

tives from the Children of Philanthropists", suggests that we consider the possibility of "intergenerational leakage". I flatly reject the supposition that this loss of philanthropic dollars is simply the "normal fact of philanthropic life, not worth being concerned about". Too often, I have heard the voices of those adult children, and they are hurting. In order to reverse that trend, philanthropists under the guidance of experts must learn not only to share with their children "their vision of what they are trying to accomplish and why", but also honor who the children are and what motivates them.

Starting Our Own Foundation

I applaud Mayer when he suggests that the Jewish world of fundraisers might need "to work in tandem with other professionals who can address the emotional, educational and possibly even spiritual needs of the various members of the philanthropists' family", but would edit that sentence to read "who can address the emotional, educational and *especially* the spiritual need..."

My children and I have decided to try an experiment. By August, we will have set aside a modest sum which we will try to allocate as a family. "Do you want it all to go to Jewish causes?" each one asks me independent of

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the other. They know where I stand, but they also know I believe very strongly that we are all citizens of the world.

"Think about it

over the next few months, and let's see how each of us feels," I answer, telling them over and over again this is going to be a family decision-making effort. We will all work together to set policy. Perhaps we will operate by percentages. Perhaps we will decide to go our separate ways. At least we will try to listen to each other.

Paul Schervish, in his moral biography writing, helps us to understand the spirituality involved in giving and the "community of caring" that ultimately defines the self. Our children need to appreciate their responsibility as Jews to their Jewish community as it relates to who they are and what Judaism values. This can happen only within an environment of mutual respect such as can be created using Bob Graham's family foundation model. In such a setting, the intent of the parents' philanthropic wishes have a better chance of being incorporated into the children's future decision making so that proper stewardship is ensured and Jewish giving is enhanced. I believe that by nurturing family foundations, no matter how small

the corpus, we will be strengthening Jewish families, enabling them to live better Jewishly. Our Jewish communities will be the real beneficiaries.

DIANE TRODERMAN is active in the world of Jewish philanthropy.

Reflections on the family, tzedakah and transmitting Jewish values

David Arnow

The American Jewish community's profound concern over continuity creates both urgency and an overall context for assessing the vital intersection of family, *tzedakah* and the transmission of Jewish values.

Because the subject is so broad, my approach will only highlight some of the key psychological issues that arise when considering these three elements together. First, I will comment on families with younger children and then turn to subsequent phases in the life cycle.

From the outset, children need to learn that *tzedakah* really matters to their parents. While that rings of common sense, at least some evidence suggests that it is far from common practice. Several years ago, Egon Mayer of the Center for Jewish Studies at CUNY, completed a study for the Human Resources Committee at New York UJA/Federation involving a small sample of children from prominent families who had *not* followed in their parents' philanthropic footsteps. The reasons were complex, but among other factors, Mayer concluded that "The 'underinvolved' do not perceive the Jewish philanthropic activities of their parents as reflecting deeply held values and personal norms that were [discussed] within the family." It is my strong suspicion that these conclusions apply to a large proportion of American Jewish families.

Show Your Children

The problem is not that parents fail to practice or appreciate *tzedakah*. The 1990 CJF Population study determined that 67% of Jewish households contribute to charity, making this one of the most widespread activities in the American Jewish community. Likewise, research by Steven M. Cohen found that 53% of American Jews feel it is extremely or very important to contribute to Jewish charities and to support social justice causes. To put this in perspective, only slightly more, 56% feel that

way about attending high holiday services, while far fewer, only 33% attribute comparable importance to any form of Shabbat observance.

A number of factors help explain why many parents who believe in *tzedakah* do not take the obvious step of sharing their attitudes and activities in this area with their children. Awareness of these factors may help parents more successfully expose their children to *tzedakah*.

Generally speaking, families tend to relate to issues involving money with discomfort and outright avoidance. Even many parents who are deeply involved with philanthropy, therefore, miss the opportunity of making the home a place where children can learn from their example.

Aside from such discomfort, many parents fail to actively bring *tzedakah* into the home because they assume it is already there. Often within families too much is assumed and too little said. I was surprised when I asked my then ten-year-old son's friends what their mothers or fathers do for a living. Beyond a one word label, many of these kids seemed genuinely puzzled. Parents, in other words, overestimate the level of their children's understanding of many elements of their adult world, including their philanthropic interests or commitments. In other families (as observed by Egon Mayer in a recent conversation) *tzedakah* and business are so closely interwoven, that parents do not even think of it as a Jewish value that requires nurturing at home. Either way, if *tzedakah* remains a subject that a family does not intentionally discuss, chances are it is one about which children will remain misinformed or indifferent.

Remembering to Speak About the Good

Finally, especially among parents heavily involved with charitable organizations, it often happens that the essence of the philanthropic motive has been submerged by the less than inspiring humdrum of daily organizational life. When you have put your shoulder to the wheel so hard for so long, it is easy to complain about the mud. Rediscovering or rearticulating those positions tends to occur on special occasions, frequently in public settings, while the frustrations about organizational life are more likely to surface at the family dinner table. Parents would do well, in other words, to monitor the impression they convey to children about their involvements, lest they unwittingly paint a picture that children ultimately find unattractive.

A related word of caution. A research study by Gabriel Berger, *Voluntarism Among American Jews*, found that the probability of volunteering for Jewish organizations increased for families with minor children at home.

The finding raises concerns about the extent to which dedication to the work of *tzedakah* comes at the expense of spending time with children. Parents who are perceived by their children to put "saving the world" before availability on the home front, will do little to build an appreciation for *tzedakah*. In such circumstances, children are more likely to resent rather than respect the causes to which parents are so dedicated. Parenthetically, organizations that have difficulty recruiting members from one generation to the next might, in part, look to these dynamics for an explanation.

Once these obstacles are overcome, it is not difficult to anchor *tzedakah* within the family. Something as basic as spending a little time with the children going through the solicitations found in a typical day's mail, conveys a lot about the kinds of problems--in

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the neighborhood and around the globe--that *tzedakah* can help solve. With older children this can develop into discussions about the criteria parents use to evaluate and prioritize these requests. Youngsters can be encouraged to choose a cause and to make a contribution from funds they have earned or received as presents. Obviously, the level of a child's exposure and participation varies with age, but it is probably safer to err on the side of exposing children to the nature of their family's giving--however modest--too early rather than too late.

The goal of such activities is to create a potent family milieu that builds Jewish identity by explicitly translating an abstract Jewish value of social responsibility into concrete behavior, the act of *tzedakah*. Tracing its roots sets the stage for encountering and applying core Jewish commitments to social justice, human dignity and fundamental equality. Practicing *tzedakah* at Maimonides' highest level--when giving helps the recipient become self-supporting--gives children a valuable appreciation of Judaism's commitment to the concept of empowering the needy.

Healing the World Step by Step

Equally important, this kind of introduction to *tzedakah* conveys Judaism's profound conviction that many of the tragic elements of the every day world are not immutable, that little by little the world can and must be improved. Youngsters discover the world's imperfections all too quickly. They know it needs repair, but the job seems

overwhelming and children don't know how or where to start. A healthy exposure to Judaism's particular approach toward *tzedakah*--in a family setting--creates a safe space to start. At the same time, this builds pride in one's heritage along with a durable sense of optimism and enthusiasm for continuing the lifelong work of *tikkun olam*.

Clearly, adult and family education focusing on *tzedakah*, as well as social action projects in which parents and children participate together, reinforce efforts at home. But, if *tzedakah* and other Jewish values are to be transmitted effectively, ultimately these programs first must encourage and then enable parents to take their share of the responsibility. And that requires dramatically more parental involvement than once assumed. Dropping a quarter into the *pushke* at home or at school is simply not enough.

Validating Your Child's Passions

Let us now look a bit further down the life cycle. If parents have succeeded in modeling a deep commitment to *tzedakah*, they should not be surprised when down the road they are solicited by one or more of their children--and not necessarily for a cause already on their parent's list! An experience with my own family may be worth sharing.

Until my early thirties, my involvement with the organized Jewish community only included synagogue membership. Joining the Board of the New Israel Fund in 1983 represented my initial foray into the Jewish world of fundraising and my parents and grandparents were important prospective contributors. They were deeply involved with Federation and Israel, among other things, but certainly not with most of the causes in Israel for which the New Israel Fund was raising support--Jewish/Arab coexistence, the status of women, religious pluralism, civil rights and the like. Suffice it to say, they contributed, and very generously at that!

Again, this illustrates what should be common practice. But, parents often fail to provide that kind of mature affirmation. Instead, especially in families with major philanthropic involvements, too many parents try to determine their children's philanthropic preferences. Underlying conflicts over control versus autonomy easily become struggles about whether or not a child remains within a particular organizational fold. In fact, some of the larger, traditional Jewish communal organizations feed these conflicts by creating exaggerated expectations that children of past leadership should form a natural pool for future recruitment. Parents and the organizations to which they are loyal must remember that *tzedakah* is the imperative, not support of a particular organization.

P.S. My family's openness to my philanthropic agenda later made it easier for me to embrace an important part of theirs. Now, along with NIF, I have become deeply involved with UJA/Federation!

A Stage for Family Dynamics

These struggles can be compounded when such families establish foundations with board members from one or more generations of the family. Last spring, I chaired a small workshop at the Jewish Funders Network Conference in which participants in family foundations shared their experience. I began the session with an allusion to that great opening line from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*: "All happy families are alike, unhappy families are unhappy in their own way." Participants shook their heads wearily in agreement. That discussion revealed--as do any number of articles on the subject--that the dynamics within these foundations generally reproduce all the joys and conflicts present in the family--sibling rivalry, conflict between the generations over power, authority, etc.

A Mechanism for Connectedness

But, there were also many joys associated with practicing *tzedakah* in a multigenerational context of Jewish values. Indeed, one study, "The Impact of Family Dynamics on Family Foundations" concluded as follows:

"They provide a mechanism through which family members can stay connected and continue to work on long-standing issues, conflicts, alliances, and struggles for individuation and recognition....Each story is different, but most share the conviction that if the foundation did not exist, there would be no opportunity to heal old wounds or put to rest old grievances. We were frequently told that it is only the foundation that keeps the family from flying completely apart."

For families with the resources, courage and inclination, establishing a family foundation can offer an incredibly powerful opportunity to engage in the work of *tikkun olam*.

Much more can and should be done to strengthen the links between the family and the broad sphere of *tzedakah*. Throughout the life cycle, this linkage constitutes a vital juncture, not just for augmenting resources for *tikkun olam*, but for inculcating Jewish values and strengthening Jewish identity. I would only caution that past generations of American Jews have expected too much of *tzedakah* as a guarantor of Jewish continuity.

The danger these days is that anxieties over continuity will lead to the search for silver bullets--simple, one

dimensional approaches to complex problems. In that regard, even the ideal relationship between family and *tzedakah*, can be no more than a genuinely useful adjunct in the quest for continuity and the perpetuation of Jewish values.

Tzedakah, as Rabbi Assi, the Talmudic sage argued, may be "as important as all other mitzvot put together." But, if transmitting Jewish values to the next generation had been on his mind he might have added, "Now go and teach you children about the other mitzvot too!"

DAVID ARNOW, a psychologist, is active in many Jewish communal endeavors, including the New Israel Fund and UJA/Federation.

Unto the tenth generation: the straus foundation

Dora Straus, Livia Straus, Sarena Straus

The Straus Family Foundation was established in April of 1985. Its goals were twofold:

1. to target specific Jewish causes and thus to intensify the impact of family charitable distributions.
2. to actively involve the younger members of the family in charitable work.

This article seeks to trace a *tzedakah* line as it grows in intensity, commitment and breadth of application from the generation of the grandmother to that of the grandchild.

First Generation: The Voice of the Grandmother

One day, more than 30 years ago, two big *machers* (big shots)--the president and the executive director of the yeshiva our children were attending--walked into our place of business. On seeing me one turned to the other and said: "Do you think we can solicit Sam while Dora is around?" The answer was: "Dora and Sam think alike about *tzedakah*. It doesn't present a problem." They informed us that there was an emergency--a shortage of funds. When is there not a shortage of funds in a Yeshiva? The board had decided that certain parents (the amenable ones) had to be apprised of the urgency of the situation and asked to help. They suggested a sum of money that they would like each to donate.

Sam and I walked into the office and discussed it. Sam wrote the check and signed it with a special flourish, walked out of the office, and with an air of bravado, presented it to them. They took one look and started to

thank us effusively. Sam stopped them. "Please don't thank us. You can't imagine how happy I am to have reached this plateau after starting as a starving orphan in war-torn Poland. We give with joy and thankfulness." They started to laugh and said that they should have requested double. "The door is always open," was the reply.

This was our credo and we imparted these priorities to our children. At every major *simcha*, when they received monetary gifts, they were asked to give a substantial percentage to a charity of their choice. Recently our granddaughter took a substantial amount of money from her *bat mitzvah* gifts to make a donation to the Holocaust Museum. She is now a charter member there.

We are our brothers and sisters keepers. In the name of religious intolerance and ethnic cleansing our people were almost decimated while many turned a myopic eye and a deaf ear to our anguish. Our children sense the obligation to care for others and to support worthwhile projects. We do it to benefit the people of Israel as well as for ourselves. *Tzedakah* benefits all--the giver, the receiver and society as a whole.

Second Generation: The Voice of the Daughter-In-Law

It was April 1986. My father-in-law had been very ill over the last year and a half. For our family this would be a very special Seder--perhaps the last that we would share physically with him. My husband and I had already discussed the concept of the foundation with his parents. The proposal would be presented to his siblings and their families on the night of the first Seder. If all were amenable then the annual meeting of the foundation would be part of our Seder ritual.

We had both come from families who were committed to the support of Jewish causes and Jewish organizations. Both sets of parents had lived through the era of the Holocaust and carried a strong conviction that Jews must help themselves since the world had failed them. They practiced what we call today "hands-on *tzedakah*", direct from bank to human-in-need. And they gave no matter what their personal income was.

My husband and I were of the Blue-Box generation. We walked the trains collecting money for the JNF, gave generously to our synagogue and I, following the example of my grandmother, never destroyed or returned a solicitation envelop empty.

Three issues were now of concern for us:

- a. Was our quiet example impacting on our children? What of the other children, grandchildren and future great-grandchildren in the family?