

# CONTACT

SUMMER 1999 / TAMUZ 5759

THE JOURNAL OF JEWISH LIFE NETWORK / חברים כל ישראל



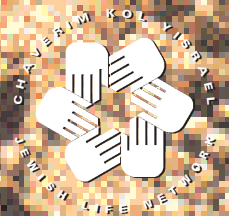
**Jewish Service:  
A Frontier for Jewish  
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**Toward a New Concept  
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**Volunteers:  
Bane or Boon?**

**Service and the  
Jewish Tradition**



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**CONTACT** is produced and distributed by Jewish Life Network, a Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation, 6 East 39th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10016.

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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.

## F r o m t h e E d i t o r

### *Serving with the Soul*

**T**he Torah is very clear: it is a Jewish mandate to “serve” (*la'avod*) God. But what exactly does “service” mean?

Throughout the centuries, it has meant a wide variety of things, from offering pigeons and goats for sacrifice, to praying alone or with others in community, to building up the land of Israel.

With no firm historical consensus as to what the concept of Jewish service actually means, its implementation and practice have changed and evolved with the Jewish people over time.

In our own day, a new generation of Jewish teachers and leaders has begun to develop a fresh approach to the issue of sacred service. While the pursuit of justice and social action has always been at the heart of what it means to be a Jew (and a Jewish community), a growing number of Jewish organizations has made this type of service the exclusive focus of their mission and the *raison d'etre* of their work. Still other groups have expanded the idea of service, creating new models and programs that are taking Jewish service into areas untapped by previous generations and not limited only to social action.

The following authors explain their work as well as what they see as their organization's role in the wider Jewish community. One of the core questions is this: What makes service programs and activities *Jewish*, and, if they are, how can they be used as vehicles for inculcating a new or even stronger sense of Jewish identity in their participants? A final essay looks at the concept of service through the lens of the Jewish textual tradition.

May you all have a wonderful and rejuvenating spring.

Rabbi Niles E. Goldstein



# Jewish Service

## A Frontier for Jewish Identity Building

by RABBI SARA PAASCHE-ORLOW

**T**he Jewish community has succeeded in developing a tremendous fund-raising apparatus, but we are failing to show our dedication through our time and with our hands. Our donations will build institutions, but will our children attend them? What can we bring to society? What are the essential values of Judaism that have attracted Jews throughout generations and will attract our children? Clearly, a good Jewish education is necessary, but without service, without *tikun olam*, our culture cannot stand. Whether it is volunteering to reach out to other Jews and helping to connect them to community, practicing *bikur cholim* or working for social justice, these acts are essential to being and living as a Jew.

Service is a tremendous opportunity for education and community building. As the early builders of Israel knew, working together forges bonds between people and cultivates values and belief. Taking on a goal together creates a basis for shared experience and connection. At

one time in the context of synagogue community life, one would have been called upon to visit a sick person, to help create a food pantry, or to assist in the acculturation of a newly immigrated family. Today, the sisterhoods and brotherhoods are not attracting the next generation. In the meantime, volunteerism has become the agenda of secular America. Service, however, is an excellent point of entry for Jewish learning, and Jewish professionals must capitalize on this tremendous opportunity. Indeed, the long-lasting spiritual and ethical impact of service experienced through the lens of Torah is exactly



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*Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow is a program officer/educator at the Jewish Life Network and is currently developing a service initiative.*



**Clearly, a good Jewish education is necessary, but without service, without tikun olam, our culture cannot stand.**



what continuity hawks are seeking.

In the 1950's, middle class Jewish women were not in the workforce. These wives and mothers volunteered. A recent study of women serving on Jewish boards found that 40% of the women over age 52 were full-time volunteers. Fewer than 10% of the women under age 53 were full-time volunteers. In the

past, volunteer women staffed Jewish agencies and social welfare efforts as well as serving on boards. Their work was an expression of Jewish identity and was performed in a Jewish context. Today, these same jobs are filled by Jewish professionals, many of whom must view their work as a form of Jewish service because of their low salaries.

The face of volunteerism has changed. Jewish singles, high school and college students, and retirees have all entered the arena, and the work is no longer taking place within the context of Jewish agencies. Secular Jews are volunteering at Vista, Teach For America, Habitat for Humanity, the Peace Corps, and local soup kitchens. They are not finding meaning in synagogue services but rather in service for the

needy. We fail to make the connection for these people between the tremendous mitzvah that they are doing and Jewish consciousness. We have to create more options for Jews to volunteer Jewishly. We must also foster a culture that honors people who serve. We need to

begin raising up role models and honoring those who give their time to benefit the community and others.

Charitable giving, *tzedaka*, has become the predominant way that affiliated Jews are contributing. Service is no longer as revered or developed by the community as it used to be. The ancient practice of giving money in place of servitude, as in "*pidyon ha-ben*", the redemption of the first born, where cash obviated a first born son's obligation of service to the Temple, has become a social and cultural crutch. A telephone pledge fails to bring you into community in vital and experiential ways. Your *tzedaka* is clearly important, but you cannot redeem your obligations for community service with your donations.

As the old models for service fall aside, synagogues and JCC's are seeking new models to invigorate communities with tasks that call for a deeper commitment to Judaism and utilize the potential of their membership. There is a lot going on, but we are far from realizing our potential. In the past few years a number of new programs have sprung up to address this deficit of meaningful Jewish service opportunities. These include: Avodah: The Jewish Service Corps, The Jewish Campus Service Corps, The National Jewish Coalition for Literacy, and the Jewish Organizing Initiative. These programs are the first step in what could become a full reorientation of our cultural norms and herald the rededication of Jews to community service. It is time to encourage grass roots efforts already taking place across America to gain the momentum needed to inspire and enlist Jews into service. A national structure for the promotion and coordination of these projects will need to emerge within a model that will advance Jewish identity and community. Join us! 🌸

# Serving the Jewish Community

by RACHEL E. SAIFER

In class yesterday, my professor directed a loaded question at me. He asked why I wanted to work in community service. Before I could answer, he said, “Whatever you say, don’t tell me that it’s because you want to save the world.” I’d heard the question before. I’ve thought about it on a number of different levels.

I am currently a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania and I have been awarded the honor of being a Steinhardt Scholar. What this means is that after I receive my Master’s degree, I will work in the Jewish community. Through this scholarship, Hillel is investing in the future of Jewish communal leadership. For me, what this means is that the question my professor posed becomes even more pointed and loaded. The question becomes “Why do I want to work in the Jewish community?”

After I graduated from college, I spent a year as a member of Hillel’s Steinhardt Jewish Campus Service Corps in 1996-97. I decided to apply for the fellowship because I was told I would be good at it, that it was a job I’d love. My year as a Fellow in Philadelphia was one of tremendous growth and learning. The Fellowship is the epitome of the notion of “thinking out of the box.” Not only do the Fellows engage tens of thousands of Jewish students in

meaningful Jewish experiences; they also build and shape the next generation of Jewish communal leaders. The following year I became the Jan Mitchell Fellow at Hillel’s International Center. The professionals I was exposed to provided levels of excellence to be emulated in almost any arena one might choose to enter. It was a love for Jewish community that drove them and their work. Now that I am in the status of student again, I am able to appreciate all of these qualities and recognize the source from which the Jewish community derives its strength.

Working in the Jewish community comes with countless stigmas attached. I’ve learned that use of language is important in creating change, and I’ve chosen my words carefully. Jewish communal service implies that one must be a servant, while Jewish communal leadership implies strength and ownership. To work in the Jewish community, it is said that one should be a “do-gooder,” a rabbi, a throwback to the 1960’s, or a religious and pious individual. Though I can’t speak with first-hand knowledge about any of the previous descriptions, I can say that the scope of Jewish communal leadership is becoming more and more diverse. For me, the impetus is reaching beyond who I am to build something meaningful for the present and the future Jewish community. An artist needs to make art. A doctor is driven to heal the sick, and

lawyers to advocate for our rights. While these may all be noble ways of spending your days, it is not for me—not today, anyway. Today, what keeps me up at night is envisioning ways to make Judaism meaningful to myself as well as to others.

On some level this vision is a part of all of our lives, whichever path we choose to follow. Jewish communal devotion is expressed in so many different ways that it is hard to define. In no way am I saying that one should be pigeon-holed into a single professional identity. However,



**Michael and Judy Steinhardt with a few of the JCSA fellows.**

to work in the Jewish community, it is essential to have an unyielding drive and vision. You should always have the privilege to be able to do what you love. Many say it is not an easy job. Others say there is nothing more fulfilling. All I know is that you need to do what you love in a capacity you consider appropriate.

I have yet to tell you my answer to the question I spoke of in the beginning of this article. The answer I gave my professor is even more lofty than his suggestion of saving the world. I told him I want to work in the Jewish community because it is what I love doing and what I am most passionate about. ✿

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*Rachel Saifer is currently working on her masters degree in social work at the University of Pennsylvania.*



# Community Living

## A Microcosm of the World and a Challenge to the Jewish Community

by JENNIFER WALPER

I have spent most of my 22 years living a compartmentalized life. I had a solid Jewish education, having gone to after-school Hebrew school throughout my pre-college years and participated in Jewish youth groups. I knew a lot about what tradition said regarding *Tikkun Olam* and *Gemilut Hasadim* and I'm sure that had an influence on some of my social and political ideologies. But I also experienced unsupportive leadership in the Jewish community when I suggested mobilizing our community to follow through on some of these teachings. Jewish study lost its place in my life because I had no idea how to be part of that community while still working on issues that mattered most to me.

I decided that to experience a meaningful life as a Jew, I needed to try to integrate all these compartmentalized realms of my life. I stumbled across a pamphlet for AVODAH, the Jewish Service Corps.

AVODAH, the Hebrew word that means “work, worship, and service,” is a one-year program that involves working for a New York City anti-poverty placement organization while living in a community with 8 other young (21-24 year old) Jews. Each AVODAH community member works in a job placement that allows him/her to have professional experience in a realm that he/she cares passionately about. The service corps members live communally in the *Bayit* (house), and participate in bi-weekly AVODAH programs (text study, meetings with anti-poverty professionals, etc.). Living in a community helps AVODAH members to better understand their work and each other.

Half-way through my year I am realizing that living in a community is both the richest and the toughest task I've ever faced. It provides a *wholeness* to life — integrating my personal relationships, professional and social passions, and spiritual motivations through every part of my day. Here is a glimpse of a typical day in the life of an AVODAHnick:

**6:30 AM** The row house in Brooklyn that holds all nine of us comes to life as alarm clocks *beep beep* until their owners awake. The owner usually sleeps right through the digital buzz, but the housemate in the neighboring room angrily wakes up ½ hour earlier than planned.

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*Jennifer Walper* is a recent graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park. Her AVODAH placement is at Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, where she is a program coordinator. AVODAH is a beneficiary of Jewish Life Network.

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Someone trying out religious observance davens Shacharit in one room while in the kitchen the whirl of NPR spreads the morning gospel. One-by-one each AVODAHnick shoves some leftovers from last-night's community meal into a Tupperware to bring to work for lunch. Nine people prey like buzzards over the only *New York Times* (house rule: the *Times* is not allowed to leave the kitchen.)

**7:30 AM** Someone can't find the lid to their Tupperware. She dashes over to the "issues for the next house meeting" board and jots down "Why don't we have lids for all of our Tupperware?" Other meeting agenda items include planning the Purim Party and bringing some sort of closure to the *Bayit* kashruth rules discussion that has lasted for over 6 months.

Everyone is involved in his or her morning routine, yet there is a unity among us – all of us were involved in Talmud study the previous night. As we head out to our jobs (housing advocacy, WEP workers community organizing, immigrant and urban education, food-bank coordination, foster care program coordination, HIV/AIDS harm reduction, homeless job-training/education, etc.) an

the institutionalized racism and classism that plagues our society. After work we return to the *Bayit* where someone has made dinner. We dig into the food and share our day's stories. "My organization is doing great things for people." "I am so drained." "I'm looking forward to Shabbat – who is going to be around on Friday night?"

No doubt, a lot of us will opt to stay home on Shabbat (a major life-style change for many of us) because our time together—singing, eating, relaxing, praying—has proven to be the richest form of entertainment in NYC.

**10:00 PM** Almost everyone is home and various conversations animate the house. Topics: romantic relationships, Jewish text analysis, grappling with uncomfortable religious concepts, sharing professional resources. Others are busy searching for the phone (which is already in use) or sharing a resource that a housemate might be able to use at their work. The "head shopper" plans for the next day's 6:30 AM grocery shopping trip and the light committee debates whether



beliefs and priorities, manage to live in a community. It requires everyone to evaluate what is most important to him or her. It challenges us to question our habits that promote social and economic injustice, and it challenges us to try to understand how and why others worship and study. All this leads to one thing: a higher level of consciousness about how we approach our personal, professional, and community relationships.

So where do we go from here? Enough of the inter-movement bickering. Enough of supplemental Judaism. Programs like AVODAH allow Jews to

## Living in a community is both the richest and the toughest task I've ever faced.

ongoing dialogue continues both out-loud and in our heads. We hear the voices of the rabbis of old and of our housemates asking, "Where do my needs end and my responsibilities to community begin? How can I find the holiness and dignity in all of creation among New York's poverty-infested, corporate-climbing concrete streets?"

**8:00 AM** Questions like these linger as we board the subway and guide our decisions to give to the homeless or to sit next to the man who smells or the one who has lost control of his social graces and is blurting out profanity in song. Our text study and our political and intellectual pursuits all lead to our small daily choices that hopefully promote human dignity and that help us to "love thy neighbor."

**9:00 AM** We get to work. We do our best to put a small dent in

the Jewish law prohibiting turning on and off the lights on Shabbat should take precedence over the environmental and social implications of leaving lights on.

AVODAH is different from any other Jewish organization because it is a first-hand exercise in the dynamics of a community that integrates the intellectual, religious, spiritual, social, and professional needs of diverse individuals. Every piece of the puzzle in each individual's life has a place in the design of the community. It is a model that Jewish organizations should strive to emulate because it doesn't treat Judaism as an add-on, but as an integral part of every life decision. Jewish people need to know what it means to live life Jewishly, incorporating the ancient debate about social responsibility and religious commitment.

The magic of AVODAH is that nine Jews, from nine different Jewish backgrounds and with nine different sets of

follow their individual passions while acknowledging that Judaism provides guidance in any realm. The challenge is to find more ways that incorporate Jewish thought and debate into daily life. Judaism is lost when we do not have even the slightest clue what we're rejecting. We need to strive to give people the tools to attempt to bring Jewish thought into their daily decision-making. Everyone is part of a community, has a job or daily responsibility, has family or friends, has a natural habitat, and is affected by national and world politics. Judaism doesn't exist unless Jews have the knowledge to integrate their Judaism into daily decisions. If we did that, we'd learn that meaningless divisions within the Jewish community are holding us back from taking care of each other and treating one another with dignity, from loving each other and our neighbors, and from living in the image of G-d. 🌸

Jews have historically *had a universal mandate to improve the conditions of*

# Toward a new concept of Jewish Service

by RUTH MESSINGER

Now more than ever a new paradigm of Jewish service is needed. Jews have historically had a universal mandate to improve the conditions of all the world's people. As the prophet Isaiah proclaims, part of our covenant is the responsibility of Jews to be of service to others:

"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness... and set thee for a covenant of the people, for a light unto the nations; to open the blind eyes, to bring prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."  
(Isaiah 42:6-7)

Many American Jews live at a level of affluence and security unprecedented in our history. Moreover, the world is increasingly interdependent — economically, culturally, and politically. And technology has so reshaped the world that the consequences of our acts will have global implications. That is why our ability to respond to people in need around the world will significantly influence the shape and features of American Judaism in the twenty-first century.

An analogous moment of change in Jewish history occurred during the first centuries of the Common Era. The Temple was destroyed, the Jewish people dispersed. The rabbis responded by creating new strategies of sur-

vival. They transformed the permanent structure of the Temple into the abode of the Jewish home — the *mikdash ma'at*, or "little sanctuary." The sacrificial service of the Temple was replaced by the worship of the heart, or prayer. According to this new paradigm, sacred space and time were now portable vehicles that could travel with Jews wherever they went.

A new model of Jewish service needs to be articulated that is informed both by Jewish sources and by the radical new challenges of the contemporary world.

The Talmud states, "Now, when the Temple no longer exists, a person's table atones for him." (*Berakhot 55a*) And the Zohar adds, "When one is privileged to eat in the presence of the Lord, you must show your appreciation by giving to the poor, feeding them, as the Lord in His bounty feeds you." (*Terumah 168b*)

This account of divine service suggests a new way of formulating our obligation to the other. We perform our sacrifices, our service to God, and receive atonement by hosting the poor at our tables. Animal sacrifice can no longer function as a symbolic gesture of the human/divine relationship. Now, God can only be found in our response to the needs of the other. Deed replaces symbol. Service to God is fulfilled by service to others. Service is, in other words, not some secondary obligation. It is, instead, our way of encountering God in the world.

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**Ruth Messinger** is President and Executive Director of American Jewish World Service and the former Borough President of Manhattan.





# Volunteers Bane or Boon?

by RABBI YITZCHAK ROSENBAUM

**A**t the National Jewish Outreach Program, we are frequently asked how a relatively small organization can reach so many people through its programs. The answer is simple — volunteers. From the start, NJOP understood that the only way we could have a significant impact on the Jewish community would be through the multiplier effect. One outreach worker working with searching Jews will be able, at the most, to impact on one hundred Jews a year (and that is an optimistic number). However, if an outreach worker trains 100 already committed Jews to do outreach, then that single original worker can reach perhaps 10,000 Jews a year. Based on this thinking, NJOP developed pre-packaged, easily replicable outreach programs which were offered to synagogues and Jewish centers across the nation, to enable these locations to become successful outreach centers.

Even this, however, was not sufficient. If the programs would require professional teachers, then we are not really increasing the manpower available for outreach.

NJOP therefore made special efforts to create teaching and leadership materials which could be used successfully, with a minimum of training, by *lay* volunteers, thus multiplying geometrically the personnel available to perform outreach. Fortunately, even this necessary minimum training can be accomplished

nurtured a cadre of more than 3,000 volunteers who have been, without remuneration, the key element in reaching 400,000 Jews across the religious spectrum. Our volunteers have served as teachers of the Hebrew Reading and Basic Judaism Crash Courses, publicity coordinators, Shabbat Across America/Turn Friday Night Into Shabbat coordinators and hosts, hospitality coordinators, Beginners Service leaders, and in other vital positions in the NJOP outreach effort.

In addition to the very immediate benefit to NJOP of multiplying manyfold the available outreach personnel, the use of volunteers has had another critical residual benefit. The volunteers themselves are touched by the experience and benefit personally from their volunteerism. They emerge from their programs more committed to their Judaism and to their synagogues or outreach centers than before. It is clear that the contact with searching Jews invigorates even those who were not previously searching. Teaching Basic Judaism or an introductory Hebrew class often inspires the volunteers to engage in introspection and self examination, which often results in religious growth. Much of this is a result of the effort to meet the needs of the students with whom he/she is engaged. The volunteer who leads the

We need practical ways of translating this primary obligation to be of service to others in our own religious communities, in our cities, in our nation, and in the world. American Judaism must address both universal as well as particular concerns.

American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is dedicated to this mission. Our Jewish Volunteer Corps places adults from the American Jewish community with local, grassroots, non-governmental organizations in the developing world, Russia and the Ukraine. We match up skills with needs and support volunteers who go for a month to a year to work with others to improve the quality of their lives.

This summer, we will run an International Jewish College Corps, a program of study and service that will place young people in both the developing world and Israel.

These are just some of the ways in which AJWS is affirming our obligation to imitate the ways of God. Through our service corps we are enabling American Jews to improve themselves and create a better world. Jewish service is an integral part of *Tikkun Olam*, healing, repairing and transforming our world. ❀

## Can any organization afford not to extensively involve volunteers?

relatively easily through properly prepared, clear teaching/leadership materials. Consequently, NJOP offers a host of such materials, both printed and audio-visual, including teacher's guides, flash cards, wall charts, visual aides, as well as comprehensive marketing materials and recruitment ideas. Extensive telephone consultations with NJOP's regional program coordinators are available as well.

Using these methods, NJOP has

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*Rabbi Yitzchak Rosenbaum is the program director at the National Jewish Outreach Program.*

Beginners Service might find it necessary to improve his/her own understanding of the prayers in order to make the Beginners Service more attractive and vibrant. The person who hosts beginners at his/her Shabbat or Holiday table will certainly want to be sure that the guests will leave the table with an uplifting spiritual and religious experience. They will have to conduct a "real" Shabbat, no winging the rituals, and of course no *lashon harah* (gossip) at the table.

Taking all this into consideration, can any organization afford not to extensively involve volunteers? ❀

Keeping silent *and failing to address the needs of those who are suffering is a very serious sin.*

# Service Jewish and the Tradition

by RABBI STEVE GOLDEN

In mid-January I attempted a Sisyphian task: to write an essay that would be critical of Jewish Service from a 'traditionalist' point of view. Of course, one could always wrench from this or that sad and morally impoverished text criticism of service. But while such texts might be misused by some small percentage of people who are against Jewish Service, they are not representative of our tradition.

I told myself that if the evidence did not live up to negative expectations, so be it; let the traditional sources express their characteristic views. As I plunged into the vast literature that describes such *hesed* activities, what caught my attention was the proscription against indifference. It dawned on me that the quintessential attitude of the Torah is that one may not close one's eyes, pass by, or ignore injustice, deprivation or misfortune. Keeping silent and failing to address the needs of those who are suffering is a very serious sin. In short, indifference is villainy.

The teaching went back to Scripture. The Torah stated this moral imperative boldly: "Do not stand upon the blood of your fellow" (*Leviticus 19, 16*),

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**Rabbi Steven H. Golden**, one of the first graduates of the Institute of Traditional Judaism, teaches at The Abraham Joshua Heschel School in New York City.

and the Rabbis understood this text as prohibiting a human being from standing idly by while others are in danger. Again, Scripture had declared "you may not ignore it" (*Deuteronomy 22, 1-4*) — a clear call to action — which was taken to mean that one cannot flinch when he/she can be of service.

The *Aggadah* (Midrash) portrays Pharaoh as having three advisors to whom he put the question 'What to do with the Israelites?' One of them, Bilaam, advised destroying them. Jethro said 'no' to wickedness and fled. The third advisor, Job, kept silent and had to endure tribulations hardly lighter than Bilaam's (*Babylonian Talmud, Sota 11a*). This *Aggadah* deems the Jobs of this world who keep silent almost as responsible as the Bilaams who promote evil.

Another midrash — the painful story of Nahum Ish Gimzo (*Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anith 21a*) — goes even further. Journeying on the road with three mules laden with food, drink and dainties, Nahum Ish Gimzo is accosted by a beggar. Nahum doesn't act quickly enough and the man expires while he unloads the mule. Perhaps his tardiness is a sin. In any event, Nahum Ish Gimzo was plagued with acute remorse for the rest of his life because he hadn't responded with alacrity.

The Torah's record of Moses' early years is tantalizingly brief. What it

chooses to concentrate on are three separate instances where Moses swiftly intervenes when he encounters injustice (*Exodus 2,11-17*). Then there is the Job of Scripture with his zero tolerance for looking away from human wretchedness:

"If I have withheld their needs from the poor or let the widow's eye grow dim with tears, if I have eaten my crust alone, and the orphan has not shared it with me...if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or a poor man with nothing to cover him, if his body had no cause to bless me because he was not kept warm with fleece from my flock, if I have raised my hand against the innocent, knowing that men would side with me in court, then may my shoulder-blade be torn from my shoulder, my arm wrenched out of its socket." (*31,16-22*)

For Moses and Job this activism is not something optional; is it any wonder that Hashem calls both "my servant"?

Some of the rabbis take this model to even further levels. Whereas Job is praised for his home — built with an 'open door' policy that combined the best of fast-food menus with drive-through architecture, Abraham makes the top of the list by roaming the countryside looking for guests to dine in his tent and managing the construction of a large chain of 'Abraham's Big Palace Eateries,' free restaurants that dotted the highways and byways of Canaan!

Mitzvah as it may be, offering a helping hand can be a touchy matter when there is a risk of the recipient feeling embarrassed or belittled by the *hesed* (or act of compassion). In a society where the ideals of service have become widespread, it is precisely this issue which opens a door for the principles of our religion to enter and to transform our service into something more sensitive.

We are taught that, after they had

eaten their fill, the guests at Abraham's table would rise up to bless him (*Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 10a; etc.*). Abraham would respond 'You are not eating of me! You don't owe me thanks! We have eaten of the L-rd of the universe — therefore thank, praise, and bless the One who spoke and caused the world to be created!' In this way, when the provider of service does not perceive himself as the ultimate giver but rather as a link in a chain that points beyond itself, the recipient is at one and the same time spared humiliation and brought into G-d's presence.

**Jewish Service is stewardship!**

Perhaps there is no better motto for Jewish Service than the words of praise for Abraham that the *Aggadah* places in G-d's mouth: 'You have sown this righteousness and caused Me to be known in the world.'

In addition to the call for intervention and activism, G-d's covenant with the Jewish people also demands compassion; this is why Service is very much a 'Jewish' thing. What happens when Service conflicts with societal mores? The Talmud says that in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, helping the poor was a punishable offense! We would do well to remember the daughter of Pharaoh. With two simple words, *vattahmol alav* "and she took pity on it," (*Exodus 2,6*) the Torah encapsulates her decisive moral victory, and celebrates her humanity and instinct for pity which she did not allow tyranny to smother. She could have easily walked past the baby Moses with the law serving as a very good pretext. Yet the action of a single person — and Pharaoh's daughter no less! — putting compassion over obedience to law changed the course of history forever. ❁

*The concept of Jewish service is woven into traditional Jewish ritual. Page from Joel ben Simon Haggadah, Germany and North Italy, mid-15th century. British Museum, London.*





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“At Jewish Life Network, we search for breakthroughs that change the odds. All philanthropy should show a willingness to create new institutions which could meaningfully change the community’s capacity to reach whole groups which are falling out of its orbit.”

—Michael Steinhardt