

CONTACT

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Jewish Service

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Jewish Life Network is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewry to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

Photographs in this issue appear courtesy of Art Today, C. Garret, Steve Saton, and R.L. Sullivan.

Rededicating Ourselves to Service

Jewish life once revolved around service. A hierarchy was established in which the greatest esteem was attached to good deeds that could not be repaid. Since caring for the dead was an example of absolute altruism, membership in burial societies became the highest honor.

But in recent years, as the American Jewish community has become more prosperous, service and volunteerism have receded from prominence as community-defining values. Today the highest honor in the community is awarded less for personal service than for giving money to a Jewish institution. Needless to say, *tzedaka* is a fundamental Jewish ethic, but it was never meant to be a replacement for acts of human service.

In an affluent age, it is easy to blind ourselves to the need for service. But suffering and neediness persist through every age. On a deeper level, it is often when people have satisfied their material needs that they begin thinking of larger issues such as finding meaning and working for the greater good of society. For this reason, now more than ever Judaism can inspire people with its message of service. Indeed, if Judaism is to remain a comprehensive system of ethical conduct, service must return to the forefront of community life. With this in mind, the current issue of *Contact* is devoted to creating a practical and theological framework to mobilize Jewish service in contemporary America.

As part of the surging tide of service work in recent years, American Jews certainly volunteer. Yet service is often expressed not as a reflection of Jewish values, but as a secular commitment to assisting those in need, or as a search for meaning in an avidly materialistic era. Indeed, many Jews devote themselves to non-sectarian service, reasoning that the Jewish community is self-sufficient and that our time should thus be devoted to helping the less fortunate. It is time to articulate a vision that embraces and honors all kinds of service, including acts of *hesed* outside the Jewish community. It happens that in many cases, even the most marginally-affiliated Jews volunteer out of an unspoken connection to their upbringing. We need to bring these connections back to the surface. By fusing essential Jewish values with a contemporary emphasis on community building, we can inspire Jews throughout North America towards a rededication to service, Jewish life and *tikkun olam*.

Eli Valley

A SPECIAL NOTE TO OUR READERS:

We were putting the finishing touches on this issue of *Contact* when tragedy struck the United States. Although it is impossible to predict where these events will lead our country and the world, the crisis has already summoned a newfound devotion to volunteering. In New York, Washington and throughout the country, the stories are endless: thousands of people have given of themselves in ways that stir the soul. From the long lines of blood donors and rescue volunteers to the social workers who came from out of town to console the bereaved, the United States has been strengthened and sustained by people helping others.

In a time of national upheaval, we have found that service is the lifeblood of civil society. It is the expression of a primal human instinct to unite, to rebuild, and to heal. In this light, the theme of this *Contact* is more pertinent today than ever.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims, their families and friends. As we continue to grieve at a tragedy we are still struggling to absorb, we long for a time of healing, justice and a peaceful future for ourselves and the world.

Personal Service: A Central Jewish Norm for Our Time

by RABBI YITZ GREENBERG

The central value affirmation of the Jewish tradition is that every human being is created in the image of God. According to the Talmud (*Sanhedrin 37a*), this implies that every human being has three intrinsic dignities: infinite value, equality and uniqueness. The Jewish vision of *tikkun olam* envisages improving the world — politically, economically, socially, culturally — until it fully sustains these dignities for each and every human being.

How do we support the infinite worth of other people? Part of the answer is economic. When people are provided with their material needs, they feel worthwhile and have the basic necessities to achieve their potential. When people are hungry and cold and no one lifts a finger, then they can get sick and die.

But the most powerful statement of human value is not made by giving money or transferring goods from one person to the other. However valuable, such gifts are of finite value. The deepest confirmation of the preciousness of a human life comes when a person gives his/her own infinitely valuable life to the other. Normally, this is not done by literally giving one life for the other — say in dying to protect or save another. The fundamental, ongoing communication of human value takes place when one person spends a piece of his/her life — some unique and irreplaceable amount of time — in relationship and service to the other.

This is the true meaning of the concept of *gemilut chassadim*, generally (inadequately) translated as “acts of loving kindness.” *Gemilut Chassadim* really means to service/help the other with my own life/time. The Talmud underscored this point by stating that *tzedakah* is done with money whereas *gemilut chassadim* is performed with money and **with one’s own body**, i.e., life.

If we properly understand *gemilut chassadim* to mean personal service and relationship, then the values carried in the Hebrew language terms become even clearer and more instructive. *Gemilut* comes from the verb *ligmol* which means to grant goodness, give overflowing, to nurture, to nurse (and by inversion, to wean from nursing.) The image is that of direct interpersonal giving (as a mother gives milk to the child nursing at her breast.) This is giving which sustains the life of the recipient and which links the giver and the recipient in elemental (or literal) connection. Actions of personal service and relationship are the key links to all human life; they make society and human living possible. According to the Jewish value system, human beings are commanded to give direct personal service and relationship to fellow humans. In this way, they nurture, sustain and give others the wherewithal to grow.

The word *chessed* (plural, *chassadim*) describes more than loving kindness; *chessed* really means covenantal love, i.e., love that becomes committed and obligated to the other. Judaism teaches that all humans are related and bound to each other. To perfect the world and to become fully human, individuals enter into a covenantal community. As partners, they are obligated to serve, nurture and sustain each other and

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Rabbi Yitz Greenberg is President of Jewish Life Network.



thereby to bring out the image of God (infinite worth, equality and uniqueness) of the other.

Jewry is a miniature covenantal community. Judaism is the way of life that teaches behavior which respects and embraces the image of God of every human being. All of humanity also constitutes a world covenantal community, for human beings are bound by the Noahide covenant to partner with God in *tikkun olam*. Historically, Jews have practiced these *chessed* values primarily within the isolated, embattled Jewish community which needed this sustenance. Still, the fundamental respect and obligation to sustain the infinite value, equality and uniqueness of the other is owed to all humanity — for all humans and not just Jews are created and born in the image of God.

One of the glories of modern culture is that it has brought out the image of God of every individual, of every gender, race, religion and culture and put this truth before everyone. Modern culture is in the process of breaking down the fixed categories of insider/outsider, superior/inferior, fellow tribal member/stranger. The combination of increased recognition of human solidarity and the greater affluence, dignity and freedom given to Jews means that the Jewish capacity (and, therefore, the obligation) to nurture the image of God of the other — Jew and non-Jew alike — has grown. Then Jews' actions must extend beyond fulfilling the classic command "the stranger among you shall be [equal] unto you as the home-

born (citizen) and you shall love him as yourself" (*Leviticus, 19:34*). Today, increasingly, there is no stranger — for the media bring the suffering, the plight, the reality, the humanity of the other before us every day. Thus, everyone must recognize the obligation to nurture the other as the image of God.

The Talmud has always upheld the principle that *gemilut chassadim* (i.e., personal giving and nurturing) is the highest form of behavior (outstripping even *tzedakah* or acts of justice). The highest form of *chessed* was defined as giving to the neediest, who cannot repay the kindness. (This was called *chessed shel emet* = true [pure] giving.) The classic example of such behaviors is to do loving acts of caring for the dead (such as ritually purifying and dressing the body, burial, mourning, etc.). However, caring acts of personal service are owed to all human beings. The responsibility for such deeds is derived from the broader primary obligation to serve all living images of God.

In stressing these norms, the Talmud and the later Mussar (ethical) and philosophical traditions also placed great emphasis on the religious duty to walk in God's ways (*Deuteronomy, 28:9*), that is, to imitate God's behavior. Since creation, the central activity that God engages in is sustaining life (*Job, 12:10*) and nurturing all living things in accordance with their needs (*Psalms, 145: 8-9, 14-17*). Humans are commanded to imitate these actions of God. Thus the tradition teaches us that human beings were given God-like capacities of consciousness, power and love (which make us images of God) in order to join in God's work of sustaining the dignity and life of others and thereby perfecting the world.

In light of the growth of the recognition of the dignity of all human beings, the time has come to articulate the obligation for personal service to the other as a fundamental obligation of a human being, according to Judaism. After the Holocaust, in which the fundamental dignity of Jews — their infinite value, equality and uniqueness — was denied, degraded and over-ridden, Jews have a special obligation to uphold *tikkun olam* by restoring, nurturing and enhancing the image of God of all in need. This obligation is met through personal service. The service obligation applies legitimately to all needs: economic (the poor); social (the devalued and degraded); cultural (the outsider); physical (the sick, the disabled and the old); psychological (those who need confirmation and healing); mental (those who need teaching); emotional (those who need relationship and love).

There are implications for Jewish communal policy in this analysis. One is that personal service must be brought to the fore as a central value of Jewish tradition and culture. Every synagogue, school and organiza-

tion must teach this norm. Even unaffiliated Jews recognize education and family as synonymous with Jewish values; so should personal service become known as the indispensable expression of Jewishness. (This is not to say that Gentiles do not practice this value. Personal service to others is widely recognized and valued in America. However, service must be upheld as a norm expected of Jews. We must teach and work so that personal service is a field pioneered and spearheaded by Jews.) Finally, we must move to establish *mitzvah* norms in the realm of service. A Jew is commanded not just to do individual acts of *chessed* to others but to set aside regular time for volunteering and giving personal service. What is the minimum number of hours a week, a month or a year that one must dedicate to nurturing the equality and uniqueness of other human beings?

I believe that we will come to the idea that every Jew should set aside a portion of his/her life for gemilut chassadim.

We must create a Jewish culture in which the final measurement of "was this life worthwhile?" will be: Did one set aside regular times for nurturing other human beings? At every stage of life, the individual must ask him/herself: In what professions or paid work do I give of myself to nurture and enhance the infinite worth of other human beings? In what volunteer setting? How can these roles be expanded? As we develop these norms, I believe that we will come to the idea that every Jew should set aside a portion of his/her life for *gemilut chassadim*. Perhaps the emergent norm will be to take a year — or two — when graduating high school, or after finishing college or upon reaching the age of 40 — to personally serve and nurture other human beings in whatever form of need they have.

Some day, a year or more of personal service — be it in the Peace Corps in impoverished countries or in the Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps in an affluent American Ivy League campus, be it building residences through Habitat for Humanity or mentoring mentally disabled in a Bais Ezra home, be it teaching, nursing, community organizing, literacy tutoring full time or part time — will be the hallmark of a Jewish life. Thus will our generation match the Talmudic declaration that exhibiting mercy, modesty, and doing acts of *gemilut chassadim* (= personal service!) are established, characteristic traits of the children of Abraham and Sarah. 🌸



Doing Well & Doing Good

by JEFFREY SWARTZ

My grandfather came to America from the shtetl at the turn of the last century, a Jewish cobbler fleeing conscription in the Czar's army. He was a complex man, with simple passions—he wanted to run his own business, to provide for his family, to live decently. If he were alive today, he'd marvel at what has come of his passion.

I am the third generation of my family to run the business he founded. Today, Timberland is a \$1 billion enterprise, a NYSE-listed company with 6,000 employees worldwide. We sell footwear, apparel and outdoor gear to consumers in 85 countries, including Russia, the land of my grandfather's birth.

Timberland is a business community, not a religious community; I am (I think) the only observant Jewish employee. The way I work at being a Jew who is also a businessman is through a strategic assertion that doing well and doing good are not separate activities, that the business of doing business includes the pursuit of profit and the pursuit of justice. Indeed, in running a business, I must always remember the caution from *Pirkei Avot*, "*Dah mah l'ma'alah*" — "Know what is above you." (*Pirkei Avot*, 2:1)

At Timberland, one way we put our strategy of doing well and doing good to work and to test is through active, voluntary service in the communities where we live and work. Twelve years ago, we launched an innovative partnership with City Year, an urban youth corps. Started in Boston, now in 13 cities across the nation, City Year leads young people into an intensive year of service and community building. They serve in schools and in youth centers, mentoring young children and modeling citizenship. City Year is the model around which the Americorps program was designed. Timberland's shareholders have invested more than \$10 million in helping City Year grow to national scale, including outfitting every corps member with a service uniform.

And we have reaped enormous returns on our investment. Most substantively, our relationship with City Year has led to Timberland's Path of Service. Path of Service means that all Timberland employees are entitled to 40 hours of paid leave to serve in their community. For some employees, Path of Service includes six month paid leaves of absence, to serve in justice organizations important to them. For all of us, Path of Service is the challenge to bring service values into our daily business dealings.

The impact of service at Timberland can be seen through different prisms. On the one hand, there is the real, measurable impact that we have on the communities that we live and work in. Most profoundly, though, the outcome of striving to find a way to integrate Torah values into daily business life is the transformation of the employee back into a moral force — into a human being. Old or young, men or women, from every background and belief or point of view, the employee who serves is brought into contact with the essentially Jewish

Jeffrey Swartz is President and Chief Executive Officer of The Timberland Company.

notion of serving a purpose greater than self. And through this experience, this reintroduction of the employee to the human within the employee, great goodness is unleashed. At the end of a day of service, when I walk from site to site, I can see on people's faces a sense of joy, purpose and wisdom earned. Serving with committed colleagues in a world needy of our strength, we begin as co-workers but end as brothers and sisters.

In thinking about how to integrate a life of business with a life of Torah, I rely on a lesson taught to me by my Rabbi, which he learned from his teacher. In Pirkei Avot, the Mishnah teaches us that Abraham was tested ten times by God. Most of the commentators agree that the binding of Isaac was the ultimate trial of a man of faith. But a Medieval Italian rabbi, Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona, sees the binding as the penultimate trial. The ultimate challenge, according to Rabbeinu Yonah, were the negotiations with the Hittites for the *machpelah* — the burial cave in Hebron for Avraham's beloved wife, Sarah. Imagine,

my Rabbi taught: from the physical and spiritual height of Mount Moriah, where his son is bound on an altar, Abraham had to descend into the world of commerce. But Abraham remained a man of God. He maintained the spiritual heights of Moriah in the tense world of business negotiations. My Rabbi taught me to see my business life in this context. The constant challenge is to bring the heights of Torah to every business situation, no matter how mundane.

On the basis of trying to live our values in daily business practice, Timberland fields a powerful culture, one that substantively contributes to our business success. For four straight years, Timberland has been named one of Fortune magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work for, while at the same time, we have earned our place on the Forbes Platinum List of the best performing public companies in our sector. Doing well and doing good are related.

For me, this need is a professional responsibility and a religious obligation. As a CEO, it behooves me to understand my employees' needs to connect their

values to to their professional lives. As a Jew, it is incumbent upon me to live my business life in a Torah context. And service is one powerful way in which I can bring Torah into my work world.

Recently, after a particularly hot and muggy day of service at a Boston homeless shelter, I observed a small group of my colleagues cleaning up their tools and detritus. As I watched them doing such great good, I thought of what Moses taught the Jewish nation at the very end of his life, as he stood on the plains of Mamre. Moses urged us — doctors, lawyers, educators and citizens — to recognize that we are equal to the challenge before each of us, that we can live a life of Torah *im derech erez*, or Torah incorporated into daily living. "For this commandment that I command you today — it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven ... nor is it across the sea ... Rather the matter is very near to you — in your mouth and your heart — to perform it." (*Deuteronomy 30: 11-14*)

And so, let us all look into our hearts, and do it. 🌸



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The Jewish community has come to realize that without a revitalized infrastructure, it is futile to dream of renaissance. Thus it is that the typical forums of Jewish education and religious life — synagogues, summer camps, day schools, college programs, Israel trips, and adult education — have received increased attention and investment in recent years.

But in order to reach as many American Jews as possible, we must look beyond the typical Jewish forums. After all, if the majority of American Jews could be found in synagogues and day schools, we wouldn't find ourselves in a crisis of assimilation. We need to bring the richness of Jewish life to the venues American Jews feel most comfortable with.

Service is a perfect example. Throughout the country, rates of volunteerism are increasing, and Jews comprise a healthy percentage of the volunteers. As people come to realize that the pursuit of material wealth is no longer a satisfactory end in itself, they seek to give something back to society. But ask a soup kitchen volunteer whether she is doing service out of a Jewish sense of obligation, and chances are she'll deny it, citing humanist or universalist reasons instead. The decline in Jewish cultural literacy has spawned a generation unaware of the Jewish roots of service. Those who are knowledgeable about Jewish service often feel that such work is strictly parochial — Jews only helping other Jews. As a result, many unaffiliated Jews view service through a non-sectarian lens with nary a tint of Jewish values and ethics.

Since service has become a vital component of the secular culture of unaffiliated Jews, it presents a great opportunity to meet Jews where they are. The virtue of service-oriented outreach is that *tikkun olam* has a grand history in Jewish religion and culture. If many American Jews prefer helping the homeless to sitting in synagogue, we should connect with them and work in the areas they find most meaningful. Indeed, we should be seeking ways to teach the Jewish roots of service and to promote Jewish service programs that meet this need. As we create a comfortable Jewish platform for all kinds of service, we can begin to impart the distinctively Jewish ethics that make service a fundamental human obligation.

By creating a Jewish framework for all

service and incorporating Jewish teachings into the service experience both inside and outside the community, we can inspire a generation of American Jews who would otherwise have no contact with

the Jewish spiritual tradition. In this way, service won't replace the traditional forums of Jewish involvement, but complement them and serve as a gateway to more enriched Jewish living. Once people understand that service is one of the most profound values in Judaism, they will begin to explore other facets of their heritage. They will be more inclined to delve deeper by celebrating holidays, by sending their children to day schools, by living a Jewish life. Indeed, service is the spark that can ignite a passion for Jewish living.

But service is not only a conduit for Jewish life. In and of itself, service is one of the most noble Jewish ethics, a value that has flourished even among Jews who are totally disengaged from other Jewish traditions. We should begin to celebrate this aspect of Jewish identity. Jewish devotion is manifested not only in synagogues but in hospitals and mentoring programs. Indeed, instead of defining service as yet another path Jews take away from their roots, we must recognize that service is Jewish roots, as intrinsic to the religion as is honoring one's parents. The Jewish community should support and reinforce all forms of service, even service that is not directed internally at Jewish causes.

On a purely pragmatic level, two facts are paramount: American Jews volunteer more than ever, and service is a bedrock Jewish value. If we can synthesize the two, we have the potential to create one of the strongest pillars in a portal back into Jewish life. It is time to use the ideals of *tikkun olam* in their practical, strategic and ethical dimensions to effect a renaissance of American Jewish life. ✿

Service as Strategy to Strengthen the Jewish Community

by MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT

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Michael H. Steinhart is Chairman of Jewish Life Network.



Choosing a Life of Service

by ARIEL ZWANG

In an age of material excess, it has become a challenge to reorient the Jewish community towards service work. Throughout the community, many parents encourage their children to pursue lucrative careers at the expense of less profitable positions in service fields. There is even a tacit stigma associated with careers in helping others, as compared to the social prestige of high-wage jobs or the intellectual prestige of academia and science. Despite this, as the following article indicates, the satisfaction of choosing a life of service can more than make up for these difficulties.

A friend of mine is an Ivy League-educated surgeon, a fourth-generation college graduate (one more generation than I can boast), and a member of a minority group that would like to have more clout. Recently, he asked me to name the top three reasons Jews have achieved such success in the United States. I think he expected me to talk about our community's organized structures, our emphasis on supportive family units, and the like.

My response: education, education and education. I told him that we Jews call ourselves *am hasefer*, people of the Book, that our religious obligation to study has extended itself to the pursuit of secular education as a cultural value, and that in the mostly-meritocratic United States, a focus on education has allowed us to take advantage of opportunities for advancement in society.

I think my own choice of a non-profit career over more remunerative work has been possible, in no small way, because of the feeling of security

I gained as a result of my educational opportunities and early professional experiences.

The daughter of a Solomon Schechter school principal and the granddaughter, great-granddaughter and niece of rabbis, I saw the rewards, but certainly also the difficulties, of professional communal service. Thus, when it came time to make the relevant decisions in my twenties, I got an MBA and worked for an investment bank and then a management consulting firm. Being able to support myself comfortably was very important to me.

The only problem was, in spite of the income I found that the work did not satisfy me. So after acknowledging a strong interest in helping to alleviate urban poverty, I made the switch to the New York City Board of Education — not much of a surprise, looking back on it, though it was a hard decision at the time — with the goal of helping others take better advantage of the source of education that my grandparents had benefitted from. Since

Ariel Zwang is Executive Director of New York Cares.



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then I have also worked in the South Bronx, providing economic development services in one of the lowest income areas in the country; and in Washington, DC, helping to implement anti-poverty policies at the Federal level.

Nearly ten years ago, shortly after I had left the private sector, I met a man who had emigrated in his late teens from what was then the USSR. His family had lived through most of the serious hardships that refuseniks endured. During his early years in the United States, his family lived in a tiny apartment so vermin-infested that they could go into the kitchen only during the day. Today he and his brother are bankers, the family is comfortable by any standard, and I salute them. But when I told this man that I had left the business world to try to help improve inner-city public education, he said plainly that he thought I must have lost my mind. He could not understand how anyone from the privileged, easy life I had led could just

throw away an opportunity to earn a good living.

There are certainly a great many bankers, consultants, lawyers, and business people who love their work; but I believe that there are many others who would like to find more satisfaction in the way that they spend most of their waking hours. So what is it that makes it possible for some of us to abandon all hope of ever owning a country house in favor of the certainty of struggling to pay our kids' day school tuition?

In my own case, what tipped the scales is the precept that *lo alecha ham'lacha ligmor*, none of us bears the responsibility for completing the work, but we are also not free to abstain from it. It seemed important to me to feel that I was taking an active role in helping, in my own small way, to fix what I think is wrong in the world. And, yet, I must admit that a big part of what helped me take the plunge was also the feeling that, if I had to, I could probably go back to the

private sector without too much trouble. That's how I hope my refusenik friend's children will feel one day.

After nearly a decade working in the non-profit and public sectors, I can look back and say that my work has helped moms who were previously on welfare get decent jobs; kids in the poorest public schools learn that their horizons can include a college education; families that were in homeless shelters obtain a safe and decent place to live; and tens of thousands of impoverished children get a warm coat in the winter.

So far, I haven't regretted my career choice, even for a day. Quite the contrary: there are few things as wonderful as waking up every morning and going to a job you love, and that you also feel is worthwhile. Still, I haven't forgotten about that country house. I try to make that other grass seem less green when, during the *Amidah*, I ask God to purify my heart so that I may serve God honestly. Perhaps, some day, I'll even stop thinking about what's on the other side of the fence. ✿

COMMUNITY SERVICE: The Nexus of Volunteerism, Philanthropy, and Jewish Identity

by STEVEN COHEN

volunteering and philanthropic generosity.

The first supposition is, of course, a normative assumption, best argued by rabbis, educators and communal leaders. However, the second supposition raises an empirical question, the sort that social scientists can address. Most simply:

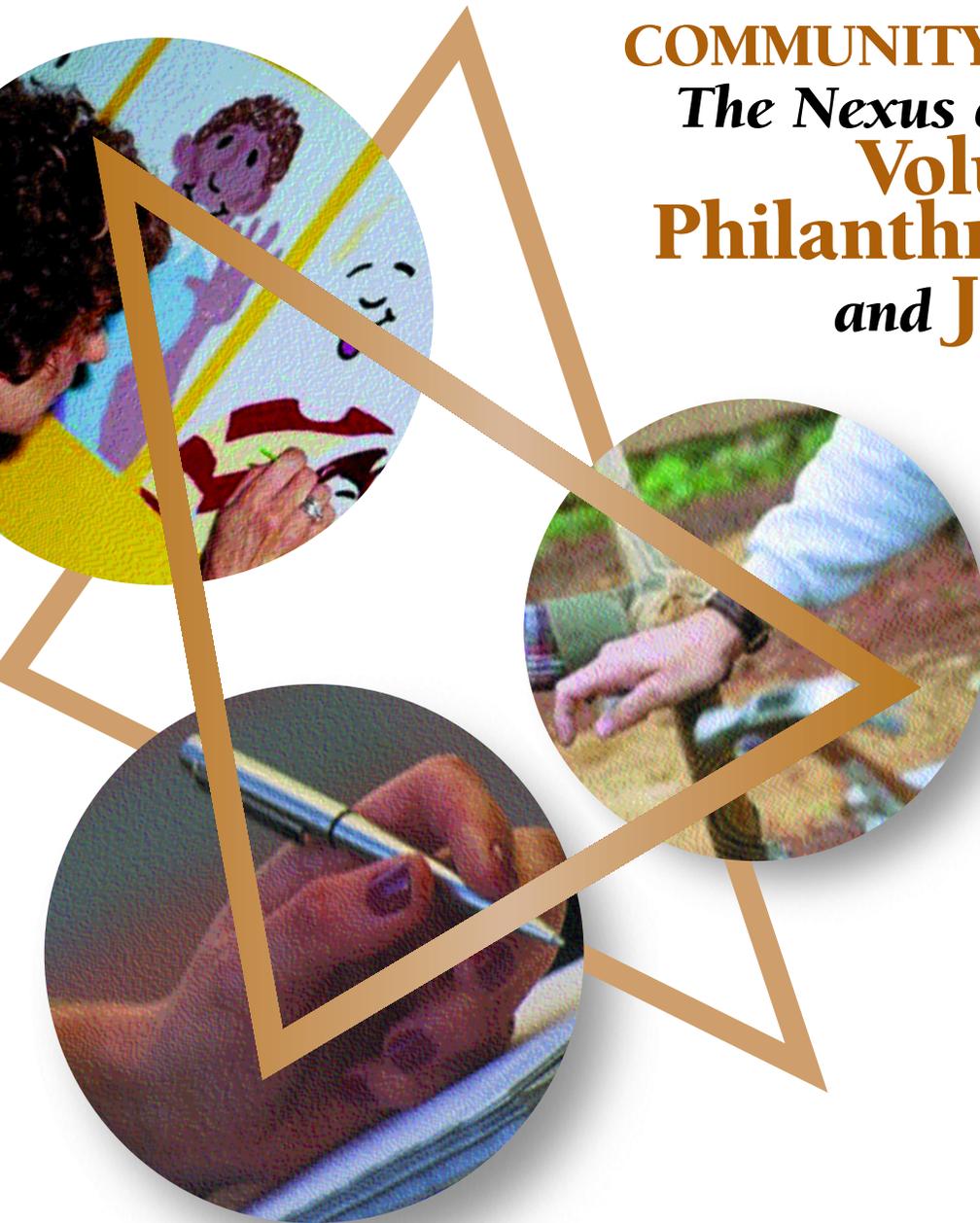
Does community service under Jewish sponsorship elevate the “Jewish identity” of young adult American Jews?

Evidence bearing upon the answer to this question emerged from a study I recently conducted under the sponsorship of Jewish Life Network. Following focus group interviews with Jewish young adults (primarily in their twenties and thirties), we conducted Web-based surveys of Jews associated with three programs: Makor, New York’s popular cultural, educational and social facility for Jewish young adults; Jewish InterAction, Boston’s lead educational, service and social programming effort for Jewish young adults; and New York Cares, a non-sectarian agency that recruits volunteers year-round and that allowed access to its participants, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

The survey, with a sample number of 700 from Makor, 220 from Jewish InterAction and 47 Jewish participants in New York Cares, assessed three critical measures:

1. the extent of recent volunteering under the sponsorship of Jewish agencies (and, in the case of NY Cares, the extent of Jewish volunteering under non-sectarian auspices);
2. the levels of Jewish engagement (as measured by Jewish friendship, organized affiliation, ritual practice and subjective commitment); and
3. Jewish philanthropic generosity, as measured by Jewish giving levels relative to income.

From a scientific point of view, the ideal study design would randomly assign people to different levels of community service, examine them “before” and “after,” and determine the extent to which community service experiences elevated their Jewish engagement and philanthropic generosity. Unfortunately, we have had to



Over the last decade, Americans have reported rising levels of volunteering. Community service has seemingly become more widespread and routinized in high school years, and is seen by many college applicants as indispensable to admission to the most selective universities. A wide engagement in community service activities apparently extends to college years and beyond.

Capitalizing on these trends, and drawing upon long-standing and well-established Jewish values, several Jewish institutions, educators, thinkers and community leaders have advocated an expansion

of service opportunities for Jewish young adults under communal auspices. They advance two arguments:

1. In principle, Jews ought to be engaged in community service, volunteering, *tikkun olam* and social justice activities (these terms, though distinctive, also overlap). In their view, Jewish tradition from Biblical times to the recent past absolutely demands these sorts of engagements.
2. In terms of effectiveness, community service constitutes an important gateway to Jewish involvement. This is a keen concern at a time of high anxiety over the levels of Jewish engagement among young adult American Jews. Volunteer experiences under Jewish sponsorship can, the thinking goes, bestow more positive images of being Jewish, promote Jewish social connection and teach the values of

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...bringing people together *who share distinctive values makes those values more plausible, more enduring and more deeply-rooted.*

make do with less than the ideal research design; but, even so, the available evidence that emerged is highly suggestive.

We learned that Jewish young adults who participate in programs like Makor and Jewish InterAction are, as a group and on average, more Jewishly engaged than the general Jewish population as described in local Jewish population studies. More pointedly, Jews in such Jewish-sponsored programs scored higher on several measures of Jewish involvement than did Jews who participated in New York Cares. To be sure, the Makor and InterAction Jews are, especially at this point in their lives, uninvolved in organized Jewish life of any sort. But it seems that their Jewish center of gravity rests on relatively strong ethnic commitment. In line with this inference, the focus groups demonstrated that Jews come to Makor in large part because they like the company of Jews, and they want to meet other Jews for friendship and romance. The Jews of New York Cares, by contrast, voiced indifference or even resistance to the notion of associating with other Jews, or of participating in programs sponsored by an official Jewish agency.

This finding corresponds closely with research on JCC members around the country. With all their inclusiveness and openness, JCCs manage to attract a population that is more Jewishly engaged than average. We are led to the inference that Jewish sponsorship in any way, shape, or form — even in the most subtle and least overt ways (Makor is very skillful at this) — inevitably attracts more Jewishly committed people than do programs devoid of any Jewish content or connection whatsoever.

We also learned that the extent of recent engagement in Jewish community service activities is strongly related to Jewish philanthropic giving. That is, within the group of people who come to places like Makor or Jewish InterAction, those who choose to volunteer in Jewishly sponsored programs of community service reported higher levels of philanthropic donations to Jewish causes.

Of course, we have no way of determining what leads to what. Do more philanthropic Jews volunteer more? Do volunteer-oriented Jews deepen their Jewish commitment? Does Jewish commitment provoke philanthropic giving? The causal directions are unclear and not

at all clarifiable, even with the ideal research design. However, totally understanding causality is not, for our purposes, all that critical.

For, based on the evidence, we know that by their very nature, community service programs under Jewish sponsorship attract Jews who are more Jewishly engaged, who are more philanthropically inclined, and, by definition, who are more prepared to volunteer their time to make the world a better place. Inevitably, their socializing, sweating and saving the world together can only serve to reinforce the positive norms that attracted them to Jewishly sponsored community service in the first place.

In general, bringing people together who share distinctive values makes those values more plausible, more enduring and more deeply-rooted. This observation applies not only generally, but apparently with specific reference to community service in America. As Robert Putnam observes in *Bowling Alone*:

Community service programs really do strengthen the civic muscles of participants, especially if the service is meaningful, regular, and woven into the fabric of the school curriculum. Episodic service has little effect. ... On the other hand, well-designed service learning programs (the emerging evidence suggests) improve civic knowledge, enhance citizen efficacy, increase social responsibility and self-esteem, teach skills of cooperation and leadership, and may even (one study suggests) reduce racism.

—Simon & Schuster, 2000, p. 405.

By extension, to paraphrase Putnam, we can reasonably infer that community service programs under Jewish sponsorship really do strengthen the Jewish and philanthropic muscles of participants, especially, we suspect, if the service is meaningful, regular and enriched by a Jewish educational context. Not only do such programs serve an intrinsic Jewish purpose laden with historic, cultural and religious meaning for Jews today. In all likelihood, Jewish participants accrue additional benefits in terms of strengthening the commitments that bring them together in the first place: Jewish identity, philanthropic generosity and an actionable desire to help one's community. 🌸

Many of the responses to the Service Survey (see accompanying article) illuminated a diverse range of approaches to Jewish identity. Following are selected remarks from volunteers with Makor, a Jewish cultural, educational and service center that reaches out to New Yorkers in their 20s and 30s, and Jewish InterAction, a service and social programming organization for the same age group in Boston:

- “Volunteering is some form of spirituality. It helps me feel connected to the community at large, and especially the Jewish community.”
- “I think [service] enforces the communal aspects of Judaism. I like the opposing forces at work in Judaism — on one side the family and community bonds; on the other the intellectual and self-discovery aspects.”
- “If I had to choose between going to synagogue twice a month or [volunteering at a Jewish home for the aged] twice a month, I would volunteer, because this adds value to dozens and dozens of people's lives. And because it is at a Jewish organization, I feel like it's not a substitute or an alternative but — that's my synagogue in many regards. I find it spiritually rewarding, emotionally rewarding, and that's the feeling I would hope to get out of going to synagogue.”
- “[Volunteering] allows me to express my Jewish commitments even when my religious beliefs or attitudes are at their most feeble.”
- “I am always inspired when I see people whose Judaism causes them to help others. I feel my commitment deepen whenever I am out there doing volunteer work of any kind.”
- “What is a Jewish context? Does that mean service that only helps Jews? Service by Jewish organizations? If I helped the Red Cross distribute food to flood victims, isn't that still in the Jewish context of loving thy neighbor?”
- “[Service] work makes all the study and sitting in synagogue seem founded on something real.”

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING: Pursuing Jewish Ideals of Compassion and Justice

by JOEL WESTHEIMER

Service learning involves community service activities tied to the academic curriculum. It has strong roots in the progressive philosophy of turn-of-the-century educators like John Dewey, Harold Rugg, and William Kilpatrick, but its widespread popularity is a contemporary phenomenon. A recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics reveals that 83 percent of high schools currently offer community service opportunities (compared with 27 percent in 1984). School-based service learning is among the fastest growing and popular education reforms of the past three decades.

Jewish educators have seen similar renewed passion for tying community experiences to the academic curriculum. There are dozens of Jewish organizations that promote both community service in general and service learning in particular. As an educator who has been involved in both developing and studying service learning programs, I relished this invitation to reflect on the possible links between my own Jewish experience and my fondness for (and reservations about) educational programs that bridge academic work with community action. My exposure to Jewish traditions and, in particular, my thirteen-year involvement with the youth movement, *Hashomer Hatza'ir*, led me to ask: What might a Jewish perspective on service learning offer?

Education that is inextricably bound to improving community life is a deeply embedded Jewish value. Judaism undoubtedly teaches us the critical importance of texts. However, Jewish customs, traditions, and the texts themselves make clear that learning from books alone is insufficient. As Abraham Joshua Heschel pointed out in his book *The Prophets*, Judaism demands participation in the details of everyday life. It is not enough to pray for atonement on Yom Kippur, for example. Ritual acts must be accompanied by one's work and actions in the community.

The Jewish requirement to help repair the

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Acts of kindness
and of charity are
important, but
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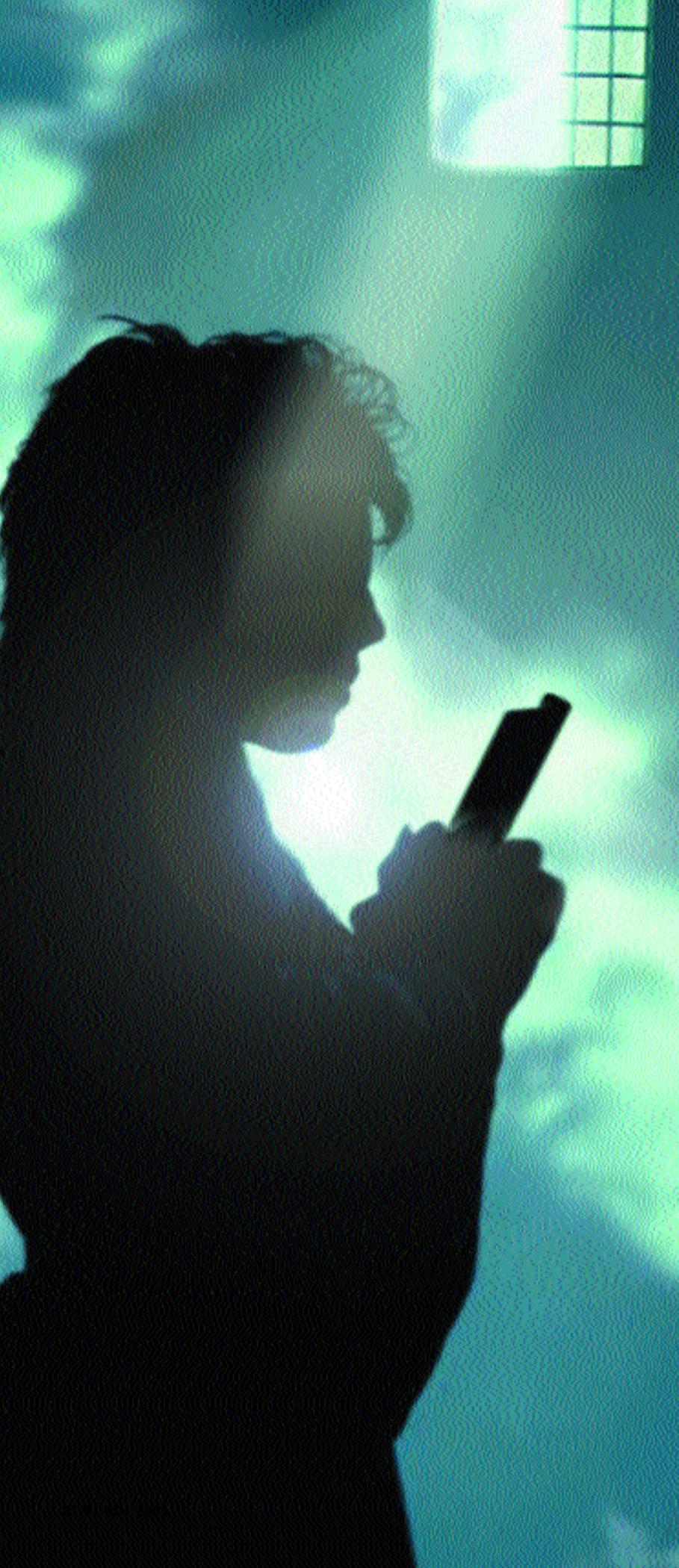
world is often interpreted as a call for *tzedaka* or charity. But, a second critical aspect of Jewish tradition and experience is an emphasis on the need not only for compassion and charity but also for justice—for addressing root causes of problems and inequity. Judaism teaches that acts of *tzedaka* (charity) and *hesed* (kindness) are not enough if these acts ignore or perpetuate underlying root causes of problems. The notions of *tzedaka*, on the one hand, and *tzedek* (justice) on the other offer a powerful lens through which educators can assess the worth of a variety of service learning activities.

Some of the greatest historical seekers of social justice and change were expressing a profoundly Jewish sensibility: the belief that change is possible and that justice is not some other-worldly concept but an imperative for the here and now. The Jewish tradition is committed to ideals of democracy and basic human rights, to fighting oppression and injustice, and to meaningful community participation in improving society. The fact that a disproportionate percentage of activists in the civil rights movement were Jewish is not a matter of happenstance. Professor Judith Hauptman of the Jewish Theological Seminary notes that the Torah and Talmud both present a clear vision of a just society: “The pages of the Torah resonate with a profound concern for the socially and economically vulnerable segments of society—the poor, the day laborers, the orphans and widows, [and] the resident aliens.” The struggle of the Jewish people to move beyond slavery

is retold *each week* in the Torah readings; it is our common story and our common reference point for our actions on behalf of all peoples. *Tikkun Olam* means to repair the world not simply by being nice to your neighbor but also through a progressive message of change: we were slaves and we overcame our oppression; we know that it is possible to change the world, and we must act in the world to change it on behalf of those who are less powerful.

These profoundly Jewish commitments resonate powerfully with those who hope that service learning can reinvigorate a democratic community. Currently, both within the Jewish community and in the broader education community, volunteerism and charity remain the most common form of service. An emphasis on charity and on acts of kindness (collecting cans for a food drive, cleaning up a local park, etc.) allows the formation of coalitions of community workers, politicians and activists, but prevents deep investigation into solving complex social problems. As the name of the Federal legislation to “Serve America” implies, most service learning programs emphasize altruism and charity, hoping that teaching a personal responsibility to “help others” is the solution to the nation's problems. This kind of service risks being understood as a kind of noblesse oblige, a private act of kindness performed by the privileged that does little to address underlying causes of inequity and injustice. As Paul Hanna notes in his 1937 book, *Youth Serves the Community*, making Thanksgiving baskets for poor families is important work, but it does little to address “the basic inhibiting influences which perpetuate a scarcity economy in the midst of abundance.” In other words, while engaging students in acts of service might produce George Bush Sr.'s now-famous “thousand points of light,” it might also promote a thousand points of the status quo.

Acts of kindness and of charity are important, but citizenship in a democratic society requires more than civic decency. To repair the world, students have to learn how to create, evaluate, criticize, and change public norms, institutions, and programs. Students need to learn to contribute cans to a food drive, but they also need to learn to question why people are hungry and explore ways to solve structural causes of hunger and homelessness. “It's like a rowboat,” explained one service learning instructor I observed, “one oar is compassion and the other is justice. If you don't keep both going, you move in a circle.” Judaism and Jewish ideals of social action can help to reinvigorate the quest among service learning educators for both compassion and justice and ensure that neither is ignored on the road to a better society. 🌸



Sparking a Renewed Jewish Commitment to Service

by RABBI SARA PAASCHE-ORLOW
and MAGGI G. GAINES

Where do Jews stand in relation to service and what might a Jewish commitment to service look like? By reflecting on historical Jewish understandings of service, we hope to gain perspective on the present and the need to rejoin our concepts of God, service, and worship. Such explorations can spark a radical transformation of our social and communal norms.

Historically, prayer involved a physical act: a portion of one's material goods were given as an offering. Individuals could then experience how their sacrifice sustained others — specifically, the priesthood. The ritual sacrifices of the Temple fostered a connection to God and to a greater community that was confirmed and celebrated on the pilgrimage festivals.

Since the destruction of the Temple, the Rabbis of the Talmud succeeded in transforming the Temple services into a system of prayer services and Torah readings for dispersed individuals and communities. For almost two millennia, we have brought our sacrifices in the form of prayer rather than crops.

The Rabbis based the new prayer system on the pattern of activities of the priestly cast. This exploded the traditional hierarchies, as every [male] Jew took on the mantle of daily prayer. In certain ways, this central transformation has succeeded for thousands of years as a crucial historical link for Jewish practice. However, for many modern Jews the analogy is meaningless. The central holy work of our people, which derived from the Temple service to God, is now expressed through the synagogue service. But prayer does not feel like service. To be sure, we use the same language: “How were services today?” “Oh, very nice.” But it falls flat. The cultic practices seem obscure; synagogue worship does not fulfill a sense of service, be it to God, community or humanity.

Is prayer service? Many Jews feel that the recitation of prayer is itself a service to God. In traditional terms, it is a fulfillment of what God has required of us as interpreted and re-constituted by the rabbis. In an essential way, synagogue worship sustains and supports us as a community, but it cannot be the exclusive expression of how we understand our service obligation. Ultimately, if our prayers do not move us to engage the world in constructive and generous ways, the glaring fact of our inaction erodes the meaning of our prayers.

Most modern Jews do not pray out of a traditional sense of obligation, but relate to prayer as a discretionary experience. Prayer is often experienced as a luxury, an

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THE Partnership FOR SERVICE

Partnership for Service is an emerging national Jewish non-profit seeking to increase the number of Jews committed to and involved in service and volunteerism. Traditionally, Jews visited the sick and the homebound and sought creative ways to help meet a wide range of needs. However, in recent decades community needs have become more polarized, work patterns have changed and social work has grown as a profession. As a result, we have become less comfortable as volunteers, and often when we do volunteer we do not connect it with the Jewish tradition.

Launched this Fall, with the support of four initial funding partners — Beginning with Children Foundation, The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Fund, and Jewish Life Network, Partnership for Service will capitalize on the need for meaning, bringing the Jewish community back to the tradition of service sector careers and volunteer engagement. In so doing, it will bring us back to finding greater purpose in our lives. It will encourage the understanding that volunteering and service are significant expressions of Jewish identity and commitment.

The organization's plan is to work collaboratively to channel the skills and energy of individual Jews and of the Jewish community toward volunteering and giving of the self. By encouraging and supporting Jews who volunteer and organizations that are developing and modeling volunteer programs, Partnership for Service seeks to connect acts of service with living a Jewish life. The initial emphasis for Partnership for Service will be on Jews in their teens, 20's and 30's who increasingly volunteer but frequently have limited connections to the Jewish community.

Partnership for Service will engage diverse segments of the American Jewish population in this work, in order to encourage Jewish pluralism. It will build and work with a coalition of Jewish organizations to model and expand the teaching of service as a cultural Jewish value. Partnership for Service will also participate actively in the general societal dialogue about service and volunteerism. In every facet of American life, Partnership for Service will advance the field of Jewish service.

opportunity for reflection, a social gathering, or a concert. Many Jews come to services seeking absolution. However, as this type of prayer is largely self-service, it is not true service.

In the Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah 10a-b*, when Abraham's guests want to thank him for his generosity, he responds, "don't thank me, praise and bless God." Through Abraham's *hesed*, or act of kindness, his guests are moved to prayer. In this model, we experience God in our lives through the actions of our fellow human beings and become motivated to offer thanks, to pray out of gratitude.

Another important model in understanding the relationship of service to prayer is that revelation is often preceded by acts of *hesed*. Acts of *hesed* often bring us in contact with people who are in difficult circumstances. We are awakened to the world as it is experienced by less fortunate people. Through opening our door to the stranger or those in need, we open ourselves up to a relationship with God. The agent of *hesed* is him/herself changed through the experience.

The emotional rushes of fear, gratitude, distress, exhilaration, or pride that emanate from service are powerful moments in people's lives. As a Jewish community, we should embrace the potential of these emotions and see in them an opportunity for the empowerment of volunteers as Jews. Jewish study, reflection and prayer are important responses to service that can help connect volunteers to our rich tradition. Our ritual and spiritual relationship to God can become deeply rooted in our actions towards other people.

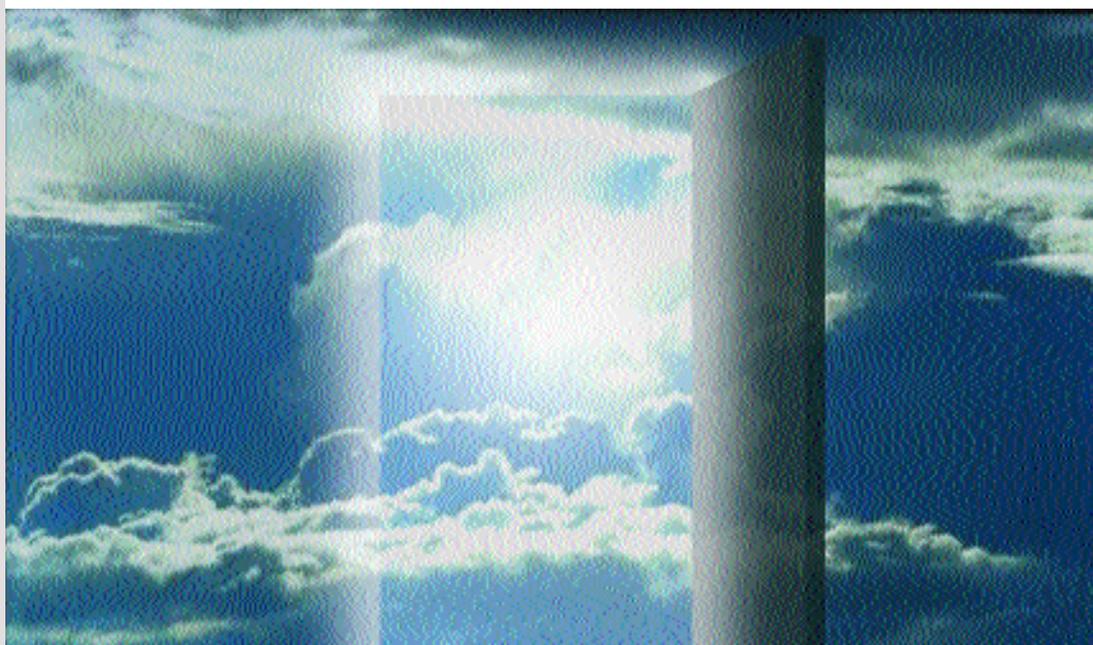
The Rabbis replaced the hierarchy of the Levite blood-line with a civilization based on meritocracy. Success in the rabbinic system could be established through mastery of Jew-

ish texts or through the accumulation of great wealth. Out of this communal structure we maintain a special role for the scholar and the philanthropist. It is time, however, to assert a third axis of meritocracy in our community, by giving our respect to those who engage in service. Jews who work in professions that serve the communal good, that support the poor and the downtrodden, and that serve humanity are fulfilling the highest precepts of Torah. This is not to say that we should not study and learn, but that learning is only defensible when it results in humane activism and a response to the issues in the world around us.

Many Jews are not compelled to pray or learn in community. Some of those who do pray interact with the activity as spectators or as theater critics. The crowds who appear on Yom Kippur for propitiation often find the experience grueling. However, many Jews may be motivated to engage with the Jewish community through service. Volunteering allows for the personal declaration of principle outside of an explicitly theological framework. Through additional service learning, volunteers can engage Jewish ideas and texts and explore the ways in which their own impulse to live an ethical life and serve those in need is supported, informed and enriched by Jewish tradition. Not only should we encourage more service by all Jews, we must engage this generation of service-oriented spiritual seekers and support them in their sacred work.

When the Jews arrived at Sinai, God spoke to them and said, "Indeed, all the Earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (*Exodus, 19:6*). By exploring and engaging in the many meanings of service, we aspire to fulfill this vision. 🌸

Through opening our door to the stranger or those in need, we open ourselves up to a relationship with God. The agent of hesed is him/herself changed through the experience.



Volunteering IS NOT Enough

by JOSEPH I.
LIEBERMAN

I raise this point not to say that we need more voting and less volunteering, but really an outpouring of both. We have to find a way to maintain that civic spirit while translating it into the political arena.

According to a study by Independent Sector, 46 percent of the nation's 18- to 24-year-olds volunteered in the past year, up from 38 percent in 1996. I applaud this noble trend toward voluntary public service in American life. I encourage people to become a Big Brother or Big Sister, work a regular shift at a local soup kitchen, counsel rape victims, join the local PTA, serve on an education board or library board, or find one of the countless other ways to volunteer their time to strengthen the sinews of the community where they live and improve the quality of life there. Volunteerism shows that despite all the political cynicism and disenchantment today, America's civic spirit is alive and well, and being expended effectively to better our communities and the lives of those who live in them.

But there is a subtle cause for concern in the flip side of volunteerism, particularly as it relates to young people. Surveys consistently show that more and more of those volunteers are people withdrawing from the democratic process and looking for alternative ways to channel their sense of communal responsibility. For instance, a poll taken last year by the Panetta Institute found that 73 percent of college students had done volunteer work in helping the homeless, tutoring children and cleaning up the environment, among other things, with 41 percent doing so more than ten times in the past year. Nearly two thirds said they would consider spending some of their lives working in education or for a non-profit. But only 25 percent said they would consider spending some time in politics. A Harvard study found that 85 percent of college students prefer volunteering to political engagement as a better way to solve important challenges facing their communities.

This withdrawal from political life is evident in legislative races throughout the country that are being run solo, with incumbents facing no challenger. And it is most evident in those who are and are not doing the voting. A smaller percentage of voters goes to the polls in recent years than at any time since 1942, when millions of Americans had the excuse that they were overseas fighting to keep the world safe for democracy.

In the past several decades, I fear much has happened to discourage young people from choosing the path of public service: a politics too often embittered by partisanship and personal attacks; a press increasingly consumed by conflict and scandal; a public that, as a result, is more and more distrustful of government even while understanding their need for it. A recent poll from the Council for Excellence in Government found that two out of three Americans feel "disconnected" from their government.

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More than half do not believe that government is any longer "of, by and for the people." And the segment of our society that feels most estranged from government is the young generation of Americans aged 18 to 34.

And yet, our great nation cannot survive without public service. We cannot have a democracy without Democrats and Republicans and Greens and Reformers and other political practitioners. Democracy requires participation to work. That is what Ben Franklin was getting at when he responded to a question about whether America was a republic or a monarchy by declaring "a republic — if you can keep it."

Of course, our government is not on the verge of collapse and our freedoms are not about to evaporate. We have people to write the laws and run the programs and render the services. But, in fact, we are facing what the folks in the Senate in Washington are calling a coming crisis in human capital. Translated into English, that means in the next several years a very large number of the our nation's workforce is going to retire. We need new people to replace them in the service of our great society. We need politicians to formulate and implement the next Marshall Plan for the poorest people on earth, the next G.I. Bill to better educate every one of America's children, the next Civil Rights Act to extend freedom's franchise. We need to empower the government to find a cure for AIDS, breast cancer and Alzheimer's. We need vision and courage in the government to confront the threat of global warming. And we need brilliance to shape an energy future that is based on new, clean, and efficient technologies, not on old fuels that pollute our world's atmosphere and diminish our nation's independence.

I raise this point not to say that we need more voting and less volunteering, but really an outpouring of both. We have to find a way to maintain that civic spirit while translating it into the political arena. We have to because no matter how many Kiwanis and Lions Clubs there are, and no matter how many good deeds they do, these private associations simply cannot replace our public institutions or fulfill their enormous responsibilities. It would be unfair and unrealistic to expect them to do so. We need a vital and accountable government to educate our children, build our streets, defend our borders, and provide a safety net to our most vulnerable citizens. And we need good people to serve and all kinds of people to participate to foster that kind of government.

Volunteerism and government service should not be considered either/or options. They should complement each other as we work to strengthen and improve American society for all its citizens. Politics can be not only a noble profession but a way to give something back to the country that has given us and our families the priceless promises of freedom and opportunity. 🌸



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By creating a Jewish framework for all service and incorporating Jewish teachings into the service experience both inside and outside the community, we can inspire a generation of American Jews who would otherwise have no contact with the Jewish spiritual tradition. In this way, service won't replace the traditional forums of Jewish involvement, but complement them and serve as a gateway to more enriched Jewish living.

—MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT