

Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh La'Zeh: Taking Care of Our Own in a Global Community

Lesson plan for high school

This lesson plan is part of a larger lesson entitled “Benevolent Societies and Tzedakah,” which can be found at <http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/oct05/>.

Visit this website to download the featured primary document, “A New Year’s Wish,” from the October 1921 cover of The Jewish Woman.

This is a values-clarification exercise that challenges participants to consider which causes and communities are closest to our hearts and how we prioritize the aid we give.

Advance preparation: Print the list of organizations at the end of this lesson plan, make one copy per 3-4 participants in your group, cut at the lines to make individual strips, and put each set of strips into an envelope.

- 1. Begin with the “New Year’s Wish” document.** (Explain that this was a magazine cover from 1921 for a new organization, National Council of Jewish Women, which was devoted to civics, philanthropy (raising and disbursing funds for worthy causes), religion, and education, as is evident from the four columns in the image.
 - Ask participants what other values are evident from the image and text in the document.
 - Point out that Jews are commanded to help provide for people in need, but are faced with decisions about how to prioritize our aid – which causes and which populations do we prioritize?
- 2. Divide participants into small groups (3 or 4 people in each group),** and give each group one envelope with a complete set of paper strips. Tell them that in a given week, they received requests in the mail for financial donations to each of these causes. Ask them to lay out the strips in the order that they would prioritize donating to each cause. It’s

ok if the group cannot come to consensus: the important thing is the discussion about HOW they would decide and WHY one cause is more worthy than the other. If they cannot agree on what order the strips should go in, ask them to make one pile for the causes that they can all agree they would prioritize, one pile for the causes they can all agree they would not prioritize, and one pile for those they disagree about. Give the groups 15 minutes to discuss and wrestle with their choices.

3. **Ask the groups which causes they prioritized and what their criteria were in deciding.** Were they more likely to donate to a Jewish organization? To a local organization? To immediate disasters?
4. **Hand out the following quotes to read,** either continuing in small groups or as one larger group.

Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la'zeh: All of Israel is responsible for one another.

Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a

*If you lend money to any of My people that is poor by you:
 [this teaches, if the choice lies between] my people [Jews] and a heathen [non-Jew], 'my people' has preference;
 [between] the poor or the rich – the 'poor' takes precedence;
 [between] your poor [your relatives] and the [general] poor of your town – your poor come first;
 [between] the poor of your city and the poor of another town – the poor of your own town have prior rights.*

Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 71a

5. Discuss:

- Clearly we are not the first generation to struggle with the problem of establishing criteria for prioritizing aid. What was the Talmudic ruling on how we should prioritize?
- According to these passages, which of the causes should we give to first?
- In our generation, through internet, television, and printed news, we are inundated with stories about problems of poverty, environmental disasters, social ills, and people in need all over the world. Do you think this makes the Talmud passage more or less relevant? (i.e., Is it even more important, in a global environment, to focus on our own people and our own city first? Or should we be applying different principles of prioritization because of our new connection to the global population?)

6. Read the quote below, from Rebecca Gratz, and consider how, and why, she took the traditional value of *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la'zeh* into account.

To the Jews, who have no country, and whose brethren come from every clime, it is incumbent wherever a few are collected together in a community, to form societies for the relief of the wayfarer, the poor, and the stranger; for in all their borders God has blessed them...

Rebecca Gratz, secretary of the Philadelphia Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, 1837

Follow-up activity:

Ask students to look at the JWA web exhibits on Rebecca Gratz, Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, or Lillian Wald (<http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/>).

Ask students to consider:

- What were the contributions to *tzedakah* and *gemilut chesed* (acts of lovingkindness) that each of these women accomplished?
- How did each woman organize others to aid people in need in their communities?
- In what ways did each of these women make decisions about how to prioritize aid?

A. AMERICAN RED CROSS – for relief to the victims of the recent hurricane. Red Cross disaster relief focuses on meeting people’s immediate emergency disaster-caused needs.

B. MAGEN DAVID ADOM – for assistance to victims of terror and to buy new ambulances. Magen David Adom is Israel’s only emergency medical, disaster, ambulance, and blood bank service, providing vital, lifesaving services during each of Israel’s wars, skirmishes, and terrorist attacks, as well as in times of peace.

C. LOCAL JEWISH FEDERATION – for relief to the victims of the recent hurricane. The United Jewish Communities (UJC – parent organization of every local Jewish Federation) is working with local federations and Network communities in the affected regions and will assess damages and help coordinate relief efforts.

D. LOCAL RESCUE MISSION – for clothing and food for local people in need. The Local Rescue Mission is a faith-based outreach program open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, offering food, shelter, clothing, laundry service, case management, counseling, and referrals.

E. MAZON – for food banks across the country. MAZON allocates donations from the Jewish community to prevent and alleviate hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds. MAZON funds emergency food providers, food banks, multi-service organizations, and advocacy groups both in this country and abroad.

F. BREAST CANCER RESEARCH FOUNDATION – for donations to research. The mission of BCRF is to achieve prevention and a cure for breast cancer in our lifetime by providing critical funding for innovative clinical and genetic research at leading medical centers worldwide

G. YOUR SYNAGOGUE'S SISTERHOOD/BROTHERHOOD – to help provide kiddush cups for all the b'nai mitzvah in your synagogue. The Sisterhood and Brotherhood sponsor a number of special events during the year, such as the Yom Kippur Break-the-Fast, and conduct fund raising activities to provide for many congregational needs.

H. NEW ISRAEL FUND – for funding bridge-building organizations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. NIF believes in protecting Israel's strength by protecting Israel's democracy and promotes human rights, justice, and equality for all Israelis.

I. CHILDREN'S HUNGER RELIEF FUND – for helping starving Darfuri children in Sudan. CHRF provides emergency relief and long-term opportunities to needy children around the world.

J. YOUR COUSIN – for help paying off her loans. She recently got divorced, is taking care of her children on her own, and needs help paying off her loans so she can support her family more independently.
