



Re'eh 2023

You are Worthy

3 minute read | Straightforward

The Exodus is an orienting event for the Jewish People, a founding moment in our history, with a daily duty to recall it. It's the first thing God has to say to humans at Sinai; God introduces Himself as the God who took us out of Egypt.

Remembering the Exodus is a perpetual mitzvah, and an astounding amount of our daily blessings, mitzvos, and prayers commemorate the Exodus – זָכַר לִיציאת מצרים. It is ubiquitous to the extent we could miss the point entirely.

What do we mean when we say that we remember that God took the Jews out of Egypt?

It is essential to understand first principles because they are the foundational concepts that govern the systems built upon them.

If we unpack the story, the Jews in Egypt didn't deserve to be saved because they were so great or unique; they were quite the opposite. And that's the point we need to remember.

The Zohar imagines the angels arguing whether or not God should save the Jews, and the argument was that “this lot are just a bunch of idol-worshippers, and so are those!” The Haggadah admits as much – מִתְחַלְלֵה עֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה הֵיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ –

When Moshe told the Jews to set aside and take one sheep per family, the Midrash says that “set aside” meant setting aside their idols before taking the sheep for the mitzvah!

Even when Moshe, already well on his way to greatness, intervened to protect Yisro's daughters from bullies, onlookers mistook him for some random Egyptian!

The Midrash famously states that the enslaved Jews retained their names, clothing, and language. This is frequently – and mistakenly – framed as a point of pride when it seems the point is that apart from these narrow and limited practices, they were indistinguishable from Egyptians in every other conceivable way!

Moreover, the generation that left Egypt and stood at Sinai fought Moshe for the rest of their lives, begging to return to Egypt, and was ultimately doomed to wander and die in the wilderness.



The Zohar goes so far as to say that the Jews were on the 49th level of spiritual malaise, just one notch off rock bottom, the point of no return. Rav Kook notes that this adds a particular dimension to the imagery of God’s mighty and outstretched arm – it was a forceful intervention, an emergency rescue of a nation that had stumbled and was about fall off a cliff – **בְּיַד הַחֲזָקָה וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה** –

As R’ Shlomo Farhi explains, whenever God is characterized with strength, it indicates God is doing something undeserved. God does not require more power to move a grape than a galaxy, but God can force compassion to overwhelm what justice requires – **גּוֹאֵל וְחֲזָק אֶתָּה**.

That is to say that on a fundamental level, the Jews didn’t deserve rescuing at all.

And yet crucially, as R’ Chaim Kanievsky notes, God responded to their cries all the same – **וַנִּצְעַק אֱלֹהֵי** – **אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע ה’ אֶת-קִלְנוּ**.

The Divrei Chaim notes that the very first Commandment is no command at all; God “introduces” himself as the God who took us out of Egypt – **אֲנֹכִי ה’ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים**. It’s not a command but a simple statement of fact. We might not deserve redemption, yet God redeems us all the same.

R’ Tzadok haKohen writes that to remember Egypt is to remember God’s first declarative sentence; God rescues people from Egypt, whatever they have done and whoever they have become. Our God initiates the great Exodus before the Jewish People ever take a single step of their own to be better – **אֲנֹכִי ה’ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים**.

The Ropshitzer quipped that **תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ זָכַר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם** – the first step towards holiness is remembering that the same Exodus that rescued people from the abyss once before could be just a moment away.

So when we remind ourselves about Egypt, it’s not just that it happened once, but that, as the Lubavitcher Rebbe put it, God’s redemption is not contingent on our worthiness. As the Kozhnutzer Maggid reminds us, the Creator chooses us at our worst – **מִתְחִלָּה עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ**.

Take this lesson to heart; it’s one of the vanishingly few that the Torah specifically asks us to remember at all times – **לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת-יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ** –

And it’s clear why.

You don’t need to remember the simple historical events of the Exodus; you must remind yourself that every single last human is worthy of God’s unconditional love.



All Men are Created Equal

3 minute read | Straightforward

Centuries ago, the founding fathers of the United States of America made the radical and immortal proclamation that all men are created equal.

Today, this doctrine is called egalitarianism and is arguably a cornerstone of the modern world. This political theory prioritizes equality for all people, generally characterized by the idea that all humans are equal in fundamental worth or moral status and should have equal rights. While different sections along the political spectrum can reasonably disagree on the exact contours of equality and which policies further its ideals, it is clear that the inequalities of the ancient world are relics of history. Feudalism and entitled aristocracy are gone, as is a landed gentry with lords and serfs. Today, we understand that all men are created equal and that no one is better or worse than anyone else.

Quite compellingly, the Torah makes a case for a form of equality that not only predates many of the Renaissance ideals that gave rise to the modern world; but is quite arguably their source.

When the Torah talks about humans in the image of God, the Torah is unequivocal that the only hierarchy that exists is between you and God. There is no one else above or below you; every other human stands alongside you and under God.

What's more, is that whenever the Torah talks about interpersonal mitzvos and our duties to each other, the Torah utilizes recursive imagery in which all the laws are rooted:

כי-יהיה בך אביון מאחד אחיך / ולא תקפץ את-גדך, מאחיה, האביון / ורעה עינך באחיה האביון, ולא תמן לו / פתח תפתח את-גדך לאחיה / כי-ימכר לה אחיה העברי / לבלתי רום-לקבו מאחיו / ונתלה לא-יהיה-לו, בקרב אחיו / ושרת, בשם ה אלקיו-ככל-אחיו / כי-ימכר לה אחיה העברי / לבלתי רום-לקבו מאחיו / ונתלה לא-יהיה-לו, בקרב אחיו / ושרת, בשם ה אלקיו-ככל-אחיו / When there will be a poor man among your brothers / Don't withhold your hand from your brother, the poor man / Should your eye turn evil towards your poor brother, and you don't give him [what he needs] / Open your hands to your brother, and open them once more / Should your brother be sold as a slave / [Let a king] not be haughty over his brothers / [The kohen] shall not have an inheritance with his brothers [because of his extra benefits] / He will serve in God's name, as his brothers / A prophet will come from among your brothers / Conspiring witnesses shall suffer what they conspired upon their brother. (Multiple sources)

Whether we're talking about rich and poor, slaves or kings, prophets or priests, the Torah utilizes the imagery of brotherhood and fraternity consistently. When the Torah says something, it matters. When the Torah says the same recurring thing over and over, it matters a lot, and we should recognize it as such.



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The Torah asks us not to define people by their status in a hierarchy as a lender or borrower, king or subject, master or slave. While socioeconomic status may accurately describe us, it is our common identity that defines us.

There is a radical concept here.

We must help each other, not because we are different, but because we are the same.

The theory of common identity anchoring us to each other is presented as one of the foundational reasons we observe the Torah:

וַיִּזְכְּרֶנּוּ, כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, וַיִּפְדֶּךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord redeemed you (15:15)

The fact that we were once oppressed is not merely a reason to find empathy with vulnerable folks; it goes further. It should serve as a constant reminder that we mustn't fall victim to arrogance and hubris by taking credit for our good fortune – וְאַמְרַת בְּלִבְבְּךָ כִּחַי וְעַצְמֹךָ יָדִי עָשָׂה לִי אֶת-הַחַיִּל הַזֶּה.

Although egalitarianism informs many government policies today, we live in a modern professional world optimized for capital and commerce, not community. It has bestowed a litany of benefits and has resulted in arguably the finest era of human society to date. Still, while reasonable people can disagree on what optimal social policy looks like, we ought to remember that the Torah's conception of our duties to each other goes a lot further than equality and deep into the realm of brotherhood and fraternity, imposing a firm sense of duty to protect and respect each other.

The Torah speaks past our relative status and straightforwardly and unambiguously demands that you see the less fortunate as your responsibility. It has nothing to do with generosity and everything to do with our duties towards each other.

Because there, but for the grace of God, go I.

Sensitivity to All Creatures

3 minute read | Straightforward

From the dawn of humanity, people have utilized animals for all kinds of purposes, from farming and hunting to clothing, food, labor, transport, and domestication as pets. Inasmuch as the Torah permits these uses, the Torah categorically prohibits human mistreatment of animals, with a comprehensive list of laws designed to minimize animal suffering resulting from human interaction.



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in a civilized society. The laws of kosher elevate the simple act of eating into a reminder and religious ritual to exercise self-control over our most basic, primal instincts, even the ones to hunt and gather food.

While animals do not possess sentience to understand the notion that life is a sacred thing, humans are not like other animals, and the Torah gives us laws to remind us that there is a difference. R' Shlomo Farhi teaches that the Torah's boundaries should instill sensitivity and reverence for life. Our abilities, choices, rights, strength, and power are not trump cards; just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

You don't need to become a vegan; you can still enjoy your steak and ribs. But you should recognize the Torah's concern for all creatures and not just humans, because the two are linked; someone who is cruel to animals will be cruel to people.

In a largely positive trend, our host cultures have woken up to animal cruelty in recent decades, but we have a proud tradition that is millennia older; the Torah instituted the first systematic legislation prohibiting animal cruelty and mandating humane treatment long ago.

Judaism is in constant dialogue with its surroundings, and we may have to get more familiar with our environment to navigate it properly. On the one end, the Torah's laws don't explicitly regulate intensive factory farming, but it's a product of modern business practices that raises many animal welfare issues, and the relevant parties should be receptive to calibrating how they can do better. On the other end, the tradition of kosher slaughter is in jeopardy in an increasing number of jurisdictions, labeled as backward and cruel; there are some important organizations working tirelessly to protect our tradition that deserve your support.

The Torah has regulated human interaction with animals for thousands of years; the laws of kosher teach us compassion and sensitivity to other creatures.

We should be proud of our heritage.

Living with Newness

4 minute read | Straightforward

One of the critical skills children learn is how to read a clock; what time is it?

Beyond answering the basic question with hours and minutes, there is something deeper behind the question; knowing the time means knowing what to do. The time of day and time of year, the seasons,



and the calendar establish the boundaries and time frames upon which our world is built, with specific routines for morning, afternoon, evening, and night, summer, fall, winter, and spring.

Different cultures have established various numeral systems and calendars to measure time. Today, most of the world uses the Gregorian calendar, a fixed calendar determined by how long the earth takes to make one complete orbit around the sun.

The Torah asks us to track time using the moon as a frame of reference; when people spot the new moon, they would report it to the highest court, which declares the beginning of a new month – Rosh Chodesh. It's not Rosh Chodesh because there's a new moon, but because the Jewish leaders say so. It's the very first commandment in the Torah, given to the Jewish People still enslaved in Egypt:

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה – This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. (12:1)

There are lots of mitzvos, so one of them has to come first. But why is establishing the lunar calendar through Rosh Chodesh the first mitzvah as opposed to any other?

The story of the birth of the Jewish People begins at a time of stuckness, with the Jewish People systematically subjugated and oppressed, powerless objects with no choice or control over their circumstances.

Although slavery is illegal in most of the world, it persists today. What's more, slavery isn't just an abstract legal status or even just a phenomenon that still occurs in some dark corner of the world; it's also a state of mind, body, and soul that can happen to anyone. Thankfully, we don't have much primary lived with the experience criminal aspect of actual human trafficking; but if you've ever felt helpless, powerless, or stuck, you have experienced an element of slavery.

When we internalize that forces of change exist and that we have the power to harness and steer them, the possibilities are limitless. This moment can be different to the moments that have come before; this newness is the beginning of all newness – הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה.

The Shem miShmuel explains that the power of the Exodus story is that its story of freedom on a national level offers us the opportunity to become free of the tendencies and troubles that hound us on a personal level. With the power to change, hard times don't need to be so scary anymore, and the world isn't threatening; it can be full of exciting possibilities. It follows that the first mitzvah is the one that empowers us to change by giving us a symbol of change.

The sense of futility, powerlessness, and stuckness that come from being burnt out or overwhelmed is poison. But as much as stuckness can come from attachment to the past, R' Nachman of Breslev teaches us to avoid dwelling too much on the future and focus on the present day and present



moment. As R' Hanoch Heinoch of Alexander teaches, we can attach ourselves to vitality by being present – וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תִּימֵם בְּלִבְכֶם הַיּוֹם –

The Torah often speaks to us in terms of here and now – הַיּוֹם / וְעַתָּה. Our sages take these references to Teshuva, our capacity and power to change and repent – וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שְׂאֵל מֵעַמָּךְ כִּי אִם-לִירְאָהּ – Because in one day, everything can change – הַיּוֹם אִם-בְּקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ – As R' Baruch of Mezhibozh teaches, forget the past; right now, be a Jew – וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל! The Chafetz Chaim takes this to be a reference to introspection – וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שְׂאֵל מֵעַמָּךְ – what does this moment require?

It follows that our sages wisely guide us to seize every moment; if not now, when? As the Chiddushei Harim observes, every “now” has a different duty, calling for some new, renewed, or entirely other choice or deed. As R' Ahron of Karlin points out, each moment has its resolution; each moment of existence is incomparably unique, never existing before in the history of Creation, and never to be repeated before becoming irretrievably lost forever.

As the Vilna Gaon points out, Moshe speaks in the present tense to offer us all the power to choose – רְאֵה אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרִכָּה וּקְלָלָה.

The world tracks time using the sun; the Sfas Emes notes that the nations of world history rise and fall like the sun, lasting only when things are bright. The Jewish People track time using the moon, persisting in darkness, and even generating light among total blackness.

The very first mitzvah is the lunar calendar, the only calendar with a visual cue for changing times; and a powerful symbol of change, a natural metaphorical image of a spiritual reality. It's not just an instruction to count the time but a commandment to rule over time and even natural phenomena. It is a mitzvah to live by and with the power of change and renewal. It is a mitzvah to live presently with this moment and make it count.

Every day, every week, and in truth, every moment, is brand new, brimming with freshness, vitality, and renewal.

Charity Redux

7 minute read | Straightforward

One of the foundations of the modern world we inhabit is the notion of egalitarianism, the idea that all humans are equal in fundamental worth or moral status; giving birth to, among others, the ideas that women aren't lesser than men, and that black people aren't lesser than white people, and the like.



This has been a decisively positive development in many respects; the American Declaration of Independence famously begins by stating that it is self-evident that all men are created equal, and the Torah says as much – וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם –

But it is equally evident that in many respects, the universe is not fair or equal; plenty of people are disadvantaged in countless ways. Many hardworking, honest, and decent people have difficult, stressful, and impoverished lives, not to mention the various health issues so many people experience. Human input isn't decisive; luck is.

A modern phenomenon in human civilization has emerged to address this imbalance: the welfare state. First-world governments allocate taxpayer funds to alleviate the poverty of the disadvantaged and less fortunate – in other words, charity is a core part of national policy. This practice has been criticized for perversely enabling and exacerbating poverty further, reducing the incentive for workers to seek employment by reducing the need to work and reducing the rewards of work. If we help these people, so the thinking goes, they become dependent and lazy. Moreover, it's a zero-sum game; I have to give up more of what's mine, and somebody else gets the benefit from it – as any child could tell you, that's not fair!

While the specific contours of government policy are best left to experts, it brings to the fore a relevant question that profoundly impacts our orientation to others.

What do we owe to each other?

The conventional understanding of charity is that it's an act of benevolent kindness and generosity, initiated and executed at the actor's sole discretion; but this is not the Jewish understanding.

The Jewish understanding of tzedaka is orders of magnitude more comprehensive and overarching. Extending far beyond the boundaries of kindness, the word itself literally means justice. The practice is a religious duty and social obligation; we have a duty to dispense God's justice by helping the less fortunate. In the ancient agrarian world of the Torah, Jewish farmers were subject to mandatory religious taxes that were allocated to different beneficiaries according to specific parameters. To this day, many Jews tithe their income, allocating at least ten percent to worthy causes.

The Torah is consistently firm and unequivocal in our obligations towards each other:

וְכִי־יָמוּד אָחִיךָ וּמַטְּהָ יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וַתְּחַזְקֵהוּ בְּיָדְךָ... וְחַי אָחִיךָ עִמָּךְ – When your brother languishes, and his hand falters, you must steady and support him... Let your brother live by your side, with you. (Leviticus 25:35,36)

This framing allows no savior complex; the Torah says plainly that the recipient of your help is a disadvantaged equal, lateral to you. There is no hierarchy or verticality in helping your brother – אָחִיךָ – and you must help him live alongside you, with you – עִמָּךְ. The person you get to help is not lesser or worse than you.



R' Shmshon Raphael Hirsch highlights how in this conception, the value of a person is not tied in any way to their economic productivity; the Torah speaks of a person's hand faltering and requiring assistance, yet still remaining your brother – וְכִי־יָמוּךְ אָחִיךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ. Other people don't need to achieve anything or make money to be valid in their humanness or worthy of your respect and support.

The Rambam famously taught that the highest level of charity is helping people get on their own feet – the ultimate and most literal fulfillment of helping your brother stand alongside you.

In the Torah's primeval story of the dawn of humanity, Cain fatefully asks God the rhetorical question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" This question deserves scrupulous attention, not just because we read the story and know that Cain is attempting to cover up his crime, but because it is the great unanswered question of Genesis and quite possibly the entire Torah and all of human history.

The pregnant silence in the story is jarring; when we read about the obligations we have toward our brother, we should consider them in light of the Torah's first brothers – perhaps suggesting that yes, you are indeed your brother's keeper.

Echoing the Genesis story, the Ramban famously wrote to his son that humans have no natural hierarchy; nobody is better than you, and you're better than nobody. Humans are brothers; the Torah speaks of what we owe each other as a result of our fraternal bond; our obligations to each other are born of sameness, not of difference. The interpersonal mitzvos are obligations between equals – from human to human; horizontal, and not vertical.

As a direct consequence, the Torah encourages loans, whether of money or food, not as debt investment instruments the modern world is built with, but as assistance to enable the poor to regain their independence; as such, charging interest of any kind is predatory and therefore forbidden. The Torah goes so far as to command its adherents to lend money even when non-repayment is guaranteed, with an explicit mitzvah to lend before the Shemitta year, when all debts are written off:

כִּי־יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאֶחָד אֶחִיךָ בְּאַחַד בְּאַרְצֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־הָ אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תִאֲמַץ אֶת־לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת־יְדֶיךָ מֵאֶחָד הָאֶבְיּוֹן: – If there is a needy person among you, one of your kin in any of your settlements in the land that your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need. (Deut 15:7,8)

The mitzvah to aid others is far-reaching – beyond financial loss, the Torah's expectation is that we spent time, energy, and emotion, on helping others, even to the point of manual labor:

לֹא־תִרְאֶה אֶת־תְּמוֹר אָחִיךָ אוֹ שׁוֹרוֹ נִפְלִים בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם הֲקָם תְּקִים עִמּוֹ – If you see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it; you must surely raise it together. (Deut 22:4)

Beyond your brother, or the people you'd want to help, you are even obligated to help the people you don't:

עַזְבַּת מֵעֵזֶב לֹא עֵזַב תֵּעָזֵב עִמּוֹ – פִּי-תִרְאֶה חֲמוֹר שׁוֹנֵאָה רֵבִץ תַּחַת מְשָׁאוֹ וְחִדַּלְתָּ מֵעָזֹב לוֹ עֵזֶב תֵּעָזֵב עִמּוֹ
its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless surely help raise it. (Ex 23:5)

R' Shamshon Raphael Hirsch notes the common tendency humans have to give up on people who seem to attract calamity and misfortune; it would be far easier to cut them loose. The Torah speaks against the backdrop of such wayward thinking and reminds us that this person is your brother; you cannot give up on him. You must persist in helping, even if he fails over and over again – עַזְבַּת מֵעֵזֶב / עִמּוֹ / תֵּעָזֵב. פִּתְחֵם תִּפְתַּח / וְהַעֲבַט תֵּעֲבִיטְנֵם.

However, this unilateral obligation is ripe for abuse, giving cheats and crooks a religiously sanctioned opportunity to exploit good people. The Kli Yakar offers a sharp caveat; you must only persist in helping people who are at least trying to help themselves – עִמּוֹ. R' Shlomo Farhi piercingly suggests that it is not actually possible to help someone who won't help themselves; the mitzvah is only to help, not enable. But so long as they're trying, don't walk away; figure it out together – עַזְבַּת מֵעֵזֶב עִמּוֹ / הֵקֵם תִּקִּים / עִמּוֹ.

Our sages suggest that we should be grateful for cheats and crooks; otherwise, we'd be guilty over each and every person we fail to help.

While many mitzvos and rituals have an accompanying blessing to initiate the action, the Rashba notes that interpersonal mitzvos do not have such a blessing; making a blessing before helping another person would be dehumanizing, instrumentalizing a person into an object you do a mitzvah with, eroding the mitzvah entirely.

The Torah has a prominent spiritual dimension, but the interpersonal aspect of the Torah is a coequal, interdependent, and reciprocal component. It can be easy to get carried away with the spiritual trappings of helping people without being concerned about the person, but that's what it's all about – the other person is your brother, and you need to relate to him in that way.

R' Yitzchak Hutner was a Rosh Yeshiva renowned for his wit. Sick in hospital, a student came to visit his teacher and mentor. The great rabbi asked his guest why he had come, and the young man responded that it was a great mitzvah to visit the sick. In characteristic form, R' Hutner challenged his visitor, “Am I your Lulav? Did you come to shake me?”

The Alter of Kelm suggests that the most pristine form of charity is not the person who helps others because it's a mitzvah; but the person who empathizes with the recipient and gives because he is moved by their needs. On this reading, charity and helping others is an extension of loving your neighbour. Most people don't eat because it's a mitzvah to protect our bodies, we eat because we feel hungry; the Alter says you must treat the needs of another the same way. Don't help people because



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it's a mitzvah. Help people because you empathize with their pain to such a degree that if they are hungry, you are hungry; and when you are hungry, you eat.

If we are more concerned about lazy freeloaders who exploit public resources than disadvantaged people who need a leg up, it is only misdirection from the lesser angels of our nature; moral indignation that permits acting on envy and hate under a cloak of virtue. The Torah articulates a clear skew and strong preference toward taking action that helps others; the marginal cost of not helping is unacceptable.

Tzedaka is not charity or philanthropy. Less fortunate isn't a euphemism; it's a self-evident and observable fact. It's entitled to think it's not fair that you have to give something up so someone else can benefit; it's about justice, not fairness. Giving your money to others is explicitly a zero-sum game. By telling us to do it anyway, the Torah explicitly dismisses this objection as irrelevant, revealing that thinking in terms of winning and losing is an entirely incorrect perspective to bring to the interaction.

Your choice isn't whether to help others; it's who to help and how – which charities to give to, and in what quantities. It's the right thing to do; it is wrong not to.

It is important to be a good steward of capital; will this contribution be the highest and best use of your resources? But while it's vital to think in terms of impact and effectiveness, be mindful that some people aren't ever going to get by on their own. The widows and orphans of the world aren't going to be okay because you wrote a check one time or sent a care package for Pesach; people experiencing chronic illness aren't going to recover because you visited them once or hosted a fundraiser a while back.

And if you don't have the financial means, remember that your time and expertise must be spent charitably as well.

The Torah calls for your continued interest and persistent involvement, not a one-off act; a mode of being, a mentality of feeling obligated to intervene for people who need help today and, in all likelihood, will still need help tomorrow and the day after as well.

Your brothers need you; you must persist.

I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.

I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond. And if you saw, heard, read, or watched anything that spoke to you, please send it my way - Neli@TorahRedux.com.



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If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?

Neli

PS - *TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. My business, Hendon Advisors, allows me to dedicate time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I source and broker the purchase and sale of healthcare businesses; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers. If you are a buyer of healthcare businesses or can make introductions to healthcare operators who might buy or sell, just reply to this email to get in touch.*

Redux: *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.