

**Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?**  
**What Does Jewish Tradition teach us About How We Should Treat Beggars**

*Adapted from a program created by NFTY-Southern  
based on "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime" by Arthur Kurzweil*

**GOALS:**

- To educate participants about the 2002-2003 NFTY Social Action Theme
- To educate participants about what Judaism has to say about those who are homeless or hungry

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Participants will have the opportunity to discuss in small groups how they treat those who are homeless and/or hungry by answering a series of questions.
- In those small groups, participants will be assigned Jewish texts that address one or two of the questions they answered to learn what Judaism teaches us to do when we encounter those in need.
- Participants will have the opportunity to creatively present what they learned to the other groups.

**MATERIALS:**

- Copies of texts and questions for each participant
- Copies of this program for each group leader
- Small slips of colored paper to use to break group into smaller discussion groups (one color per small group)

**PEOPLE:**

- 1 Program Leader (PL)
- 7 Group Leaders (GL)
- 2 Rovers (to travel from group to group in order to keep time)
- 35 participants (not including PL, GLs or Rovers)
- 7 pieces of poster board (one per group)
- 7 markers (one per group)

**SPACE NEEDED:**

- A large space for group to convene for the introduction and wrap-up
- Breakout spaces for each small group discussion

**TIMELINE:**

0:00 – 0:05	Introduction
0:05 – 0:10	Break into Small Groups
0:10 – 0:15	Name Game
0:15 – 0:30	Answer Questions
0:30 – 0:40	Answer Assigned Questions with texts
0:40 – 0:55	Create Presentation
0:55 – 1:00	Re-Group
1:00 – 1:25	Presentations of Groups
1:25 – 1:30	Wrap-up

**NOTES TO PROGRAM LEADER:**

- This program was written for a group of 35 participants to break into 7 small groups (not including program leader, group leaders and rovers), but can be used for any size group.
- If you have more than 35 participants, it will work better if you make sure that the small group discussions have no more than 6-8 participants (not including the group leader).
- If you have less than 35 participants, you have a few choices:
  - Run the program as written with fewer participants in each group
  - Have 4 or 5 small groups assigning more questions to each group to study and present. – if you choose to do this, think about having participants in each small group work in pairs to study one of the questions. Have each pair report their understanding of the text to the rest of the group, then move on to your creative presentation. This will allow everyone to have enough time to study at least one or two texts extensively.
- Be sure to have slips of different colored paper to use for breaking up into small discussion groups (one

color per small group)

## **DETAILED PROCEDEURE:**

### **0:00 – 0:05 Introduction**

*As the participants walk into the program, hand each of them a piece of colored paper which tells them which group they will be in for the small group discussions.*

PL: Last week, my parents took me out to dinner in the city. After the meal we walked quickly back to our car because it was really cold outside. On our way to the garage, we were approached by a homeless person looking for spare change so he could get something to eat. My parents positioned themselves on either side of me as if to protect me and started to walk even faster. When we got back to the car, my father told us that he offer sees that person when he is coming and going from his office which is not far from where we were for dinner.

So many questions entered my mind. Should we have given this person our doggie bag of leftovers from dinner? Should we have given them money? Should we have offered them a kind word? On the other hand, he did smell and look pretty bad. Why can't he get a job? Why is it my responsibility?

What is my responsibility?

### **0:05 – 0:10 Break into Small Groups**

*The PL should direct the participants to their locations with their group leaders (tip: assign rooms in advance!)*

Red – Room #1 with Amy	Questions #1 & 2
Blue – Room #2 with Max	Questions #3 & 4
Green – Room #3 with Josh	Questions #5 & 6
Purple – Room #4 with Sam	Questions #7 & 8
White – Room # 5 with Becky	Questions # 9 & 10
Orange – Room #6 with Isabel	Questions #10, 11 & 12
Yellow – Room #7 with Anna	Questions #13, 14 & 15

### **0:10 – 0:15 Name Game**

Group Leader (GL): Hi everyone. Let's sit in a circle, go around and say our names, where we go to school, what grade were in and the last time we encountered a beggar or homeless person.

*"Hi, I'm Rachel. I'm a 10<sup>th</sup> grader at Woodlands High School and I saw lots of homeless people asking for spare change outside the restaurant my parents took me to last week in the city."*

### **0:15 – 0:30 Answer Questions**

GL: Lets talk about what happens when we encounter people in need. To help our discussion along, I am going to ask you 15 questions.

*Ask someone to take notes on the main points of the discussion using the poster board & marker.*

### **The Questions:**

1. Do Jews give to beggars?
2. What if they are fakes or frauds?
3. What if they are offensive in looks, smell, etc.?
4. What if you simply can't afford to give to beggars?
5. Are there better causes to give to than giving to beggars directly?
6. Should these beggars be supported by official or organized agencies?
7. Should you just ignore these people?
8. What if you are in a rush?
9. What if they aren't Jewish?
10. What if you have no money with you, or no spare change?

11. If you do give, how should you treat these people? What should you say to them?
12. What if you see the same people every day?
13. What if you have given already to a few beggars in one day?
14. If they ask for money, should you go buy them food instead so they don't spend it on drugs?
15. Finally, if you do give to beggars, how much should you give?

**0:30 – 0:40                      Answer Assigned Questions with Texts (see attached document)**

GL: I am now going to hand out a document that lists the questions I just asked you along with Jewish texts that address each question. Our group is assigned questions \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_. Let's look at those specific texts together. Once we have had a chance to look over the texts, we need to come up with a creative way to present how Judaism teaches us to answer these 2 (or 3) questions.

"Before we begin, let's say the blessing for studying Torah together – which is written at the top of your handout."

*"Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah."*

**0:40 – 0:55                      Create Presentation**

GL: OK, now that we have a better understanding of these texts, how can we creatively present the main points to the rest of the group?

*Suggestions - Skit, Rap, Song, story*

**0:55 – 1:00                      Re-Group**

**1:00 – 1:25                      Presentations**

*Presentations should take place in order of the questions being answered.*

**1:25 – 1:30                      Wrap-up**

PL: I hope this program will help you for the next time you encounter a beggar in need of assistance. Thanks to all of our group leaders for helping us navigate what our tradition teaches us about this important issue of tzedakah!

## **Blessing for the study of Torah:**

INSERT THE HEBREW

"Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah."

### **1. DO JEWS GIVE TO BEGGARS?**

R. Hiyya advised his wife, "When a poor man comes to the door, give him food so that the same may be done to your children." She exclaimed, "You are cursing them (by suggesting that they may become beggars)! But R. Hiyya replied, "There is a wheel which revolves in this world." *Shabbat 151b*

R. Abun said: The poor man stands at your door, and the Holy One stands at his right hand. If you give unto him, the One who stands at his right hand will bless you, but if not, the One will exact punishment from you, as it is said, "Because God stands at the right hand of the needy." (*Psalm 109:31*) *Midrash Ruth 5:9*

### **2. WHAT IF THEY ARE FAKES OR FRAUDS?**

Our Rabbis taught: If a man pretends to have a blind eye, a swollen belly or a shrunken leg, he will not pass out from this world before actually coming into such a condition. If a man accepts charity and is not in need of it, his end will be that he will not pass out of the world before he comes to such a condition. *Ketubot 68a*

R. Akiva said, He who takes even a penny from charity when he needs it not will not die before he requires the help of man. He further said, He who binds rags on his eyes or on his loins and says, "Give to the blind man," or "Give to the man who is smitten with boils," will end by having good cause to utter this cry. *Avot d' R. Natan I,iii,8a*

**(Question:** Do these items actually answer the question: Should we give to fakers?)

R. Hanina was wont to send a poor man four zuzim every Friday. Once he sent them by his wife, who reported on her return that the man was not in need. "What did you see?" said the Rabbi. "I heard how he was asked, 'Would he use the silver outfit or the gold outfit.'" Then R. Hanina said, "This is what R. Eleazar said: 'We must be grateful to the deceivers, for were it not for them, we might sin every day.'" *Ketubot 68a*

A beggar once came to the city of Kovna and collected a large sum of money from the residents. The people of the town soon found out that he was an imposter; he was actually a wealthy man. The city council wanted to make an ordinance prohibiting beggars from coming to Kovna to collect money. When the Rabbi of Kovna heard about the proposed ordinance, he came before the council and requested permission to speak. He told them that although he sympathized with them, he had an objection to raise. "Who deceived you, a needy person or a wealthy person? It was a wealthy person feigning poverty. If you want to make an ordinance, it should be to ban wealthy persons from collecting alms. But why make a ban against needy beggars?" *Ethics from Snaf,III,p.121 (check source)*

Rabbi Chayim of Tszanz had this to say about fraudulent charity collectors: "The merit of charity is so great that I am happy to give to 100 beggars even if only one might actually be needy. Some people, however, act as if they are exempt from giving charity to 100 beggars in the event that one might be a fraud." *Darkai Chayim (1962), p.137*

### **3. WHAT IF THEY ARE NASTY OR OTHERWISE OFFENSIVE?**

The Chofetz Chayim's son wrote that his father was particularly careful not to hurt the feelings of beggars, although sometimes these unfortunate people say things that could arouse one's anger. *Michtevai Chofetz Chayim (1953) Dugmah Midarkai Avi, p. 38*

Rabbi Shmeike of Nicholsburg said, "When a poor man asks you for aid, do not use his faults as an excuse for not helping him. For then God will look for your offenses, and God is sure to find many of them. Keep in mind that the poor man's transgressions have been atoned for by his poverty while yours still remain with you. *Fun Unzer Alter Otzer, II, p. 99 (check source)*

#### **4. WHAT IF I SIMPLY CAN'T AFFORD TO GIVE TO BEGGARS?**

To him who has the means and refuses the need, the Holy One says: Bear in mind, fortune is a wheel! *Nahman Tanhuma, Mishpatim 8*

Even a poor man, a subject of charity, should give charity. *Gittin 7b*

#### **5. AREN'T THERE ANY BETTER CAUSES TO GIVE TO THAN TO THESE PEOPLE?**

While it is commendable to aid students of the Torah more than commoners, the Jewish law knows no such distinction. The latter must also be aided. *Nachman of Bratslav in Hasidic Anthology*

#### **6. SHOULDN'T THESE BEGGARS BE SUPPORTED BY ORGANIZED AGENCIES?**

In answer to an enquiry from a community, overburdened with beggars, Solomon b. Adret ruled that although, "the poor are everywhere supported from the communal chest, if they wish in addition to beg from door to door they may do so, and each should give according to his understanding and desire." *Responsa, pt. 3, #380*

#### **7. SHOULDN'T I JUST IGNORE THESE PEOPLE?**

R. Joshua b. Korkha said, "Anyone who shuts his eye against charity is like one who worships idols." *Ketubot 68a* and also *Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 4:20*

A blind beggar accosted two men walking on the road. One of the travelers gave him a coin, but the other gave him nothing. The Angel of Death approached them and said: "He who gave to the beggar need have no fear of me for 50 years, but the other shall speedily die." "May I not return and give charity to the beggar?" asked the condemned man. "No," replied the Angel of Death. "A boat is examined for holes and cracks before departure, not when it is already at sea." *Me'il Tzedakah*

If one noticed a poor man asking for something and ignored him, and failed to give tzedakah, he has broken a prohibitive command, as it is written: Do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy brother. (*Deut. 17:7*) *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, "Gifts to the Poor" 7:2*

Rabbi Aharon Kotler once gave alms twice to the same beggar, upon entering and leaving the synagogue. He was afraid that someone noticing him pass the second time without giving might assume that he had reason not to give to this particular beggar. *Jewish Observer, 5/7*

#### **8. WHAT IF I AM IN A RUSH?**

It is related of Nahum of Gamzu that he was blind in both his eyes, his two hands and legs were amputated, and his whole body was covered with boils and he was lying in a dilapidated house on a bed the feet of which were standing in bowls of water to prevent the ants from crawling on to him. On one occasion his disciples ... said to him, "Master, since you are wholly righteous, why has all this befallen you?" and he replied, "I have brought it all upon myself. Once I was journeying on the road and was making for the house of my father-in-law and I had with me three asses, one laden with food, one with drink, and one with all kinds of dainties, when a poor man met me and stopped me on the road and said to me, "Master, give me something to eat." I replied to him, 'Wait until I have unloaded something from the ass; I had hardly managed to unload something from the ass when the man died (from hunger). I then went and laid myself upon him and exclaimed, "May my eyes which had no pity upon your eyes become blind, may my hands which had no pity on your hands be cut off, may my legs which had no pity upon your legs be amputated," and my mind was not at rest until I added, "may my whole body be covered with boils.'" Thereupon his pupils exclaimed, "Alas that we see you in such a sore plight." To this he replied, "Woe would it be to me if you did not see me in such a sore plight." *Ta'anith 21a*

## 9. WHAT IF THEY AREN'T JEWISH?

A Jew should give charity to poor non-Jews. *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, "Gifts to the Poor" 7:7*

Poor Gentiles should be supported along with poor Jews; the Gentile sick should be visited along with the Jewish sick; and their dead should be buried along with the Jewish dead, in order to further peaceful relations. *Gittin 61a*

**(Question:** Does this quote seem like doing the right thing for the wrong reason? What does the Talmud mean by "in order to further peaceful relations?)"

## 10. WHAT IF I HAVE NO MONEY ON ME OR NO SPARE CHANGE?

If a poor man requests money from you and you have nothing to give him, speak to him consolingly. *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, "Gifts to the Poor" 10:5*

If the poor man stretches out his hand and he has nothing to give him, he should not scold and raise his voice to him, but he should speak gently to him and show him his goodness of heart; namely that he wishes to give him something but cannot. *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, 249:3-5*

Walking one day in Jerusalem, Rabbi Aharon Kotler turned around, ran after a beggar, and gave him some coins. Rabbi Kotler explained that several years previously, the same beggar had approached him for alms, but he was carrying no money. Spotting that beggar now, he hastened to make up for lost opportunity, and gave him a double amount. *Jewish Observer, 5/73*

## 11. IF I DO GIVE, HOW SHOULD I TREAT THESE PEOPLE? WHAT SHOULD I SAY? HOW SHOULD I APPROACH THEM?

R. Eleazar stated, "The reward of charity depends entirely upon the extent of kindness in it." *Sukkah 49b*

Anyone who gives tzedakah in a surly manner and with a gloomy face completely nullifies the merit of his own deed... He should rather give him cheerfully and gladly, while sympathizing with him who is in trouble, as it is written, "Did I not weep for him whose day was hard? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?" (*Job 30:25*) *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, "Gifts to the Poor" 10:4*

## 12. WHAT IF I SEE THE SAME PEOPLE EVERY DAY?

Though you may have given already, give yet again even a hundred times, for it says, "Give, yea, give thou shall..." (Deut. 15:10-11) USE THE JPS TRANSLATION OF THIS [The repetition of the word for "give" teaches that the action is to be repeated.] *Sifre Deut, Re'eh, 116*

## 13. WHAT IF I ALREADY GAVE TO A FEW BEGGARS IN ONE DAY?

If you have given a "perutah" (a small coin) to a man in the morning, and there comes to you in the evening another poor man asking for alms, give to him also. *Avot d'R. Natan 19b*

## 14. IF THEY ASK FOR MONEY, PERHAPS I SHOULD BUY THEM A CUP OF COFFEE INSTEAD?

Nehemiah of Sihin met a man in Jerusalem who said to him, "Give me that chicken you are carrying." Nehemiah said, "Here is its value in money." The man went and bought some meat and ate it and died. Then Nehemiah said, "Come and bemoan the man whom Nehemiah has killed." *Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah, VIII: 9,21b*

**(Question:** In this example, the case was reversed: the person wanted an item of food rather than money. Is the point the same, or is it different?)

## **15. HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?**

A pauper who begs from house to house should be given only a small sum. *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, 250:1-5*

It is forbidden to turn away a poor man entirely empty-handed. Let him give something, if only a fig, for it is written, "Oh, let not the oppressed return ashamed." (*Psalm 74:21*) R. Moshe Isserles note on *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, 249: 3-5*

A poor man who goes begging should not be given a large donation, but a small one. One must never turn a poor man away empty-handed, even if you give him a dry fig." *Rambam. Mishneh Torah "Gifts to the Poor" 7:7*

R. Eleazar used to give a coin to a poor man and straightaway say a prayer because, he said, it is written, "I in righteousness shall behold thy face." *BT Baba Bathra 10a*

As tiny scales join to form a strong coat of mail, so little donations combine to form a large total of good. *BT Baba Batra 9b*