclear as to how to get there, then the Midrashic mind of the Rabbis in their commentary on Leviticus, lays it out in one easy step – follow the mitzvot. So, why don't more... some... hardly any people want to save the world? And, from a Jewish perspective, why don't they feel obligated to do so? Every person has it within themselves to help make the world a better place. In fact, it is often said that people are happier and more fulfilled when they are able to help others. So why is it that people don't do more to help others and do it more of the time? Why is it that there are only a select number of individuals in this world – in all corners of it, in all religions and affiliations, in all ethnicities and cultures that tap their Maslowian capabilities to their fullest extent and rise to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the bereaved, preserve the environment – in short, to make the world a better place?

Is there something we can discover in these role models, these “heroes?” Is there some social justice DNA that we can extract from their lives and transmit to others? Can we learn from their examples and will their stories inspire others? According to Dr. Nel Noddings the answer is yes! It is called ‘modeling’ and is the first of four concrete steps (Modeling – Dialogue – Practice – Confirmation) that she suggests need to be followed in order to transform ordinary individual into caring people. The end result of this project is a Template of Action built on these four steps. The template matches a particular group of these role models called “Mitzvah Heroes,” with appropriate Jewish texts and other inspirational sources, along with practical programmatic suggestions as well.

During the 2003-04 academic-year, I had the good fortune to live, work and study in Israel as a *Chaveret Ziv* - a Fellow of the Ziv Tzedakah Fund. As such I was introduced to some of the most inspirational people I have ever known, tzedakah activists affectionately dubbed “mitzvah heroes.” As part of my fellowship, I was able to offer the opportunity for a group of Rabbinical and Education students, who were part of HUC-JIR’s first-year program in Israel, to meet once a week for 10 weeks visiting these mitzvah heroes. Our purpose was to spend time with a few of these extraordinary individuals and begin to uncover some of the “truths” behind their lives and the motivation for their work. A second goal was to begin to gauge their potential for inspiring others. I had been amazed, overwhelmed and impressed by these heroes, but it was now another thing to watch as future Jewish leaders were exposed to these same individuals. These young students, these future Rabbis and educators, will be the ones attempting to inspire others to want to do Tikun Olam – to repair the world. I hope that when that time comes, they will remember these *dugmaot* – these exemplars, whose selfless actions helped to make the lives of others a bit better and then, in turn, maybe these students will be able to serve as examples, as models for teaching others to follow in their footsteps.

We often seek the practical, the programmatic, the “next steps.” But do we understand the principles that under-gird them, the enduring questions they seek to answer? That is the task of the first part of this paper – to examine and try to comprehend the texts, and to gain a better understanding and initial appreciation of these Mitzvah Heroes.

We already know many of the traditional sources – after all, we’ve often heard them on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. We nod our heads, we know it’s the right thing to do, but once we leave we seem to leave the inspiration and mandate behind. Do we really need them? The answer is obviously “yes.” However, for the purposes of this project, it is because they represent the essential Jewish aspect of Nodding’s second step, **Dialogue**. But what about the **modeling** mentioned above? Are the Mitzvah Heroes whom the students in this project met inspirational? Who are these people that we are trying to use as models? What inspired them to do this chesed, these acts of loving kindness? What prompted them to change their own lives and take on causes and issues that are bigger than life? And even if we are moved by them, can we use these people to inspire others to follow in their footsteps?

## Section II – Review of Jewish Sources (Full Text)

A mitzvah is often translated by the general (Jewish) public as a “good deed.” In fact, however, a mitzvah is a religious imperative, something that a Jew is expected or “obligated” to do. There are 613 mitzvot in the Torah, some negative and some positive. Some are phrased in such a way as to tell us exactly what we should do or not do such as “You shall not murder.” In other commandments the goal is clear but not the details as how to achieve it, such as “Honor your father and your mother.”

While there are many mitzvot, I have selected some of the major ones used in Social Action or Social Justice study and programming and have organized them into three categories:

- a) the overarching or **foundational mitzvot** of Tzedakah and G’milut Chesed that cut across most areas of concern and action;
- b) **two sample sets of mitzvot**, each tied to a single theme – one showing how detailed and infused the notion of righteousness was in even the most basic laws of agriculture (one of the main “professions” at the time) and one showing how broad the context of financial responsibility to others is;
- c) the remainder of **the collection**.

### **The Foundational Mitzvot**

The three textual selections presented here represent three different types of sources. The first is Biblical. All commandments (even those added by the Rabbis) derive from the Torah.

***Zedek, Zedek tirdof***

***Justice, Justice, you shall pursue (Deuteronomy 16:20)***

Tzedakah is usually translated as charity, but this is incorrect. The English translation for this positive mitzvah is “justice.” Compared to the word charity, which comes from the Latin word *caritas* – translated as “love of God,” tzedakah is not a choice, but rather the fulfillment of an obligation. Charity is a gift, an expression of free will (albeit, a very loving and wonderful one). Tzedakah, as mentioned at the outset, is something that is expected of each and every one of us, which makes sense when you think about what “justice” demands. Justice is doing what’s right,

what's fair. If it's a gift then it is subject to how we feel, whether we want to give something or not. And even if we are in the mood, how much do we give? Justice, on the other hand, doesn't care whether we are up to it, or interested, or ready – Justice demands that we do “the right thing.”

But does doing the “right” thing make one “righteous?” The answer can be found in the second source, the poetic writings included in the Tanach, from the Book of Psalms, and in the Rabbinic commentary on it found in the Midrash, one of the great sources of Rabbinic explanation and imagination.

*“Open the Gates of Righteousness for me...”*

**Psalm 118:19**

*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 (g'milut chasadim).*

#### **Midrash on Psalms 118**

The only question which remains is who are the individuals in the Psalm who are able to answer in the affirmative? Are they ordinary people or are they *tzaddikim*? Did they perform these actions on a daily basis or just in the last days of their lives? What is clear is that these were not single acts since they are worded in the plural.

Whatever ambiguity may remain is cleared up in perhaps the most famous of all Tzedakah texts, our third source, Maimonides' Eight Degrees of Tzedakah. Maimonides, who was also known as the RaMBaM, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, was one of the greatest commentators on and

codifiers of Jewish law. His eight degrees of Tzedakah may suggest which level is more noble and desirable than the other, but it leaves no ambiguity that “no action” is not even an option.

*There are eight degrees of tzedakah, each one superior to the next. A person reaching the highest degree is the one who upholds the hand of an Israelite reduced to poverty by handing that person a gift or loan, or by entering into a partnership with him or her, or by finding that Israelite work in order to strengthen that person's hand, so that she or he will have no need to beg from others.*

**Mishneh Torah 10:7-15**

- Level 1 (the best) Giving a loan or getting him a job, so that he won't need to ask for charity any more.
- Level 2 When the giver does not know to whom he is giving, and the poor does not know from whom he receives.
- Level 3 When the giver knows to whom he has given, but the poor does not know from whom he receives.
- Level 4 When the giver does not know who he gave to, but the poor knows who he is getting from.
- Level 5 Giving straight to the poor, before he even asks.
- Level 6 Giving after he asks.
- Level 7 Giving, but not enough.
- Level 8 (The last and lowest level) Giving sourly, sadly. However, even this kind of charity is still a Mitzvah.

## Two Case Studies:

Throughout Jewish history, the fulfillment of the principle of tzedakah has been a noble and praiseworthy statement of communal responsibility. From Biblical days to our own times, Jews have responded to the needs of their fellow Jews, their neighbors and strangers with love and compassion. Our first “Case Study” comes from when the Israelites settled in the Promised Land after wandering in the wilderness, many of them turned to farming. The Torah gave them special laws for practicing tzedakah as they planted and harvested their crops.

A farmer harvesting his fields would naturally want to gather as much as possible. These laws served as guidelines for preventing greed as well as providing for the needy. They set forth rules, which governed the following:

- 1) *pe'ah* – the “corner” of the field: to be left unharvested.
- 2) *Shikhah* – the “forgotten” crops; to remain ungathered.
- 3) *Olelot* – the “imperfect” fruit; to be left on the vines and trees.
- 4) *Leket* – the “fallen” produce; to be left where it was dropped.
- 5) *Ma'aser ani* – the “tithe for the poor”; every third year, a one-tenth portion.
- 6) *Shemithah* – the “Sabbath” year of the land; occurring every seventh year, during which no sowing or planting would take place.

In **Leviticus 19:9, 10** it is written: *when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.*

In **Deuteronomy 24:19** it is written: *when you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.*

In **Deuteronomy 24:20, 21** it is written: *when you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again: that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.*

In **Deuteronomy 14:28, 29** it is written: *every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your field of that year, but leave it within your settlements. Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in the settlements shall come and eat their fill.*

In **Exodus 23:10, 11** it is written: *six years shall you sow your land and gather in its yield; but in the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.*

The pe'ah, the shikhah, the olelot, the leket, and the ma'aser ani were to be made available for those in want; and during the shemitah year those crops that did continue to grow by themselves would be free to all, with special attention given to the needy.

Why does the Torah include these laws? After all, some of the most joyous times in ancient Israel were the seasons of the harvest. The farmers had tilled their land, planted their seeds, watered the soil, and driven off the animals and insects that might destroy the crops. Now after months of waiting, all was ready for the harvest. But the laws of the Torah insured that those who were not able to raise crops of their own would also enjoy the blessing of the harvest. Thus the Torah repeatedly reminds the people that it is their responsibility to care for the needs of the less fortunate, so they too, can rejoice.

*He that has a bountiful eye shall be blessed."*

**Proverbs 20:9**

*Whoever shuts his ear to the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself,  
but shall not be heard.*

**Proverbs 21:13**

Our second Case Study looks at the financial implications of being righteous. We usually associate tzedakah with the giving of money to the poor. However, why should we consider it an act of tzedakah to lend someone money to purchase the tools that will enable him to earn a living or to open a business? As we already saw in Rambam's Tzedakah Ladder, this is the highest form of tzedakah, of gemilut chesed – an act of lovingkindness, to help someone help themselves. That is why the Torah also teaches us that there are three ways in which to deal with the “plague” of poverty. The first is to relieve it temporarily. The second is to help the poor escape from it. The third is to prevent it.

While the highest form of tzedakah may be an interest free loan, the Torah actually prohibits one from charging interest in this type of circumstance, in the first place. When our brother or sister is in trouble, it cannot be seen as an opportunity to benefit from, rather it must only be seen as an opportunity to help others less fortunate (try comparing that with supply-demand economic theory)!

*In Leviticus 25:35-37 it states: And if your brother be poor and his means fail... then you shall uphold him... do not exact from him in advance or accrue interest, but fear your God. Let him stay under you as your brother. Do not lend him money at advance interest, or give him your food at accrued interest.*

The Torah, however, goes beyond loans and interest and tackles the question of helping the needy in one's community in general. Because human nature may not always motivate us to constantly take care of those around us, and it certainly does not take into account the psychological misgivings that one may have, the Torah offers wise counsel, specific guidance, and a sense of how that favor will be returned to the one who gives:

*In Deuteronomy 15:7, 8, 10, and 11 it states:  
If however, there is a needy person among you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs... Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return... God will bless you in all your efforts and*

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

A close reading of this last text reveals that the Torah links “needy” and “kinsman” at the beginning and at the end. In the second half it inserts a different phrase, “*For there will never cease to be **needy ones in your land**, which is why I command you open your hand to the **poor**...*” This sentence can be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways. Who are the **needy ones in your land**? Are they only your kinsman? If they are, then the Torah had already made that clear and this sentence would be unnecessary. Also since the Torah has no punctuation, perhaps the word “**poor**” was meant to be followed by a comma thus suggesting that we need to be concerned for the welfare of our kinsman and for all of those who are in need. Perhaps, the Torah is trying to teach us the meaning of one’s responsibility for one’s total community. For the most ecumenical among us, we are all children of the One God. That is why the Midrash teaches us that God created “Adam” – one being, both male and female, so that no one might argue “my ancestor is greater than yours.” If we regard our fellow men and women as brothers and sisters, then we should be willing to offer a helping hand to any one of them who may be in need. And if not, then we are clearly (at least according to the interpretation set forth here), obligated to offer that same hand “*readily and have no regrets.*” Either way the Bible is telling us to not to look down on those less fortunate, but rather to consider them as part of our extended family and community. That is why when we see a beggar, we should see someone created b’tzelem Elohim, in the image of God, a fellow child of God.

*“When a beggar stands at your door, the Holy One... stands at his right hand.”*

Vayikra Rabbah 34:10

### **The Remaining Collection:**

In addition to the texts reviewed at the beginning of this section, there are a number of additional “classic” texts that are the foundation of many of the major Jewish principles linked to *tzedakah* and *gimilut chasadim*. They are listed below as resources for text study and discussion. Those that are referenced in the “Template” section at the end are indicated with an asterik (\*). Many of these texts may be combined to address particular populations, needs and/or circumstances. Several have already been paired below because their imperatives are often linked.

1. **\*Mishaneh Habriyot – Respect for all Human Life**
  2. **\*Lechem Lreyvim – Feeding the Hungry**
  3. **Bikur Cholim – Visiting the sick**
  4. **L’hader P’nai Zaken – Respect for Elders**
  - 5a. **Shomrei Adamah – Guarding the Earth/ Ecology**
  - 5b. **Baal Tashchit – Do not Waste**
  - 6a. **Pidyon Shvuyim – Ransoming the Captive**
  - 6b. **Al Ta’amod - Do Not Stand Idly By**
  7. **Hachnassat Orchim – Welcoming Guests**
  8. **Shalom Bayit – Peace in the Home**
- 

1. **\*Mishaneh Habriyot – Respect for all Human Life**

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Haolam Mishaneh Habriyot*

*Blessed are You, Ruler of the Universe, Who formed many different types of people.*

2. **\*Lechem Lreyvim – Feeding the Hungry**

*One way to enter Heaven is by feeding the hungry.*

Midrash Tehilim 118:17

3. **Bikur Cholim – Visiting the sick**

*Rabbi Akiva said, “He who does not visit the sick is as if he shed blood.”*

Nedarim 40a

#### 4. L'hader P'nai Zaken – Respect for Elders

*When we were young we were told to act like adults. Now that we are old we are treated like infants.*

Bava Kamma 92b

*Honor and respect the aged and saintly scholar whose physical powers are broken, equally with the young and vigorous one; for the broken tablets of stone no less than the whole ones had a place in the Ark of the Covenant.*

Berachot 8b

#### 5a. Shomrei Adamah – Guarding the Earth/ Ecology

*In the hour when the Holy One created the first human being, God took the person before all the trees of the garden of Eden and said to the person: "See my works, how fine and excellent they are! Now all that I have created, for you have I created. Think upon this, and do not corrupt and desolate my world: for if you corrupt it, there is no one to set it right after you."*

Kohelet Rabbah 7:28

*All that we see... the heaven, the earth, and all that fills it... All these things are the external garments of God.*

Tanya, chapter 42

*One day he, Choni, the circle drawer was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree: he asked him, "How long does it take (for this tree) to bear fruit?" The man replied, "Seventy years." Choni then further asked him, "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?" The man replied. "I found (ready grown) carob trees in the world; as my ancestors planted these for me, so I too plant these for my children.*

Taanit 23a

#### 5b. Baal Tashchit – Do Not Waste

*The Law forbids only wanton destruction... Not only one who cuts down trees, but one who smashes household goods, tears clothes, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or demolishes a destroys articles of food with destructive intent, transgresses the command - "Baal Tashchit."*

Rambam Mishneh Torah:

King and Wars 6:8, 10

**6a. Al Ta'amod Daam Re'echah - Do Not Stand Idly By the (spilled) Blood of Your Neighbor**

*One shall not stand by idly when his brother's blood is being shed.*

Leviticus 19:16

*If a person permitted certain sins to go on without strongly objecting, that person is considered a murderer.*

Moed Katan 5a

**6b. Pidyon Shvuyim – Ransoming the Captive**

*The duty of ransoming captives supersedes the duty of tzedakah to the poor.*

Maimonides, Mattenat Aniyyim

8:10

*Money set aside for charity purposes or for the building of a synagogue may be used for ransoming captives.*

Bava Batra 88b

**7a. Hachnassat Orchim – Welcoming Guests**

*God appeared to him (Abraham) at Elonay Mamray. He was sitting at the opening of the tent during the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes to see and there were three men standing over him. He ran from the opening of the tent to greet them and he bowed to the ground. He said: "my lords, if I have found favor in your eyes do not pass before me. Take a little water and wash your feet. Rest here under the tree. I will take a slice of bread and you will refresh yourselves. Then you can go..."*

Genesis 18:1-5

**7b. Shalom Bayit – Peace in the Home**

*Where there is domestic harmony, the Lord Himself dwells in the home.*

Sukkah 17a

*Whoever manages to establish peace in his home is regarded by Scriptures as if he were a king who establishes peace in Israel... and whoever allows jealousy and dissension to reign in his household is as if he is a king who established jealousy and dissension among all Israel.*

Avot D'Rabbi Natan 28:3

### Section III – Review of Theoretical Literature

Lawrence Kohlberg, a cognitive developmental psychologist focused his life's work on what he called the levels of Moral Development. His most famous work is based on questions that are raised when one has to think about an ethical dilemma and then choose the "greater good." Kohlberg uses the example of Heinz, the man whose wife will die if he does not get her the medicine she needs. The complicating factor is that the pharmacy is charging an outrageous sum of money which Heinz cannot afford. Should he steal the medicine to save his wife's life or allow her to die because it is illegal and unethical for him to steal the medicine? At the same time, is it unethical for the pharmacy to charge whatever it wants when a person's life is at stake?

Kohlberg articulated six levels – the highest stage of which is Universal Ethical Principles, where a person develops and follows his or her own self chosen ethical principles, which are a part of an integrated and carefully thought out system of values. If social laws violate these principles, the person's actions will remain consistent with his or her ethical principles. While the mitzvah heroes we will explore in this project do not always need to fight or supersede the "system," they do need to rely on the clarity of their mission and of the ethical principles which they have ultimately made a decision to adhere to. That clarity, that unwavering devotion is what we hope to capture some small part of and try to transmit.

Abraham Maslow, one of the founders of humanistic psychology, believed that every person has it within themselves to help make the world a better place. Maslow stated, *"These 'altruistic' people may be understood, at least in part, as having been satisfied in their basic needs throughout their lives, particularly in their early years. They seem to develop exceptional power to withstand recent or future thwarting of these needs simply because they have strong healthy character structure... It is just the ones who have loved and been loved, have had many deep friendships, who can hold out against hatred, rejection, or persecution."* This was the beginning of Abraham Maslow's understanding of self-actualizing people. Self-actualization is actually the highest level of Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" thereby making it the hardest level to achieve. Are Mitzvah Heroes self-actualizers? Maslow didn't comment on that but he did refer to the people that performed extraordinary good deeds as "the best of humanity."

While Kolberg's and Maslow's teachings offer insights into the nature and character of Mitzvah Heroes, it is Nel Noddings who offers a prescriptive for how people can achieve this level of caring. Dr. Nel Noddings, Professor of educational philosophy, has developed a thesis which she calls "The Ethics of Caring". In an effort to truly transform people from just "caring about" a cause or an issue into people who "care for" a cause or person, Dr. Noddings believes that one will change if they participate in the following four pronged process: Modeling, Dialogue, Practice and Confirmation.

**Modeling.** Within a care perspective, not unexpectedly, educators are concerned with the growth of people as "care-ers" and "care-fors." Unlike cognitive developmentalists, for example, they are not primarily interested in "moral" reasoning (although there is, of course, a recognition that reasoning is important). **Educators have to show in their behavior what it means to care.** "We do not merely tell them to care and give them texts to read on the subject, we demonstrate our caring in our relations with them." (Noddings 1998:190)

**Dialogue.** According to Noddings, "Dialogue is such an essential part of caring, that we could not model caring without engaging in it" (op.cit.). While the intent to engage people in dialogue about caring is clear, the reason why to do so is not. The answer may be, that in talking directly about, and exploring our caring – we come to realize that it can be manifested in very different ways. **True and open dialogue with other caregivers and with those that we care for, may help people to critique and better understand their own relationships and practice.** This type of dialogue allows us to also evaluate our 'attempts' to care: "As we try to care, we are helped in our efforts by the feedback we get from the recipients of our care" (ibid:191). Furthermore, and most crucially according to Noddings, dialogue contributes to the growth of the cared-fors.

In this project, I have expanded "dialogue" to include a conversation with the history, traditions and values of Judaism through Jewish texts. This not only roots the learning in Jewish sources but puts the learner in direct conversation with these texts and with commentators throughout the centuries.

**Practice.** Nel Noddings (1998:191) argues that the experiences in which we immerse ourselves tend to produce a ‘mentality.’ If we want to produce people who care for another, then it makes sense to **give students practice in caring and the opportunity for reflection on that practice.** This is the thinking behind “required” community service in high schools and many youth organizations.

**Confirmation.** This particular component, it is suggested, sets caring apart from other approaches to moral education. In making her case, Nel Noddings draws particularly on the work of Martin Buber. He describes confirmation as **an act of affirming and encouraging the best in others** (see *Between Man and Man*).

Ordinary people may be concerned about the homeless and the hungry in our community and it is certainly important to make a donation to help those people. But to do so once a year when the phone rings and we are asked to contribute is quite different from actually picking up leftovers from a banquet weekly and delivering it to a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. Dr. Noddings’ premise is that “caring about” is empty if it does not culminate in ongoing, caring relations. (Noddings 2002:23-4)

In the body of this paper, I will introduce the reader to several people – Mitzvah Heroes – that I believe reflect the thinking of both Kolberg and Maslow, and perhaps more importantly, do their chesed work in accordance with Dr. Noddings’ key components. These individuals may not know about Nel Noddings or her work, yet they are true exemplars of her underlying premise and assumptions about caring. It is because of this correlation that the “template” at the end of this project incorporates Noddings’ four-pronged process.

#### Section IV – ZIV Tzedakah Fund

The following is the current Mission Statement for the Ziv Tzedakah Fund:

*The Ziv Tzedakah Fund, started by Danny Siegel in 1981, is an exciting and unusual organization that is dedicated to the collection and distribution of funds to various little-known Tzedakah projects (we define "Tzedakah" as pure, decent caring or, simply put, "just doing the right thing"). Based upon Jewish tradition, Ziv funds both Jewish and non-Jewish programs. Ziv is also devoted to bringing the educational message of Tzedakah to communities and Jewish and secular schools throughout the United States, Canada and Israel.*

To date the Ziv Tzedakah Fund has distributed almost \$10 million. A description of the funds current efforts, educational resources, links to many of its recipient organizations, and copies of Ziv's annual reports are all available online at [www.ziv.org](http://www.ziv.org). A copy of the report from the year the project was conducted and the most recent Ziv Tzedakah Fund Annual Report are included in the Appendix of this project.

In recent years, Ziv has also produced a series of DVD's on many of the Mitzvah Heroes visited by the students who participated in this project. These DVD's can and should be used in conjunction with the project's Programmatic Template and are available for purchase from Ziv's website and can also be viewed at or borrowed from the Tartak Learning Center on the Los Angeles Campus of HUC-JIR ([www.huc.edu/tartak](http://www.huc.edu/tartak)).

## Section V – Mitzvah Heroes

Abraham Joshua Heschel once said, “What we need more than anything else is not textbooks, but text people. It is the personality of the teacher, which is the text that the pupils read: the text that they will never forget.”

As someone who has worked with teenagers for the past twenty-five years, I have come to understand that this statement by Rabbi Heschel is indeed true. We all look to people, to teachers of all kinds, formal and informal, for the answers about how to live our lives and how to model ourselves. In particular, however, young people need heroes, indeed they seek them out. In a day and age when teens are asked who their personal hero is and they respond with the name of a rock star or athlete, not for their philanthropy but because of their “professional” status, something is wrong. You can admire these individuals for their talent, prowess or professional achievements but they should not earn “hero” status as a result. This section tells the stories of several of the Mitzvah heroes with whom I had the honor of working during my fellowship and, in turn, introducing the HUC students to as part of this project.

Most people do not grow up hoping or planning to be a Mitzvah Hero, nor usually, is it something that a person suddenly decides to be. It seems like it just happens – at least that is what I have learned from my experiences with the Ziv Tzedakah Fund. Through my involvement in this most amazing organization, I have had the good fortune to meet and be inspired by the people who, Danny Siegel, founder and chairman of Ziv, refers to as “Mitzvah Heroes.” Over the past ten years, I have had the privilege of getting to know a variety of individuals, whose lives were transformed by a serendipitous moment or an epiphany-type experience. However, at their core they were already Mitzvah heroes in the making. The only question was what would happen to catapult them forward, when would it happen, and, ironically, would they even be able to pinpoint a particular moment or incident or “would it just happen?”

The Mitzvah Heroes that I have highlighted here are ‘ordinary’ human beings who currently live and work in Israel. The only difference is that they are very busy doing ‘extraordinary’ things.

This guide was written not to just share the stories of selected Mitzvah Heroes, but rather to help encourage all of us to do our part in making the world a better place. The encouragement is part of Nel Noddings ‘modeling’ and making the world a better place is pure Maslow. We all need role models in our lives, people to inspire us to grow and reach our true potential. I truly believe that we all have the power to get involved and make a difference. We are all capable of doing *tikun olam b’malchut shaddai – repairing the world within the majestic guidelines of goodness, righteousness, and Godliness.*

I will be highlighting six individuals and couples here. These and several others will be included in the next section (Programmatic Recommendations) even though they will not be covered in as much detail here. The six are:

1. The **Rabbanit Bracha Kapach**
2. **Clara Hammer**, The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem
3. **Anita Shkedi**, the Director of the **Israel Therapeutic Riding Association**
4. **Malky and Kalman Samuels**, creators of **Shalva**
5. **Miriam and Zarem Freier**, founders of **Shalhevet**
6. **Avshalom Beni**, who operates an organization called **H.A.M.A. – Humans and Animals in Mutual Assistance**

### **Rabbanit Bracha Kapach**

There are no Saints in Judaism however if we did have them I think the Rabbanit Bracha Kapach would come the closest to what I think a true saint is. The Rabbanit was married at the age of eleven and made aliyah from Yemen when she was fourteen, along with her husband and first child. Later in life after she had given birth to her children she busied herself with a full business of her own where she had sixty women embroidering clothing. It was a very successful business. One day she was walking home from work and heard a neighbor woman yelling out her window “Ani Reevah... Ani Reevah” I am hungry. The Rabbanit could not just walk past as if she had not heard anything, so she went in to find out about this woman. She found an elderly woman who had been abandoned by her family and had no way to provide for herself. The woman was laying in bed, in a filthy dirty apartment. The Rabbanit immediately washed the woman, gave her a meal and cleaned her apartment. From that moment on the Rabbanit provided three meals a

day for this woman, for the next four years of her life, and then provided a full funeral for her as well. This woman changed the Rabbanit's life. She closed down her business and instead went into the business of helping others. In a way the rest is history. Today the Rabbanit feeds hungry people in the Nachlaot area of Jerusalem every week. With donations from local caterers, following the many weddings that take place in Jerusalem, she distributes bags of prepared food to dozens of people who come to her door each Friday morning. However, she does not have enough food for the chaggim, the holidays. Therefore before a holiday a representative of the Ziv Tzedakah fund goes to the supermarket and purchases 100 bags of flour, 100 bags of sugar, 100 bottles of oil, 100 bags of rice and pasta, as well as coffee, tea and other day to day necessities for the Rabbanit to distribute.

The Rabbanit is the recipient of both the Israel Prize and the Jerusalem Prize. In fact, she and her late husband, the Rav, have the distinction of being the only married couple to have received the Israel Prize, and both for different reasons. In addition to feeding the hungry the Rabbanit lends beautiful wedding dresses to brides who could not otherwise afford one, gives clothing to those who do not have, runs a summer camp for the local underprivileged children of Nachlaot and she oftentimes writes checks to help keep someone's electricity from being turned off. The Rabbanit is a legend in Jerusalem and people who meet her cannot help but be impressed by her strong will and sense of purpose.

**Clara Hammer**, The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem, was at her butcher to purchase her weekly Shabbat order (over 20 years ago) and saw the butcher hand a bag of chicken fat and bones to a young girl. After the girl left the shop Clara inquired as to what the girl would be doing with such stuff. Mr. Hacker, the butcher, informed her that the girl's father was ill and that the family had run up quite a tab at the shop. He could no longer afford to help the family. So, at least the chicken fat and bones would make chicken soup and help in a cholent. Clara was appalled and told the butcher that from that day forward she wanted the family to be given two chickens and a kilo of ground meat. She would pay for this anonymously. A week later Mr. Hacker, the butcher called Clara Hammer with a similar story and the rest is history. Through donations, large and small she now supports over 190 families on a weekly or monthly basis. Her weekly bill at Mr. Hacker's butcher store is about 6,000 NIS = approximately \$1500.00. Today Clara is

94 years old and still going strong. In spite of a pacemaker and other maladies, she told us that she has to remain healthy and continue to live because so many people depend on her. In the United States Clara had been a Talmud Torah teacher, along with her husband, but she had always dreamed of making aliyah, which they did not long after the 6 Day War. She had always done volunteer work, even before her life changing moment at the butcher shop. It is a part of her life that she knows is something she is privileged to do. Even at the age of 94 she goes out often to share the story of what she does, trying to inspire others to follow in her footsteps.

**Yossi Samuels** was born a healthy happy baby. At the age of fifteen months he was given a tainted DPT shot which caused him to become blind, deaf and hyper-active. His parents searched for ways to communicate with Yossi and to also raise their family of seven other children as normally as possible. Yossi was introduced to Shoshana Weinstock who, deaf as well, was a teacher for the deaf. Shoshana became the Israeli Ann Sullivan and Yossi became the Israeli Helen Keller. After living to see their son Yossi able to share his feelings and live as close to normal a life as possible, **Malky Samuels** prevailed upon her husband **Kalman** to create a place where other families with special children might be able to find help or a respite during the day from the difficulties of raising a special child. Thus **Shalva** was born. This unique facility provides every kind of physical and occupational therapy for the entire range of children with special needs, i.e. deaf, blind, down's syndrome, autism and more. Kalman and his wife, Malky, know only too well the challenges of raising a child with severe special needs and it was because of this that they wanted to help others to learn from their experiences and to help make their lives a bit less stressful. The building that Shalva is in today is only a few years old. For many years Malky did day care and other support programs out of a two bedroom apartment. Shalva is a dream come true. It is complete with a swimming pool for therapy, an arts and crafts room, a full stage, a computer lab, a sound and sensory room, a music room, a dormitory for overnight stays, two full kitchens and much more. It is truly a miracle that such a place exists, but does so because of the tenacity and strong will of Malky and Kalman Samuels.

**Anita Shkedi**, is the Director of the **Israel Therapeutic Riding Association** where children and adults with neurological diseases or trauma, as well as survivors of terror attacks, are helped to walk and function again. Israel National Therapeutic Riding Association is based at Hadassah

Neurirm and is a magical place where lives are transformed through the science of Therapeutic Horseback-riding. Anita is a world expert in the field and has been helping people gain a quality of life that they may not have thought possible. People who are physically impaired or have any variety of different mental or physical issues are helped by riding atop a horse because the movements of the horse most closely replicates the body's own movements and in turn stimulates the nerves and muscles in the spine. Balance and muscle control are developed. People begin to take control of their bodies. When I was at INTRA I saw a group of riders who are mentally disabled adults who are given lessons once a week. It helps them interact with other people and also provides a chance for them to care for the horses. I also saw a young man who had become skizophrenic as an adult. The riding was helping to calm his nerves and was giving him something in his life in which he truly excels.

Following a five month boat trip around the Straits of Tiran, Anita and her family arrived in Israel to make Aliyah, only to find out that the Dr. with whom she was going to work, at Tel Hashomer Hospital, had died during her trip. Upon finding out this information Anita needed to reevaluate what she was going to do for work in her new home. Having been raised in England with horses, she was both an expert and a lover of horseback-riding. Soon she realized that she could take her passion for horses and her training in physical therapy and combine the two into a truly meaningful way to help others. She trained at the Wingate Institute and became the expert that she is today.

**Miriam Freier's** husband Zarem, was the head of Pediatrics at Shaarey Zedek Hospital for over thirty years. About twenty five years ago, Zarem asked Miriam if he could bring home a severely physically disabled little girl, who had been abandoned at birth. She was about ten at that time. Miriam said yes and thus began Miriam's devotion to helping make the lives of the physically disabled just a bit better. This little girl came home weekly and stayed overnight at the Freier's home, playing with the family's five children. After this little girl passed away Miriam began to take physically disabled people to Europe, a trip that they never thought possible. She raises money and puts on both a Hannukah party and a Pcsach Seder for people who live with physical disabilities. As a one woman performer of miracles, Miriam took on the city of Jerusalem and convinced the "powers that be" that there was a need for an apartment

building for the physically challenged to live independently. *Shalhevet, Housing for the Handicapped* is what the apartment building is called. It has thirteen disabled occupants, several of whom have caregivers. The people who live there were either born physically disabled or had an accident or illness that caused them to become disabled. They live in these apartments that have been built to specifications for the needs of the disabled. For some of the residents, this is the first time they have ever lived outside of their parent's home or outside of an institution.

**Avshalom Beni** runs an organization called *H.A.M.A. – Humans and Animals in Mutual Assistance*. Avshalom is a graduate of Reed College of Oregon and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship which he turned down because he could not afford for his wife to go with him to Europe for the year. He then began studying law at Harvard University, but it did not take him long to determine that this was not his calling. Instead he made Aliyah in 1969 and came to live on a Kibbutz, where his love of animals and his knowledge of psychology came together. Avshalom spends his life working with the abused and often neglected elements of Israeli society, doing therapy with the help of cats and dogs. He works with Holocaust Survivors, physically assaulted and sexually abused children, as well as victims of terror. He saves animals that have been abused and uses them in the therapy – a three legged Canaan Dog that was abused by a cult, a small sweet dog that was physically abused beyond recognition, but who lived to be an inspiration to people who now have to live with scars from the random acts of terror that has been a part of Israeli life for such a long time, as well as cats and an entire flock of Pekinese dogs. These animals are able to help those that have suffered so much by allowing them to care for the animals and to love them. It is through these interactions that the patients will invariably open up and share their innermost feelings.

*These additional Mitzvah heroes were also visited by the students participating from HUC in Jerusalem and some are incorporated into the Programmatic Recommendations of this project.*

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**Dr. Eliezer Jaffe**, known as the father of Social Work in Israel and founder of the **Israel Free Loan Association**. Dr. Jaffe is very familiar with Rambam's ladder of Tzedakah, and it became clear to him as the influx of Russians and Ethiopian immigrants were arriving in such large numbers that they were going to need a hand to get set up and established. So in 1990 he founded this Free Loan Association. To date they have given out more than \$36,000,000 worth of loans. Dr. Jaffe was named the Centraid-L. Jacques Menard Professor for the Study of Nonprofit Organizations, Volunteering and Philanthropy and is now Professor Emeritus at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This is the only Chair on this subject at any university in Israel and is an important element of the Master's degree program in Nonprofit Management, the first program of its kind in Israel.

**Reb Shmuel Munk** is the founder of an organization known as **Bayit Cham**, where he takes people who have suffered from mental illness and has put them back into the work force helping them to lead as normal a life as possible. Reb Shmuel has the uncanny ability to listen to what these people say to him, looking deep inside their soul and then using what he sees to help them rebuild their lives, finding meaningful work in the "real world". Over 250 people have benefited from Shmuel's intervention. They include grocery store workers, a silversmith, a florist, cooks in restaurants and banquet halls, as well as many other respected professions. **Bayit Cham** has made it possible for these people to lead relatively self-sufficient lives. **Bayit Cham** has made it possible for these people to live in dignity, with self-respect, without needing to receive subsidy or support from the welfare system of the government of Israel, in turn saving the State of Israel many thousands of dollars. If it were not for **Bayit Cham**, many of these people would end up in institutions or on the street.

The ***Dental Volunteers of Israel Free Clinic*** was founded by the late Holocaust survivor, Trudy Birger and is now still kept viable by her husband **Zev Birger**, also a Holocaust survivor, who took up Trudy's work after her unexpected death a few years ago. The DVI Clinic is the only

clinic of its kind in the world. Dentists volunteer from all over the world, spending usually two weeks treating the underprivileged children of Jerusalem. After having survived the Holocaust Trudy felt that she had been spared for a reason and felt compelled to find a way to help the less fortunate. Thus DVI was born.

Back near the beginning of the current intifada a woman named **Ruth Schlossman** was standing across the street from the Sbarro Pizzeria when the bomb went off. While she was not personally physically injured in that terror attack, it did have a dramatic effect on her nerves. After a few weeks she decided she needed a massage to try to relieve some of the stress and tension in her body. Following that very therapeutic massage she realized that if it could help her cope, then how much more so could it help the many people who were physically affected by terror attacks, and thus ***The Gift of Comfort*** was born. The Gift of Comfort uses licensed massage therapists who provide their services at a discount. Hundreds of survivors of terror attacks have benefited from this unique therapy.

**Alice Jonah** is the volunteer activities director at the Diplomat Hotel. The Diplomat Hotel is a former five star hotel in a suburb of Jerusalem. I visited the former Soviet Union, and along with many of our friends, worked very hard to help the Jews of Russia to emigrate, but none of us truly knew what was going to happen to them once they got out from under the heavy hand of communism. Fast forward about ten to fifteen years and come to the ***Diplomat Hotel*** in Jerusalem, home to about 500 elderly former Russians. In 1990, at the height of the immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union, the city of Jerusalem asked the owner of the Diplomat Hotel to turn itself into an absorption center for the new residents of Israel. Today these residents are watched over by the ever patient and very strong-willed ***Alice Jonah***. The Diplomat is not a retirement hotel. There is no communal dining room. Each person or couple lives independently. But Alice makes sure that these people have some form of quality of life, from providing concerts and lectures to encouraging a choir of their own and arranging for them to perform at Old Age Homes around Jerusalem. She watches over the residents and makes sure that they receive special assistance should they become ill or have a special need or concern.

**Barbara Silverman**, survivor of four life threatening illnesses, works day and night sending *Packages from Home* to Israeli Soldiers who are protecting their country. She began her project taking Shabbat dinners to a group of soldiers who were stationed not far from Jerusalem, near Ramallah, but eventually was told by the army that it was too dangerous for her to continue. She felt she needed to do something, so Packages from Home was created. With the help of donations from all over the world, of both monetary and the much needed specific items, she works with volunteers to send packages of t-shirts, socks, toiletries, candy, cookies, batteries, cards and letters to soldiers serving in the IDF all over Israel.

**Keren Hanan Aynor** is an organization that was founded in memory of Hanan Aynor, former Israeli Ambassador to Ethiopia. Upon his death his very dedicated and strong-willed wife, Sara Aynor, decided to create a fund to offer scholarships for advanced education to Ethiopian Immigrants. Since its inception it has conferred over 800 such scholarships in 90 different disciplines. The recipients are educated contributing members to Israeli society.

## Section VI – Programmatic Recommendations

Thus far, this paper has tried to examine “the principles that under-gird” the next steps and programming of Tikkun Olam, particularly among teenagers and adults – the classic Jewish sources, the theoretical literature of moral action and the “ethics of caring,” and the lives and examples of people, these “mitzvah heroes” who live by these principles knowingly or not. The purpose then, of this section, is to meld these three elements into a “programmatic template” that can help frame these final suggestions and recommendations. The three examples listed here are just that – examples. One of the goals of this project is for the reader to take other Jewish sources from this paper or from their own research, match them with the stories of these Mitzvah Heroes or other relevant and inspirational individuals, and then combine that with practical suggestions for projects and activities.

In order to apply this template, one needs to identify a target audience (e.g., teenagers, college students, one-time adult efforts, sustained family tzedaka/mitzvah projects) and understand something about the nature of volunteering. Since it also helps to have a long list of quick, no excuse recommendations, I have included that here as well.

In general, people in our society are taught that volunteering is a good thing to do. Most faith-based youth programs build volunteer opportunities into their programming. Many schools now require “community service” hours. The goal in all of these efforts is usually to build a balance between “value” and “obligation.” Part of the value can actually be considered self-serving because, often, volunteers are people willing to take action to help build the kind of community that they want to live in. A wise friend of mine, who is passionate about recycling, once explained that we should expect, even demand, that Jewish teenagers and adults do simple things like picking up trash whenever it is in front of them (and disposing of it properly) for three reasons – one, because they feel responsible, two, because they feel good about doing it, and three, because it represents the type of world they want to live in.

Some volunteering choices are not this easy. As a volunteer, choosing between the causes and groups that need help can be tough... they are all important! Since we can’t do it all, Danny

Siegel, in his book,  $1 + 1 = 3$ , suggests that we must begin by answering several questions about ourselves:

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?

Once you have an idea of what most of these answers are, Danny believes that it can be as simple as “caring, hugging, holding the hand of those who are critically ill, driving for hours on end, ...or bringing presents to others at the perfect moment when they are most needed”.

In general, volunteers are needed in almost every area of life. There is most certainly a pressing need for people with professional skills or special talents. If you are a writer, a bus driver, a plumber, musician, bookkeeper, doctor or lawyer, you can use your skills to help others. However, all nonprofit organizations also need help with clerical work (answering phones, stuffing envelopes, filing) as well as fundraising and publicity. This work may not seem exciting, but in most programs it is the behind the scenes work that holds everything together and makes it possible for the organization to fulfill its mission.

Here are 24 general guidelines (enough for a two-year program) for volunteering (or how to counter standard excuses):

1. It is easier than you think to be a volunteer.
2. You are usually in control of the timing. Pick a time that is convenient for you. You can put in as much or as little time as you want.
3. You don't necessarily have to make a long-term commitment – you can oftentimes do one time jobs such as spending an afternoon cleaning the beach or helping sort food at a food bank.
4. There are thousands of non-profit organizations that can benefit from one's assistance.

5. Some agencies may even create a job just for you. If they truly need you, they will be flexible and welcome your involvement.
6. You can come as you are. Many jobs do not require any special skills. What may be needed may be as simple as painting over graffiti on a freeway underpass or delivering meals to homebound elderly.
7. If there is something special that you need to know for a particular agency, most places will train you.
8. Everyone can help – everyone can do something.
9. Most people will find that there are volunteer opportunities within minutes of their own home or workplace. You can even help to begin a project like a neighborhood watch or neighborhood cleanup.
10. One of the underlying benefits of participating in volunteer programs is how it strengthens your community.
11. Volunteering can increase your sense of belonging and community spirit. Volunteering brings people together.
12. Volunteers often come from diverse backgrounds, they may have different skin color, may come from a different religion, or different ethnicity, but they all have the same goals, that of making the world a better place – to do Tikun Olam - repairing the world. Working together actually provides them with an opportunity to see just how much they have in common.
13. Volunteers who help the police, participate in neighborhood watch groups, learn CPR, or train to help in a disaster are creating a more secure community for everyone.
14. Volunteering together is also a good way to strengthen the bonds within a family. It teaches the children that the parents do as they do, not just as they say, and it helps the children see that they are an important part of the community too.
15. When schools have volunteer help from parents and other community members they can give students more individual attention and offer a wider range of activities, including sports, music and art classes, after-school programs and more.
16. By cleaning up our parks and our beaches and painting over graffiti volunteers make the world look better, and in turn that makes people feel better about the communities in which they live.

17. Volunteers provide valuable community service, which translates into saving some serious money. This money can be used for funding other local improvements. For example if neighbors help maintain a local park, the city can then spend more on things like replacing old benches or broken playground equipment.
18. Almost all programs that encourage teenagers to stay in school, help them get jobs, or provide after-school recreation rely heavily on volunteers.
19. While one volunteers they will learn a tremendous amount about themselves, about how to do things, about the government, about their community and certainly about other people.
20. People oftentimes learn that they have a hidden talent that they did not know about until they began volunteering. Taking on a new challenge creates an opportunity for people to learn that they are capable in new and different ways. They may find out that they are better with children than they thought or that they can actually sit and visit with a person in the hospital or an elderly person in a convalescent home.
21. Depending on the volunteer job, people may find that they learn a new skill. They may learn how to landscape, use a computer, do research or any variety of office skills.
22. It can be a very powerful experience to see that little things really do make a difference.
23. It changes a person's view of his or her own worth.
24. It can be a revelation, a life changing experience.

*Gimilut Chasadim are actions we do that show our love and care for one another.*

*Gimilut Chasadim is greater than Tzedakah. Tzedakah uses one's money.*

*Gimilut Chasadim uses one's money and oneself. Tzedakah is for poor people.*

*Gimilut Chasadim is for poor people and rich people. Tzedakah is for the living.*

*Gimilut Chasadim is for the living and the dead.*

Sukkah 49b

## Section VII – Programmatic – Part B (Template)

This template is built on the four part process of Dr. Nel Noddings (see page 17) – Modeling, Dialogue, Practice and Confirmation.

**Topic:** Lechem L'reyvim – Feeding the Hungry

**Modeling:** Rabbanit Bracha Kapach, Clara Hammer (see pages 21 and 22)  
(Hero/es)

**Dialogue:** *One way to enter Heaven is by feeding the hungry.* Midrash Tehilim 118:17  
(Text &  
Discussion)

*Discussion/Dialogue questions:*

- *Who's obligation is it to feed the hungry? Why?*
- *What are the positive and negative implications of helping people who are hungry? Should we be addressing sustainability and root causes?*
- *Why do you the Rabbis saw this action as deserving of entry into heaven?*

**Practice** (Recommended Activities):

- Have a canned food drive in your synagogue or school. A youth group or Boy Scout or Girl Scout Troop can also do this in their local neighborhood by writing a letter and providing an empty grocery bag... coming back several days later to collect it.
- Around Thanksgiving or Pesach – do a special food drive.
- Find out what the caterer or the sisterhood does with their leftovers. It is legal to pack them up and give them to the needy. Google the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Law for more information.
- Volunteer to work in a shelter or soup kitchen.
- Find local restaurants, bakeries or bagel shops that would be willing to donate their leftovers or day old bread and arrange for someone to pick it up and deliver it to a shelter or soup kitchen on a regular (maybe even daily) basis.

**Confirmation:** Pitch an article to a local newspaper or television news program. Collect reflections from participants for the article and then share them on a synagogue website and/or public forum (e.g., Shabbat Services).

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**Topic:**        **Mishaneh Habriyot – Respect for all Human Life (Special Needs)**

**Modeling:**     **Anita Shkedi**, the Director of the **Israel Therapeutic Riding Association**,  
(Hero/es)       **Malky and Kalman Samuels**, creators of **Shalva**, and/or **Miriam and Zarem Freier**, founders of **Shalhevet** (see pages 23, 24 and 25)

**Dialogue:**     *Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Haolam Mishaneh Habriyot*  
(Text &  
Discussion)     *Blessed are You, Ruler of the Universe, Who formed many different types of people.*

*Discussion/Dialogue questions:*

- *What might have prompted the bracha's author(s) to have written it?*
- *Is it better to have separate places available for special needs individuals and their families like Shalva, Shalhevet and INTRA or should they be integrated into the general community?*
- *How might the volunteers and the recipients get to contribute in these environments to the program and to each other?*

**Practice** (Recommended Activities):

- Arrange for a special needs program in the synagogue... it may be a once a month social group, or it can actually be a Hebrew School or Religious School Program. Match up young people from the synagogue youth group to be buddies at these programs.
- Offer a support group for parents of children with special needs.
- Do sensitivity training with the students in the synagogue Religious School or Youth Group.
- Contact local group homes for people with special needs and see if any of the residents are Jewish. Invite them to a Shabbat or Holiday dinner or program. Arrange for them to attend High Holiday Services or even attend Shabbat Services regularly.
- Take a tour of your synagogue. Look at it from the perspective of a physically challenged person. Is it handicapped accessible? What can be done?

- Is there a wheelchair in the congregation (or why not?) Take a ride around the building in the wheelchair. Could a wheelchair bound person go up to the Torah for an Aliyah? How far back would they have to sit in the sanctuary?
- Arrange for large print siddurim in the synagogue and even Braille siddurim
- Arrange for hearing aids in the synagogue.
- Have a program with a deaf interpreter and a deaf person to help sensitize the congregation to people with hearing disabilities.
- Have a program with a person who can talk about using a dog for independence (and meet the dog)!

**Confirmation:** Plan a “special needs” Friday night service at your synagogue or in the community as a culmination for the year’s efforts. Have participants highlight several of the projects, have family members speak about their needs in the Jewish community, and have people participate in simulations (e.g., closing their eyes or even better turning off the lights, accessing the bimah in a wheelchair, having the Cantor or Rabbi mouth their words for 60 seconds, etc.).

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**Topic:**            **L’hader P’nai Zaken – Respect for Elders**  
**Shalom Bayit – Peace in the Home**

**Modeling:**        **Avshalom Beni, Director of HAMA – Humans and Animals in Mutual**  
 (Hero/es)           **Assistance** (see page 25)

**Dialogue:**        *Honor and respect the aged and saintly scholar whose physical powers are*  
 (Text &                *broken, equally with the young and vigorous one; for the broken tablets of stone*  
 Discussion)         *no less than the whole ones had a place in the Ark of the Covenant.*    Berachot 8b

*Where there is domestic harmony, the Lord Himself dwells in the home.*

Sukkah 17a

*Discussion/Dialogue questions:*

- *What is the reference to the broken tablets and why were they kept in the ark?*
- *Why is Shalom Bayit an appropriate principle to teach with this hero?*
- *Why is it special about working with Holocaust survivors?*
- *Why does Avshalom have the children work with the animals?*

**Practice** (Recommended Activities):

- Arrange for a Holocaust speaker to come and share their experiences, so that the community can understand the “nightmares” that these people live with.
- Offer a class showing the students how to use animals when visiting people in the hospital, at a nursing home or with abused children.
- Help to walk or bathe the animals that do the visiting.
- See if your animal could be a “therapy” animal or a visiting pet for the patients in the hospital or nursing home.
- Have a program where an animal therapy pet and their owner or trainer shows the group how they do what they do best.

**Confirmation:** Have a party (maybe even with the residents and certainly with a least one trained animal) to celebrate having successfully visited the hospital or Home for the Aging over a given period of time.

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There are many places that we can all lend our skills and expertise in Jewish life and the community at large. Here are additional “Programmatic Recommendations” that could be applied as the “Practice” section of a new template that you can build and modify on your own.

### **Hachnassat Orchim – Welcoming Guests**

- Examples of gimilut chasadim projects would be:
- Project Chicken Soup – providing meals for homebound people who suffer with AIDS
- Meals on Wheels – providing meals for homebound elderly
- Habitat for Humanity – building an affordable home for a family that would otherwise not be able to ever own one.
- Helping to provide Shabbat or Holiday meals for students who are away from home and live in your community.
- Arranging for Pesach Seders for strangers within your midst.
- Working with a local homeless shelter, preparing meals and possibly referring clients to them.

### **Bikur Cholim – Visiting the sick**

- Create a Bikur Cholim committee within the synagogue. Learn about the art of bikur cholim – visiting the sick from your Rabbi... there are helpful hints that can make it easier to visit strangers. Arrange to get weekly lists as to the members of the congregation that are in each of the local hospitals. Create a round robin for the visitations.
- When you have a family member or friend who is in the hospital, make sure you go to visit them. Take a small potted plant or flowers and visit a stranger. It is amazing how much it can help anyone to have a friendly person to talk to.
- Create generic hospital kits to be given to members who are hospitalized. The kit can include magazines and paperback books, maybe some taped music or a video tape of a funny movie. For children you might want to include a teddy bear.
- Create a team of Mitzvah Clowns that might be interested in visiting people in the hospitals.

### **L'hader P'nai Zaken – Respect for Elders**

- Visit the local Old Age Home or Nursing Home – visit, ask questions; the residents love to tell their stories.
- Arrange for the flowers from the synagogue parties go to the Home to help brighten up the space.
- Bring a group of children to perform and play with the residents. They love to play bingo.
- If you can read dramatically, come and read a good book to the residents who can no longer read themselves, due to failing eyesight.
- Bring a group of Mitzvah clowns to the Home too. Cheering up is always a good thing.
- Ask the home if they will allow animals to visit (see the earlier template on Avshalom Benni).
- Arrange for large print books to be donated to the home.

### **Shomrei Adamah – Guarding the Earth/ Ecology**

- Start a recycling program in your home, at your synagogue or in your school. Newspaper, plastic, aluminum and glass.
- Plant a vegetable garden at the synagogue. Sell the produce and donate the proceeds to tzedakah.
- Plant flowers, trees and bushes around the synagogue buildings to beautify the landscaping.
- Help JNF sell trees to beautify Israel. Participate in other JNF projects such as the water project.
- Participate in a clean up project such as: Heal the Bay, Treepeople, Adopt a highway or canyon, do a city or park clean-up or graffiti clean-up.
- Do a survey of cleaning products and see which are bad for the environment. Alert the congregation.

### **Baal Tashchit – Do not Waste**

- Collect used books to donate to a book drive. Proceeds to go to tzedakah.
- Collect hotel size samples to donate to homeless shelters or to send to soldiers in Israel.
- Clean out your closets and give away good used clothing to shelters or rummage sales where the proceeds can go to tzedakah.
- Collect used car seats and baby clothes and toys and give to young families that do not have them.
- Collect used eyeglasses to be given to eye clinics that can recycle them.
- Collect used cell phones and donate to the police department to give to victims of domestic abuse for 911 calls.
- Help collect unused medical supplies that are not used in our hospital operating rooms, but are thrown away. Donate them to REMEDY, an organization that sends these much needed items to Third World Countries.
- Arrange for the bima flowers to be taken to a Nursing Home or Old Age Home or Hospital.
- Encourage families to celebrate their simcha with baskets of food or books or toys or any other creative items that can then be donated to people less fortunate.

### **Pidyon Shvuyim – Ransoming the Captive**

- Learn about people that are still being used as slaves today... children in many countries are used to do slave labor, Find out about these people and begin a campaign to help free them.
- Learn about Craig Kyleberger and his campaign to free the children of Pakistan and how the students at the Broad Meadows School in Massachusetts began a campaign to help spread the story of Iqbal Masih, a child who was a slave and was murdered by his former owners because he spoke out.

### **Al Ta'amod - Do Not Stand Idly By**

- Learn about various social justices causes that are in our midst...labor union disputes, sweat shop labor, conscientious objectors, immigrant detention – patriot act?,
- Learn about oppression and Genocide that is currently taking place around the world... Darfur, Sudan. Raise money to build wells for safe water in the Sudan.
- Conflict in Ireland, killing in the Congo – Protest, Protest, Protest... Write letters to elected officials and circulate petitions.
- Learn about Righteous Gentiles who saved the lives of Jews during the Holocaust.

### **Shalom Bayit – Peace in the Home**

- Make sure there are abuse hotline numbers printed and posted on bathroom stalls in the synagogue.
- Collect used cell phones to be given to victims of domestic abuse in order to call 911.
- Have a therapist come and speak about issues of stress and how it affects Shalom Bayit.

## CONCLUSION

One of my many wonderful experiences in Israel was attending a meeting of BNI, Business Networking International. The meeting was in September, very early in my year in Israel. The meeting was conducted completely in Hebrew, so I had to try very hard to follow along. At one point everyone was asked to tell about him or herself and to share a personal dream, all in sixty seconds. I figured that I would not have to talk since I was a guest, but lo and behold, no such luck. When it was my turn I told them that in a former life I worked with teenagers, that I was currently working with the Ziv Tzedakah Fund and that my dream was “Le Takhain Olam b’malchut shaddai” – to repair the world in the kingdom of god. The man across from me, said: “is that all, what about ending world hunger and homelessness?” I said: “that too.”

*Merrill Alpert  
Final Project  
Hebrew Union College  
School of Jewish Communal Service*

### **Biblio and Webography**

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## Exit Interview

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program?

- seeing such incredible acts of selfless generosity and caring
- being inspired to do something meaningful/similar in the US
- experiencing the beautiful side of Israeli society
- meeting people who have dedicated their lives to helping/serving others
- going to the homes of Israelis... that was great!

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

- trying to find good times to visit all the heroes (scheduling was very difficult!)
- meeting with heroes with very different political views than my own... it was wonderfully enlightening, but sometimes frustrating/difficult, too

Did this add to your experience in Israel? Absolutely!

If so, how?

It showed me another side of Israel that I didn't see in any other context. I learned about the generosity of Israelis, and it was wonderful to see such an inspiring segment of society (especially amidst all the stress and general negativity we saw in other contexts).

Would you recommend that this program be continued? YES!!!

If not, why? n/a

If so, under what circumstances?

(times per week, hours etc.)

It should begin when we start fall semester (right after the High Holidays) or when we're in Summer Ulpan... that way it's in our schedule from the BEGINNING. It should be one afternoon/week; number of hours would depend on the visit, but at least we'd know which day of the week to keep our schedules open. If it's in Jerusalem, then 1-1.5 hours; if it's outside Jerusalem, then you'd need more time (which is totally fine, as long as there's advanced notification).

Additional comments or recommendations:

Maybe have people jot down a few thoughts right after each visit? Or keep a small journal?

## Mitzvan Heroes that we met

Miriam Freier – Shalhevet Housing for the Handicapped

Sara Aynor – Keren Hanan Aynor (Scholarships for Graduate or Professional School for Ethiopian Immigrants)

Clara Hammer – The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem

Ruth Schlossman – The Gift of Comfort

Rabbanit Bracha Kapach – Keren Segulat Naomi

Anita Shkedi – Israel National Therapeutic Riding Association

Avshalom Beni – HAMA – Humans and Animals in Mutual Assistance

Dr. Eliezer Jaffe – Israel Free Loan Association

Rabbi Kalman Samuels – Shalva

Zev Birger – Dental Volunteers of Israel

Reb Shmuel Munk – Bayit Cham

Barbara Silverman – A Package from Home

Given that the goal of this project is to help create synagogue communities that might be inclined to perform Tikun Olam (Repair of the World) or Gimilut Chasadim (Acts of Loving Kindness) I want to get feedback from you as to how these people might help us to teach others how to do these Jewish acts.

- 1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring? VERY inspiring!
  - a.) In what ways, yes? The heroes were SOO selfless, and their ideas seemed to pop out of nowhere... just an innate desire to help other people.
  - b.) In what ways, no? Their political opinions were often very different from mine, and their desire to do good was sometimes based on principles/beliefs I don't have.

I also wanted to mention that it was interesting to see how many of the heroes were "dati", or orthodox. It made me realize that religion can lead to incredible good OR incredible evil in the world, depending on how it's used. I hope that in my career I can help people find ways to do good in the world because of their faith/beliefs/religion!

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones did you think others might find inspiring? All of them were very inspiring and/or interesting to me in some way... it's hard to choose just three!

a.) Avshalom Beni – the work he does with children and animals is unbelievable, he's such a friendly guy, & I liked that the services are available for ALL children in Israel (not just Jews)

b.) Rabbi Kalman Samuels – Shalva is out of this world. I couldn't believe how incredible their facilities were, how much they've done with their resources, and how much the program helps children and families in need. However, the one frustrating part of the visit was hearing about their brand new center in Gush. Why not put the new one in Tel Aviv or Haifa, where I'm sure it's also badly needed?! I don't know if I'd give money to an organization that was using it to create services in the Territories...

c.) Reb Shmuel Munk – Bayit Cham was probably the most inspiring place we visited. Reb Munk is absolutely amazing, and meeting him changed the way I think about Haredim. His eyes sparkle, and you can see the love he has for all human beings. His humility is also incredible. I am SOO glad we visited him!

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

Neither... I think it's mostly determined by our environment. For example, US culture teaches people to be selfish... we're a very individualistic society where we often put our needs above others' needs.

4.) What do you think could inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Do you think it has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

"Bshert" moments are fabulous when they happen, but I believe people can be inspired in more planned/intentional ways. It's easy to inspire people; the challenge is convincing people to ACT on that inspiration, to follow through. I don't have any answers, except that people are more willing to act in areas that have personal meaning/connection.

5.) Do you think that as a Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented community as part of your community?

YES!!

a.) Do you see this as a priority? Absolutely

b.) Do you think it is something that the Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or does it have to come from within the community – grassroots style?

It's better if it's grassroots style, but if nothing is emerging from within, then it's better for the rabbi/educator to encourage or impose it than for it to not happen at all.

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice?

The Reform Movement places so much emphasis on social action/justice because it's one of the most important components of Judaism, and it's one of the easiest for people to feel

## Exit Interview

Merrill Alpert  
Master's Project  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Hebrew Union College Students - Jerusalem, 2004

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program?

- It was inspiring - mostly b/c these were ordinary people who did/art doing extraordinary things.
- It provided a whole new lens to see Israel, & in the midst of so much suffering, provided hope

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

- It was disheartening to see intense bigotry & hatred in some of the heroes - Clara & Ruth come to mind in particular
- Scheduling always worked out, but took a lot of effort and could prob. be a little though Merrill was exceedingly accommodating. It prob. would have been easier to have a more regular schedule.

Did this add to your experience in Israel? YES!

If so, how?

① See ques #1!

② These are stories that will enrich my presentation of the complexities of Israel to people at home

Would you recommend that this program be continued? Absolutely.

If not, why?

If so, under what circumstances?  
(times per week, hours etc.)

I liked doing 2 heroes at once & would therefore recommend 3-5 hrs every other week (2x/month)

Additional comments or recommendations:

I don't know if they exist, but it would be nice to see more heroes/orgs that are young & just starting - people in their 20s & 30s -- I want to be like the Rabbani when I'm 80, but I would have also loved to meet her when she was my age!!

MITZVAH HEROES that we met

Miriam Freier – Shalhevet Housing for the Handicapped

\Sara Aynor – Keren Hanan Aynor (Scholarships for Graduate or Professional School for Ethiopian Immigrants)

\Clara Hammer – The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem

Ruth Schlossman – The Gift of Comfort

\Rabbanit Bracha Kapach – Keren Segulat Naomi

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Zev Birger – Dental Volunteers of Israel

\Reb Shmuel Munk – Bayit Cham

Barbara Silverman – A Package from Home

Given that the goal of this project is to help create synagogue communities that might be inclined to perform Tikun Olam (Repair of the World) or Gimilut Chasadim (Acts of Loving Kindness) I want to get feedback from you as to how these people might help us to teach others how to do these Jewish acts.

1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring?

a.) In what ways, yes? *b/c many of them started YES!*

b.) In what ways, no? *Small & have done amazing things*

*b/c, as you ask on the next page, I don't know how to move people from inspiration to sustained (not one-time) action.*

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones and what about them, do you think others might find inspiring?

- a.) Rabbi Kalman Samuels - Shalva - He is very approachable - Shalva's amazing, the story is very personal, the anecdote of parents hearing mazel for the 1st time still makes me cry,
- b.) Rabbanit Bracha Kapach - so cool.

- c.) Sara Aynor - Although she was not the best speaker/presenter, her project typifies the "reach a hand to fish & he will eat for life" approach to social justice & it is important for people to see the next generation of Ethiopian kids
- d.) Clara Hammer - a great story & she's a riot
- e.) Reb Shmuel Munk - v. approachable & warm

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

Both. I think people want to be altruistic, but often need someone/something else to make it easy for them to be - being selfish is much easier & is often an issue of inertia. It has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

First, I think for most people, if you make it easy for them, they will do it! To do something hard takes either a beshert moment, or constant encouragement & support from the community - maybe even positive pressure/mentor

5.) Do you think that as a Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented community as part of your community? Absolutely

a.) Do you see this as a priority? Yes

b.) Do you think it is something that the Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or does it have to come from within the community - grassroots style? Yes, I just haven't figured out how to do it yet.

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice?

Because if Judaism is just about ritual, it has lost its meaning & place in the world. I believe in a G-d that is far more interested in how often I make life better for another one of G-d's creatures/children, than how often I daven the traditional liturgy each day. I believe social justice is a genuine & holy form of prayer.

## Exit Interview

Merrill Alpert  
Master's Project  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Hebrew Union College Students - Jerusalem, 2004

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program? INTIMATE MEETINGS -- THE INSIDER FEELING. THE WILLINGNESS / DESIRE TO SHARE FROM THE M.H.

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

FINDING THE TIME. FEELING LIKE I'D HEARD THE STORY ALREADY FROM THE PREVIOUS M.H.

Did this add to your experience in Israel? YES.

If so, how? MET ISRAELI'S AND EXPERIENCED FIRSTHAND THE CULTURE OF VOLUNTEERING / DEDICATION TO Tzedakah THAT MAKES ME PROUD OF ISRAEL.

Would you recommend that this program be continued?

YES. ZIV & HUC IS A NICE MATCH.

If not, why?

If so, under what circumstances?  
(times per week, hours etc.)

YEAR LONG BIMONTHLY VISITS.

Additional comments or recommendations:

Mitzvah Heroes that we met

Miriam Freier – Shalhevet Housing for the Handicapped

Sara Aynor – Keren Hanan Aynor (Scholarships for Graduate or Professional School for Ethiopian Immigrants)

☒ Clara Hammer – The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem

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☒ Rabbanit Bracha Kapach – Keren Segulat Naomi

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1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring?

a.) In what ways, yes?

b.) In what ways, no?

a) yes. it is always great to hear people's stories and to experience the energy that emanates from a powerful person. All the people we visited were very strong and charismatic. They told their stories in a very meaningful way. Their Hessed is infectious.

b) I have nothing negative to say about this experience. Hard though it is to find time for these visits it is worthwhile.

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones and what about them, do you think others might find inspiring?

a.) MIRIAM - 1<sup>st</sup> VISIT. GREAT STORY. VERY HOSPITABLE.

b.) CLARA - A CLASSIC RELIGIOUS ZIONIST VERY CHARMATIC.

c.) R. SHMUEL - VERY MAJICAL. DEFIES STEREOTYPE. EXCEEDINGLY HUMBLE.

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

DEPENDS ON THE PERSON. I BELIEVE PEOPLE ARE BORN

"OPEN" AND "RECEPTIVE." FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS PEOPLE BECOME CLOSED. THESE M.H. HAVE BECOME OPEN AGAIN OR WERE PERHAPS NEVER IRREVERSIBLY

4.) What do you think could inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Do you think closed it has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

EITHER. ORDINARY PEOPLE DO EXTRAORDINARY THINGS ALL THE TIME. THE M.H. DO EXTRAORDINARY THINGS THAT TRANSCEND IN QUANTITY THE E.O. THINGS THAT MOST ORDINARY PEOPLE DO. AGAIN I THINK SELFISHNESS, EGO, VANITY, NEAR-SIGHTEDNESS LED TO BE TRANSCENDED IN ORDER TO BE A M.H. FOR THIS A PERSON MUST BE OPEN. AN OPEN PERSON IS EASILY INSPIRED. INSPIRED TO ACTION? DEPENDS ON THE PERSON -- IF THEY HAVE TEACHINGS AND ROLE MODELS WHO VALUED ACTION OVER

5.) Do you think that as a Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented GOOD INTENT community as part of your community? YES OF COURSE.

a.) Do you see this as a priority? YES.

b.) Do you think it is something that the Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or

does it have to come from within the community - grassroots style?

DEPENDS. THERE ARE LOTS OF PEOPLE WHO LOOK TO THE RABBI, UNKNOWINGLY, TO WAKE THEM UP, SUMMON THEM TO ACTION, SOUND THE SHOFAR. IF WE MAKE THE INITIAL MOVE I BELIEVE THOSE WE SERVE WILL RISE TO THE OCCASION. IF THEY MAKE THE INITIAL MOVE, WE MUST RISE.

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice?

LIB. JUDAISM IN ITS PUREST DOCTRINE TEACHES US TO SANCTIFY GOD'S CREATION, TO SANCTIFY MEANS TO RESTORE/CREATE A WORLD WHEREIN PEOPLE ARE REDEEMED. THE R.M. EMPHASIZES THIS BECAUSE SOCIAL JUSTICE IS A JEWISH VALUE THAT CAN AND MUST BE FLOWING BIC

GIVEN THE HISTORY OF THE R.M. IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT SOCIAL JUSTICE IS A PARAMOUNT VALUE BIC IT DOES NOT REQUIRE HALAKHIC COMMITMENT. IT AFFORDS WHAT I NEED AS A JEW THE OPPORTUNITY TO STRUGGLE/ AND SERVE GOD

THANK YOU MERRIL,  
MICAH

## Exit Interview

Merrill Alpert  
Master's Project  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Hebrew Union College Students - Jerusalem, 2004

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program?

See

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

Learning about the dire straits most social welfare programs are in today. This experience was challenging mentally b/c of that.

Did this add to your experience in Israel? Absolutely!

If so, how? Most of the time we are exposed to problems + issues w/in the country - and they are usually politically oriented. This project gave me the opportunity to see a very different and very important side of Israel. I was very inspired to meet the Mitzvah heroes - they gave me hope for the future (as I'm sure they do to many people!)

Would you recommend that this program be continued?

Definitely - rounded out other experiences during the year - was very meaningful.  
If not, why?

If so, under what circumstances? - Another idea would be to integrate it as part of the Wed. program (times per week, hours etc.)

Maybe 2x/month.

I think you were extremely patient (a special track) and understanding with the group.

Doing more visits @ the beg. of the school year would be helpful for the students - Summer upan might be a good time to start.

Additional comments or recommendations:

This was an invaluable addition to my year. I have been to Israel many times & I gained a whole new perspective.

I think every student should be a part of this program.

It was inspiring & educational - what an amazing project!

Do further away visits sooner when people have more time.

Thanks for opening this up to the spouses. Inviting us was very welcome.

— Miriam Freier – Shalhevet Housing for the Handicapped

Sara Aynor – Keren Hanan Aynor (Scholarships for Graduate or Professional School for Ethiopian Immigrants)

— Clara Hammer – The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem

Ruth Schlossman – The Gift of Comfort

— Rabbanit Bracha Kapach – Keren Segulat Naomi

— Anita Shkedi – Israel National Therapeutic Riding Association

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— Zev Birger – Dental Volunteers of Israel

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1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring?

a.) In what ways, yes?

b.) In what ways, no?

*Very inspiring - but frustrated  
that they don't get more governmental  
support - representative of a deeper  
issue of what a Jewish state  
is supposed to represent (actuality vs. dream)*

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones and what about them, do you think others might find inspiring?

a.) Anita Shkedi -

INTRA

Personal inspiring story that led to a way to physically & mentally assist those in need

b.) Clara Hammer

One of the most inspiring things to see is when someone goes of themselves to make sure everyone gets food & doesn't go hungry.

c.) Bayet Ham

One of the most challenging aspects of living in Israel is the mental anguish people endure. To work w/ mental aspects of healing is crucial to a person's well being

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

Altruistic is too strong of a word. I believe many people want to help others but not in a completely unselfish way.

4.) What do you think could inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Do you think it has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

I think to dedicate your life to a cause like that is beshert. Right place, right time, right influences, right challenges... It has to be a personal connection to a cause

5.) Do you think that as a Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented community as part of your community?

Imperative. It must be an underlying theme through everything. Last yr. in my job I created a Mitzvah Corps theme through the entire year - projects, discussions etc... trips

a.) Do you see this as a priority?

b.) Do you think it is something that the Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or does it have to come from within the community - grassroots style?

As w/ any "new" idea people must take it on as their own. Effective leadership

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice?

It's a hands on, visual effective way to make a difference in the world. We are all searching for meaning & happiness - doing <sup>acts of</sup> social justice brings us closer to both as well as bringing others closer.

## Exit Interview

Merrill Alpert  
Master's Project  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Hebrew Union College Students - Jerusalem, 2004

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program?

- Meeting the mitzvah heroes in person, face to face, & hearing their stories
- Merrill did nice job coordinating transportation
- meeting heroes of all observance levels, from different communities, etc. was very interesting

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

- Scheduling / last minute cancellations were sometimes frustrating
- Email communication within the group sometimes tough to follow

Did this add to your experience in Israel? Yes

If so, how?

- Met incredible people (the heroes)
- Let me see a side of Israel, i.e. the underprivileged, that I hadn't really seen
- Motivated me to try to give of myself in the future

Would you recommend that this program be continued? Yes!

If not, why?

If so, under what circumstances?

(times per week, hours etc.)

either 1, regular scheduled meeting per week  
or

2 heroes at a time → particularly for those outside of J'lem, in a longer "day"  
(I enjoyed our "Field Trips")

Additional comments or recommendations:

- More group discussion after the events
- Small groups of 4-10 visitors results in a good group dynamic during the visits ... ie don't change the size

MILITARY HEROES THAT WE MET

Miriam Freier – Shalhevet Housing for the Handicapped

Sara Aynor – Keren Hanan Aynor (Scholarships for Graduate or Professional School for Ethiopian Immigrants)

Clara Hammer – The Chicken Lady of Jerusalem

Ruth Schlossman – The Gift of Comfort

Rabbanit Bracha Kapach – Keren Segulat Naomi

Anita Shkedi – Israel National Therapeutic Riding Association

Avshalom Beni – HAMA – Humans and Animals in Mutual Assistance

Dr. Eliezer Jaffe – Israel Free Loan Association

Rabbi Kalman Samuels – Shalva

Zev Birger – Dental Volunteers of Israel

Reb Shmuel Munk – Bayit Cham

Barbara Silverman – A Package from Home

Given that the goal of this project is to help create synagogue communities that might be inclined to perform Tikun Olam (Repair of the World) or Gimilut Chasadim (Acts of Loving Kindness) I want to get feedback from you as to how these people might help us to teach others how to do these Jewish acts.

1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring?

a.) In what ways, yes?

b.) In what ways, no?

Yes, I loved hearing their stories, abt. their lives, how they became "heroes"

They were always excited to see us, which was fantastic.

They had so much energy & give so much of themselves.

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones and what about them, do you think others might find inspiring?

a.) Shmuel Mink - puts a new face on the orthodox community

b.) Clara Hammer - amazing personal story of trip to Israel & what this made of her life

c.) Rabbani - amazing story again....

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

I hope!

4.) What do you think could inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Do you think it has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

Both.... Learning about altruism helps people to "recognize" the moment in life when you can make a difference

5.) Do you think that as a <sup>Doctor</sup> Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented community as part of your community?

I hope so!

a.) Do you see this as a priority? Yes

b.) Do you think it is something that the <sup>Doctor</sup> Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or does it have to come from within the community - grassroots style?

Can be "imposed" by setting a great example & inspiring others to follow you lead!

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice?

- Saw the opportunity in the past & jumped... today we're still riding the momentum

- People can feel "involved" without being any "religious"

Exit Interview

goodman

Merrill Alpert  
Master's Project  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Hebrew Union College Students - Jerusalem, 2004

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program?

meeting inspirational, generous people dedicated  
to tikken Olam

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

That some of the presentations took a long time,  
weren't focused & the people couldn't communicate  
the wonder of what they were doing

Did this add to your experience in Israel?

If so, how?

yes provided an insight into Israeli society - how important  
tzedakah is, how different Israelis take on the  
role of contributing to society & insight into the challenge

Would you recommend that this program be continued?

for people living here

If not, why?

yes

If so, under what circumstances?

(times per week, hours etc.)

once a week - 2 hours max

Additional comments or recommendations:

tell people in advance who the group is, remind  
them that time is limited  
refrain from too much small talk w/ person

Miriam Freier – Shalhevet Housing for the Handicapped

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- 1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring?
  - a.) In what ways, yes?
  - b.) In what ways, no?

*Yes - Shmuel Munk, the animal people, the Rabbanite  
all were unassuming, passionate & providing  
vital services*

*Their dedication + insight into problems & their  
solutions have been amazing  
Such as the dental clinic & the story of the  
foster*

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones and what about them, do you think others might find inspiring?

a.) Shumel Munk

b.) Avshalom Ben

c.) Rabbanite

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

Selfish

4.) What do you think could inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Do you think it has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

Personal experiences, sensitivity, awareness of others, inspiration of others. I think beshert moments can be ~~engineered~~ - not a guarantee of "beshert" -

5.) Do you think that as a Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented community as part of your community?

absolutely

but putting the right person in the right situation helps

a.) Do you see this as a priority? yes

b.) Do you think it is something that the Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or does it have to come from within the community - grassroots style?

can be inspired by professional but with buying involvement of lay people.

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice?

it's a key element of tenets of reform - idea of not being observant just for oneself but bringing holiness to lives of others

I still want Avshalom's address for student donations next year.

## Exit Interview

Merrill Alpert  
Master's Project  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Hebrew Union College Students - Jerusalem, 2004

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program?

#1 Getting to see people and places in Israel  
I would otherwise not had been exposed to.

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

Scheduling conflicts - not enough time to meet  
everyone

Did this add to your experience in Israel? yes!

If so, how?

see #1

-also gave me stories & connections I can  
put others in touch with. Shows  
another side of Israel beyond politics &  
the situation.

Would you recommend that this program be continued?

yes

If not, why?

If so, under what circumstances?  
(times per week, hours etc.)

2x/month on a regular schedule.

Thurs afternoon/evening

Wed or Sun evening

Additional comments or recommendations:

rather than just meeting the heroes find  
a way to get hands on with their  
projects. One way would be to talk w/ Rose  
& get some of these projects set up as a  
regular volunteer project of HUC like the  
Mavasseret group.

AVREYVOR ARLOVY CHIEV IVY ARLOV  
Miriam Freier – Shalhevet Housing for the Handicapped

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Barbara Silverman – A Package from Home

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1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring?

a.) In what ways, yes?

b.) In what ways, no?

A) showed me that one person can do something & make change.

gives me an opportunity to support amazing projects and people

B) Showed a major flaw in Israeli society:

There are many underserved populations.

Also showed me what the pressure of living here can result in... neglect, abuse, illness

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones and what about them, do you think others might find inspiring?

- a.) Avshalom → seeing him in action, mtg the animals
- b.) Shalva → seeing the facility, mtg Yossi, hearing the story from the people that made it a realization & seeing how it thrives.
- c.) Rabbanit Kapach → her personal life story, also seeing the heart of her organization in action

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

Selfish

4.) What do you think could inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Do you think it has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

I think overcoming adversity OR being a part of someone else's process is the inspiration. I'm not sure of the source.

5.) Do you think that as a Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented community as part of your community?

Absolutely

a.) Do you see this as a priority? Yes

b.) Do you think it is something that the Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or does it have to come from within the community – grassroots style? It needs to be a combination.

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice?

We're about responding to modernity. This is a very modern way in which we can realize our partnership with Gd.

## Exit Interview

Merrill Alpert  
Master's Project  
School of Jewish Communal Service  
Hebrew Union College Students - Jerusalem, 2004

What was one of the best aspects or qualities of this program?

- meeting amazing "angels" who are truly an inspiration
- diversity of the heroes

What was one of the most frustrating or difficult aspects of this program?

not being able to meet every hero due to scheduling conflicts

Did this add to your experience in Israel? Absolutely

If so, how? This made the concept of doing mitzvot + tikkun olam very real in the country considered our "homeland" - it was very powerful. Some things cannot be learned in classrooms but from example

Would you recommend that this program be continued?

most Definitely

If not, why?

If so, under what circumstances?  
(times per week, hours etc.)

Keep the same structure  
It is hard for everyone to be available 100% but this worked quite well

Additional comments or recommendations:

Someone who works with the elderly

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- 1.) Overall, did you personally find meeting these people to be inspiring?
  - a.) In what ways, yes?
  - b.) In what ways, no?

Yes - seeing devotion and love being put into their cause; often a personal experience was the impetus showing how tragedy start something to help others

2.) Specifically, of the individuals you met, which ones and what about them, do you think others might find inspiring?

a.) Avshalom Benic - the relationships we share with animals + how we give to each other through love + trust

b.) Rabbi Kalman Samuels - how a personal tragedy helped them touch so many + change the lives of individuals + families

c.) Clara Hammer - undying dedication of this very elderly lady teaches of devotion to her cause despite her age

3.) Do you think that people are inherently altruistic? Or inherently selfish?

These are 2 extremes but I would say more altruistic than selfish

4.) What do you think could inspire ordinary people to do extraordinary things? Do you think it has to be a "beshert" moment or can it be planned?

Beshert moments are powerful, but planned moments can be inspirational as examples are set

5.) Do you think that as a Rabbi or an Educator you will try to create a Mitzvah oriented community as part of your community?

Yes

a.) Do you see this as a priority?

Yes

b.) Do you think it is something that the Rabbi or Educator can impose on the community or does it have to come from within the community - grassroots style?

from the community preferably with education

6.) Why do you think the Reform Movement places so much emphasis on Social Justice? Support

- Reference to the Torah

- a way of bringing community together