

## Session 5: Where Do We Give?

### Part 1: The Options

**AGE:** Middle School

**TIME:** 45 minutes

#### OBJECTIVE

In this session students begin to grapple with how to make decisions about where to give tzedakah.

#### INTRODUCTION

This session is the first part of a double session in which students explore how to make decisions about where to allocate tzedakah. The double session recognizes that because no individual possesses the necessary financial resources to solve all of the poverty and injustice in the world, we must each make choices about which causes and organizations to prioritize when we give tzedakah. In the double session, students identify the factors that influence their decisions, construct arguments for assigning certain priorities and begin to articulate their own giving priorities.

In Part 1 of this double session, students participate in an interactive game that illustrates competing tzedakah priorities and helps them begin to identify the priorities that resonate with them. Through this game and Jewish text study, students develop a language for describing and evaluating the different options for where to give. Finally, students have an opportunity to articulate their own tzedakah priorities by authoring their own versions of a classic Jewish legal text.

#### OUTCOMES

- Students will understand that the act of giving tzedakah is complex and involves making tough decisions among competing priorities.
- Students will articulate the different factors at play in deciding where to allocate tzedakah.
- Students will articulate the reasons to assign priorities to different causes or populations.
- Students will begin to articulate how they themselves make decisions about where to give tzedakah.

#### MATERIALS

- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- “Would You Rather? Questions” (provided below)
- “Who Gets Priority?” page (provided below, 1 per student)
- Watch or clock
- “Tzedakah Box Influences” poster
- Paper and pen or pencil (1 each per student)
- Camera (optional)

#### PREPARATION

- Write the following prompt on the chart paper or board: Give an example of a time when you had to make a decision about where to give tzedakah. How did you make your decision? What did you decide? How did it feel to decide?
- Please consider taking photographs of the “Would You Rather?” activity and recording students’ comments during the discussion. E-mail them to [education@ajws.org](mailto:education@ajws.org) so that they can be featured on the *Where Do You Give?* website.



## INTEGRATING THE TAP

If your class is conducting a Tzedakah Allocations Process (TAP) alongside your study of the curriculum, connect this session to the “Making the First Level Decision” and “Making Final Decisions” stages of the TAP. See *Making it Real: Guiding Students through a Tzedakah Allocations Process* for more guidance on facilitating a TAP.

## LESSON PLAN

### 1. INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

- a. Ask students to take out paper and a pen or pencil and respond in writing to the following prompt, written on the board:

Give an example of a time when you had to make a decision about where to give tzedakah. How did you make your decision? What did you decide? How did it feel to decide?

Instruct students to write continuously for four minutes, even if they can't think of anything else to say. Time them and tell them when the time has passed.

- b. Invite two or three students to share their responses.
- c. Conclude the introduction by connecting to the previous session on “Giving to Make an Impact.” Explain that the coming sessions will explore how we decide where to give. You may want to use the following language: “Last time we talked about needing to make sure that we give tzedakah in a way that has the greatest impact and most responds to what people facing poverty actually need. This is only one of many difficult decisions we make when we give tzedakah. Because even the wealthiest of us can only give away a limited amount of money, giving tzedakah always involves making choices about which issues, organizations and communities to prioritize. In this session and the next session, we will learn about different ways of setting priorities and develop our own tzedakah priorities.”



### 2. WOULD YOU RATHER? (20 MINUTES)

#### KEY ACTIVITY

- a. Explain to students that they are going to play a game called “Would You Rather?” They will be presented with two options for where to give tzedakah and they need to choose the one to which they would rather give. If they choose the first, they will stand on one side of the room, and if they choose the second, they will stand on the other side of the room. They must choose a side to stand on; they cannot stand in the middle. Explain that after students have chosen where to stand, you will ask for a few volunteers from each side to explain why they chose that side. If students are persuaded to change their decision based on anything that is said by their peers, they can move to the other side of the room. Remind students to think for themselves and to switch sides only if they are really compelled by their friends' explanations. Also remind them that while they should try to persuade their classmates, they should do so respectfully and never by insulting the other organization or their classmates.

**Note:** *If at any point all of the students choose one side of the room, the facilitator should either play the role of arguing for the other side or ask for a student volunteer to do so.*

**Option:** You can add a twist to the game by asking students if their answers would change depending on how much money they were giving. For example, “If you were giving \$10 which would you choose? If you were giving \$10,000 which would you choose?”

- b. The “Would You Rather?” questions highlight different categories that we prioritize when we decide where to give tzedakah. As students explain their decisions, write on the board the key words that students use to describe priorities and categories of giving. By the end of the game, you should have the following words or categories in your list:
- i. local/global
  - ii. Jewish/non-Jewish
  - iii. greater need/lesser need
  - iv. family and friends/people I don’t know
  - v. addressing the immediate problem/addressing the causes of the problem
  - vi. issues that matter to me/issues I don’t care about so much

If students don’t generate all of these categories on their own, you may want to add them yourself.

- c. After the game, bring the group together to debrief. Invite students to reflect on their priorities when deciding where to give by referring back to the categories listed on the board. Ask them if they can draw any general rules based on their answers to the different scenarios. For example, “I always prefer to give to Jews before non-Jews.” Or, “I think hunger is very important and always prioritize that issue.” Or, “It depends who’s asking.” If students can arrive at general rules or guidelines for prioritizing, encourage them to articulate why these are their priorities.

**Note:** Depending on how much time you have, you may choose to do all or only some of the “Would You Rather?” questions. We recommend that you prioritize questions #3, #4, and #6. The questions can be found at the end of this lesson plan.



### 3. TEXT STUDY (15 MINUTES) KEY ACTIVITY

- a. Explain to students that Jewish communities have been debating the question of how to decide where to give for over 2,000 years and that the students’ conversation today is part of that continuing debate. Tell students that they are going to look at one of the earliest voices in the debate, a statement from Rabbi Yosef that dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

b. **Option 1: Chavruta**

Ask students to learn the text in *chavruta* (with a partner) using the discussion questions provided. Do a quick check-in as a full group by taking a few responses to the question: “Do you agree or disagree with the tzedakah priorities expressed in this text? Why?”

**Option 2: Full Group**

Alternatively, you can study the text as a whole group. Invite one student to read the text aloud. Then use the discussion questions provided with the text to guide the group conversation.

For either option, consider using the visual model of concentric circles to help students understand the priorities suggested by the text. In this model, write the prioritized group in the inner circle and the other group in the outer circle. For example:



**Note:** If your students need background on the Jewish text, please use the following description:

- *Babylonian Talmud:* Written around 500CE, the Babylonian Talmud is a record of rabbinic discussions about Jewish law.

- Ask students to write their own version of this text in which they articulate potential recipients and which ones should be prioritized. For example, “Leora teaches: When you give tzedakah and have to choose between: protecting the environment and protecting people, protect people first; hunger and homelessness, hunger comes first; etc.” Encourage students to refer back to the list of categories on the board to help them write their statements.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND HOMEWORK (5 MINUTES)

- Conclude the session by inviting several students to read their versions of the text aloud.

**Note:** Students’ statements can be shared on the **Where Do You Give?** website at <http://wheredoyougive.org/get-inspired/would-you-rather/> by posting them as comments. Consider either inviting students to post their texts or collecting the texts and posting them yourself.

- Remind your students that at the end of the unit they will create a tzedakah box that expresses what they think and have learned about tzedakah. Ask them what they learned about tzedakah today that might influence how they design their tzedakah box. Write responses on the “Tzedakah Box Influences” poster.
- Summarize the session by reviewing the different categories that emerged from the “Would You Rather?” game and emphasizing how difficult it can be to assign priorities to some of these categories over others. Tell students that they will continue to explore and debate tzedakah priorities in the next session.
- Explain the homework assignment. Consider using the following language: “Ask a parent to join you to take the “Would You Rather?” quiz online at <http://wheredoyougive.org/get-inspired/would-you-rather/>. For each question, you and your parent should vote independently and then discuss your answers. Notice when you agree or disagree and why. The, click on “view results” in order to see how others voted. What, if anything, surprised you about other peoples’ votes?”

# WOULD YOU RATHER? QUESTIONS

1. Would you rather give to:
  - a. An organization that fights poverty?  
**OR**
  - b. An organization that protects the environment?
2. Would you rather give to:
  - a. An organization that helps homeless people in your city?  
**OR**
  - b. An organization that helps homeless people in Israel?
3. Would you rather give to:
  - a. An organization that sends doctors to clinics in villages in India to perform surgery and train health workers?  
**OR**
  - b. A local clinic that provides medical care to low-income residents of your city?
4. Would you rather give to:
  - a. Your local public library, which runs an after-school program that helps low-income elementary school students improve their reading and writing skills?  
**OR**
  - b. Your synagogue's scholarship fund that helps Jewish students in your community go to Hebrew school, day school or Jewish summer camp?
5. Would you rather give to:
  - a. An organization that fights hunger by providing people with hot meals at a soup kitchen?  
**OR**
  - b. An organization that fights hunger by teaching people job skills so that they can get jobs and earn a living?
6. Would you rather give to:
  - a. An organization that tutors low-income high school students in math?  
**OR**
  - b. An organization that tries to convince the government to give more money to public high school math programs?
7. Would you rather give to:
  - a. Your cousin who is participating in a walk-a-thon to raise money for cancer research?  
**OR**
  - b. An organization that runs a camp for children with cancer?
8. Would you rather give to:
  - a. An organization that provides new sports equipment to children who live in the slums in Kenya?  
**OR**
  - b. Your friend who is raising money for new uniforms for his/her basketball team?

# WHO GETS PRIORITY?

## Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 71a

Rabbi Yosef taught [about the verse in the Torah that says]: "If you lend money to any of my people that are poor with you."<sup>1</sup>

[This verse teaches that if you have to choose between:]

- a Jew and a non-Jew, give to the Jew first;
- a poor person and a rich person, give to the poor person first;
- a poor relative and poor people in your town, give to your poor relative first;
- poor people in your town and poor people in another town, give to the poor people of your own town first.

1. Exodus 22:24

## תלמוד בבלי בבא מציעא עא.

דתני רב יוסף: "אם כסף תלוה את עמי את העני עמך."

- עמי ונכרי: עמי קודם.
- עני ועשיר: עני קודם.
- ענייך ועניי עירך: ענייך קודמין.
- עניי עירך ועניי עיר אחרת: עניי עירך קודמין.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The text above describes four pairs of people who may need financial help. Underline each pair. Within each pair, circle the person who the text says should be prioritized.
2. The text suggests prioritizing "a poor person" ahead of "a rich person." When might "a rich person" need financial help?

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3. Why do you think these four statements are listed in this specific order?

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4. Do you agree or disagree with these statements of priority? Why?

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