

A STUDY GUIDE FOR SERVICE AS A SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY IN JUDAISM

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WEEK ONE

Overview

This short selection, from *The Book of Miracles*, by Lawrence Kushner is an introduction to the underlying objective of the study group and should be approached as the discussion leader sees fit. The Study and Contemplation Guide is building the case for volunteering to do service, one step at a time.

When the people of Israel crossed through the Red Sea, they witnessed a great miracle. Some say it was the greatest miracle that ever happened. On that day they saw a sight more awesome than all the visions of the prophets combined. The sea split and the waters stood like great walls, while Israel escaped to freedom on the distant shore. Awesome. But not for everyone.

Two people, Reuven and Shimon, hurried along among the crowd crossing through the sea. They never once looked up. They noticed only that the ground under their feet was still a little muddy-like a beach at low tide.

"Yucch!" said Reuven, "there's mud all over this place!"

"Bleech!" said Shimon, "I have muck all over my feet!"

"This is terrible," answered Reuven. "When we were slaves in Egypt, we had to make our bricks out of mud, just like this!"

"Yeah," said Shimon. "There's no difference between being a slave in Egypt and being free here."

And so it went, Reuven and Shimon whining and complaining all the way to freedom. For them there was no miracle. Only mud. Their eyes were closed. They might as well have been asleep. (Exodus Rabbah 24:1)

People see only what they understand, not necessarily what lies in front of them. For example, if you saw a television set, you would know what it was and how to operate it. But imagine someone who had never seen a television. To such a person it would be just a strange and useless box. Imagine being in a video store, filled with movies and stories and music, and not even knowing it. How sad when something is right before your eyes, but you are asleep to it. It is like that with our world too.

Something like this once happened to Jacob, our father. He dreamed of a ladder joining heaven and earth. Upon it angels were climbing up and down. Then God appeared and talked to Jacob. When he awoke the next morning, Jacob said to himself, "Wow! God was in this very place all along, and I didn't even know it!" (Genesis 28: 16)

Rabbi Shelomo Yitzchaki, who lived in France eight hundred years ago and whom we call Rashi (after the initials of his name), explained what Jacob meant: "If I had known that God would be here, then I wouldn't have gone to sleep!"

To be a Jew means to wake up and to keep your eyes open to the many beautiful, mysterious, and holy things that happen all around us every day. Many of them are like little miracles: when we wake up and see the morning light, when we taste food and grow strong, when we learn from others and grow wise, when we hug the people we love and feel warm, when we help those around us and feel good. All these and more are there for us every day, but we must open our eyes to see them; otherwise we will be like Reuven and Shimon, able to see only mud.

Suppose, right now, your eyes are closed. How do you wake up?

A Hasidic Story

There is an old Hasidic story of the Rabbi who had a conversation with God about Heaven and Hell "I will show you Hell", said God and led the Rabbi into a room in the middle of which was a very big, round table. The people sitting at it were famished and desperate. In the middle of the table there was a large pot of stew, enough and more for everyone. The smell of the stew was delicious and made the Rabbi's mouth water. The people round the table were holding spoons with very long handles. Each one found that it was just possible to reach the pot to take a spoonful of the stew, but because the handle of his/her spoon was longer than a person's arm, a person could not get the food back into their mouth. The Rabbi saw that their suffering was terrible.

"Now I will show you Heaven", said God, and there was the same big round table and the same pot of stew. The people, as before, were equipped with the same long-handled spoons - but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking. At first, the Rabbi could not understand. "It is simple, but it requires a certain skill said God, "You see, they have learned to feed each other."

Discussion opportunity: Reading and then discussing this story may occupy the entire first session of the group. It provides an opportunity to explore, without the formality of the commandment of mitzvot, the participants ideas about service. Should the congregation only serve its members? Other Jewish people? Anyone in the extended community of Boulder County? In the world? Has the group had collective experiences of service? What were the experiences like? Are any individual in the group engaged in volunteering? What has their experience been?

WEEK TWO

Who is a Jew?

This session begins with a, possibly provocative, selection, from a little known book called *Open Secrets, The Letters of Reb Yerachmiel ben Yisrael* by Rabbi Rami M. Shapiro. Reb Yerachmiel (a fictive character) is corresponding with a younger Jewish seeker who lives in America.

Discussion opportunity: All participants should have received a copy of this selection in Session One to read and ponder in preparation for Session Two. The discussion leader should use this discussion session to allow the group to establish what it means to be Jewish? Are there requirements beyond one's birth or conversion?

Your last letter troubled me a little. It follows naturally from our discussion on what is Judaism, but you spoke of discord among Jews over, of all things, who is a Jew. What is the confusion? And what prompts the question? Are Gentiles sneaking into *tallitot* and *tefillin* (prayer shawls and phylacteries) and trying to pass themselves off as Jews? I am sorry. I do not mean to make light of your question.

Let me answer it honestly. To my mind a Jew is a person who identifies as a Jew, who makes Jewish culture his or her primary vehicle for celebration and meaning, who upholds the values of Torah, and who practices *tikkun* (repairing the soul) and *teshuvah* (return, referring to one's returning attention to the present and rediscovering one's true nature as a manifestation of God).

I will take up each of these in turn, but first let me reply to what you must be thinking as you read this paragraph: What about being born to a Jewish mother? For centuries this has been the determining factor of who is a Jew: I do not mean to ignore it. I only question its value. Between you and me, and I think I will not share this with the others, what matters to me is not who your mother was, but what you yourself do. So what if your mother is a Jew? So what if your mother is a devout and pious Jew? If you yourself ignore the Sabbath and the Torah, if you deny God and make no effort to be godly, in what meaningful way are you a Jew?

It would be as if Fivel Lipshitz, the tailor's son who sells firewood from his wagon, were to suddenly call himself a tailor and start sewing suits. The boy cannot count to ten, let alone measure a caftan sleeve. I could imagine saying to him, "Fivel, can you cut cloth well?" No, he would tell me. "Well, can you sew a straight stitch?" No, again, he would say. "Tell me, can you hem a cuff or let out a pair of pants?" No, for a third time. "Then how is it you presume to call yourself a tailor?" My mother is a tailor so I am tailor. Can you imagine such nonsense? And yet that is exactly what we are saying about being Jewish!

Listen to me, Aaron Hershel. Bend near to this page as if I were about to whisper in your ear. It doesn't matter what your mother is or what your father is. It matters who you are.

Back to my definition. A Jew is four things. First, a Jew is a person who willingly identifies as a Jew. What kind of Jew is a person who says he is a Catholic? Should I count him in a *minyan* (prayer quorum)? No. If you don't want to be known as a Jew, fine. (I am speaking in general and not, of course, to you personally, my dear Hershele). Then, to my mind, you are not a Jew. Will the Cossacks care one whit about what you call yourself when they come charging in thirsty for Jewish blood? No. But I am not a Cossack and I will not let them define for me who is a Jew.

Second, a Jew is a person who honors the joys and sorrows of life with the traditions of Judaism. When a boy is born there should be a *bris* (circumcision). When a daughter marries there should be a *chuppah* (wedding canopy) and a *ketubah* (wedding contract). When there is a death there should be a *shivah* (mourning period). These are examples, you understand. There is so much more to Judaism than these. But my point is that being a Jew means rooting your life in, though not necessarily regulating your life by, Jewish tradition.

Third, a Jew is a person who upholds the values of Torah. What values? One God who created one world and one humanity, and who demands that we treat each other, Jew and Gentile, with the utmost respect as beings created in the image and likeness of God, and who placed us in a garden which we were to maintain.

Fourth, a Jew is a person who practices tikkun and teshuvah. A Jew who does not work to repair the rifts in the world, both inner and outer, this person is a poor Jew: A Jew who does not do teshuvah, who does not attend to the present moment and engage it with godliness, this person, too, is a poor Jew.

I will not set forth the details here of how to be a Jew: Indeed, I am inclined to let people find their own way through mitzvot (commandments or religious obligations) and halachah (Jewish law). But suffice it to say that as much as we call ourselves the Chosen People, it is becoming more and more clear to me that if we are to mean anything at all in this world we must become the Choosing People- people who choose to live by the principles and practices of tikkun and teshuvah: acting justly and compassionately toward all creatures, and cultivating the awareness of all selves as a manifestation of God.

WEEK THREE

The story of the sparks

Discussion opportunity: Someone(s) should read this selection from Open Secrets to the group. Some forms of Judaism may not agree with the Rabbi's opinion on the relationship of tradition and principle, but it may lead to a lively discussion. The objective is to explore the idea of tikkun and lay the foundation for service, i.e. volunteering, as intrinsic to Judaism.

My dearest Aaron Hershel:

You are quite right that we need to begin at the beginning. A new land, a new start. But as to your suggestion of "a new Judaism," who is to say? That is not my intent. My intent is just to answer your questions.

So, the question is "What is Judaism?" You know, of course, the Talmud's section on defining Judaism (*Makkot* 23b): Rabbi Simlai began by saying that the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) were reduced to 11 by King David (psalm 15), to six by Isaiah (Isaiah: 33:15), and then to three by Micah (Micah: 6:8). Isaiah further reduced them to two: "Keep judgment and righteousness." Amos came and reduced them to one: "Seek Me and live" (Amos: 5:4). Habbakuk proposed an alternative: "The Righteous live by faith" (Habbakuk: 2:4).

And I am certain you remember Hillel's famous reply to the Gentile who demanded he teach all of Torah while standing on one foot: "Do not do to others what you would not want done to yourself. That is the whole of Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and study it" (*Shabbat* 31a).

I am partial to these one foot Judaisms. They are simple, direct, and profound. And they leave us free to shape a Jewish life around principle rather than tradition. I am not opposed to tradition, God forbid, but I do not think it superior to principle. On the contrary, tradition is our record of the way our ancestors lived these principles in the past. We should see them as catalysts to our own creativity and not as fixed forms to be imitated. This already is *treif* (not kosher, heretical) thinking on my part and I do not share this with my peers, but the teacher should not pretend before the student.

So here is my one foot Judaism: Judaism is the Jewish people's ancient and, God willing, ongoing effort to make *tikkun* and *teshuvah*. The rest is commentary. Now go and study it. What do you think? On a par with Amos and Hillel? Probably not. Yerachmiel is no Habbakuk. But it is what I believe. Judaism is simply *tikkun* and *teshuvah*. Of course now I must be clear as to what I mean by *tikkun* and *teshuvah*.

Tikkun means "repair." The great saint and kabbalist Isaac Luria, peace be upon him (1534-1572), was the first to use this term in a spiritual way. He believed that when God set out to create the world, God, being infinite, had to contract in order to make room for what would become the finite world. God intended to pour the divine energy into specially constructed vessels that would form the foundation of creation. Yet God erred, so to speak, in the construction of these vessels and when the divine light entered them they shattered, spilling God, as it were, all over the cosmos. These shattered fragments of God became trapped in *klippot* (shells) and these became embedded in the world you and I inhabit.

Reb Luria taught that it was the task of the Jew to free these trapped sparks of God and return them to God by treating all things with utmost reverence and respect. Since the sparks were

scattered across the world, the Jews would have to be scattered across the world. Our loss of Israel and our holy Temple in Jerusalem was not a punishment for our disobedience to God, but essential to God's plan. Who among us would have left the Holy Land of our own free will? No one! So God had the Romans push us out. What appeared to us as a loss of holiness, turns out in Luria's mind to be the way to holiness. As you know; his understanding spoke to so many of our people. Luria's teaching replaced the horror of exile with the hope for redemption. And hope is the sap of life; without hope there is only lifeless form.

But, I will tell you, Aaron Hershel, that I do not believe Reb Luria meant us to take this teaching literally. Or, if he did, I for one cannot do so. What Luria saw as a process happening in God and the world, I see as a process happening only in our minds. Did God really shrink to make room for creation? No! God is infinite. Can the infinite become finite? Of course not; the infinite includes the finite. What happens is not that God shrinks, but that the *Neshamah*, the ego, imagines a distant God to allow for the illusion of a separate self. And, once it has established itself as separate it goes about exploiting others in order to maintain its selfish delusion.

This, the *Neshamah's* rejection of the fundamental unity of all life in, with, and as God is to me the real understanding of the breaking of the vessels. The ego was meant to be a way of knowing God in the relative and finite world of seemingly separate things. But it came to identify so closely with this world that it could no longer place itself in the larger context of the unity of all things in God. Do not think I am saying ego is bad or that we should eliminate it. Ego is vital to our daily functioning in the world. We need a self to interact with the world. But we must not imagine that this self is anything more than a vessel of something far greater than it.

You and I and all living things are the vessels of God, the embodiment of *Elohut* (Godhead). In this we are one with God, yet we imagine ourselves to be separate from God and this creates in us the idea of brokenness. The brokenness of the world starts as a process in the mind, but it doesn't end there. We go about the world breaking it up into smaller and smaller segments, each often at war with the rest, without ever realizing we are warring with ourselves.

Tikkun is the process of putting things back together again. There are two kinds of tikkun corresponding to the two kinds of brokenness we humans imagine. The first is called *tikkun hanefesh*, repairing the soul. The second is called *tikkun haolam*, repairing the world. Both must occur if we are to set things right, and neither takes precedence over the other. Indeed they are two ends of the same rope.

We make tikkun hanefesh when we end the delusion of separateness that keeps us feeling alienated from God and creation. The truth is that God is creation. There are not two realities, the divine and the natural. If this were so, God would not be infinite. God's infinity includes and transcends the finite world. There is only one reality that manifests in different ways. It is all God. Tikkun hanefesh is awakening to the fact that you and I and all things are one in, with, and as God.

We make tikkun haolam when we engage the world with justice and compassion, what I call godliness. Tikkun haolam is repairing the damage we do to life when we engage it unjustly and cruelly. Tikkun haolam is ending the violence that comes with seeking to control others, repairing the rifts between people, and between people and nature, and treating each other and all life with the utmost respect and care.

Tikkun hanefesh and tikkun haolam are two sides of the same coin. You cannot do one without doing the other: to end the divisions and violence around you, you must also end the divisions and violence within you. This is what Hillel meant when he said "If I am not for myself who will before me?" This is tikkun hanefesh. "But if I am only for myself, what am I?" This is tikkun haolam. "And if not now, when?" (*Pirke Avot*) Tikkun of either type can be done only in the present. The past and future are beyond our reach. If you repair your world and your soul you must do so by entering fully into the present moment.

How do you do this? Through the practice of *teshuvah*. So many people now use the word to refer to a return to *Halachah* (Jewish law) and traditional ways of Jewish living but I use it differently. Teshuvah means returning to God and godliness. When your mind is caught up in the delusion of separateness it is distracted from the present. The deluded mind dwells on the past or imagines the future, but is never at home in the present. Why? Because the delusion of separateness cannot be maintained in the present. Since separation is a delusion of the mind, it is imagined in the mind, and the mind cannot imagine in the present. Imagination is of the past or the future, never the present. We cannot imagine the here and now, we can only engage it. Teshuvah is returning the mind to the present, to God, for God is the eternal present; tikkun returns us to godliness, engaging each moment with the utmost respect and care.

I can almost hear your objections! What about God, What about Torah, What about Israel, What about *Shabbat* and *Yontif* (the Sabbath and Holy Days)? I am not ignoring these, and, if you ask, I will be happy to explore them with you. But we are talking about a one foot Judaism. Hillel, too, did not mention Shabbat. He said all the rest is commentary; now go and study it. I will say no less: Judaism is returning to God and godliness. All the rest is commentary. Come, let us study it.

WEEK FOUR

Mitzvot

I am not surprised that your last letter asked about my opinion of *mitzvot hanefesh* practices). My comments on Torah made it clear that I do not hold every word or law sacred, and therefore you are right to question me regarding the laws that are derived from Torah. But do not think I am about to dismiss mitzvot out of hand. After all, we both grew up with *tallit* and *tefillin* (prayer shawl and phylacteries). Am I now suggesting we abandon them? God forbid! I could no more start a day without *tefillah* (prayer) and tefillin, than I could start a day without breathing. And yet I am not pleased with the way mitzvot are taught or even how they are understood. We are taught that mitzvah, religious obligation, comes from *mitzaveh*, command. A mitzvah is a commandment of God incumbent upon the Jew. But do you and I believe in a commanding God? I do not. I have written you about my understanding of God.

We shall speak more of it I am sure. So let me add a bit here. Throughout Torah men and women encounter God. These encounters happen in different ways: voices, dreams, angels, a burning bush. From their various encounters they feel compelled to do certain things: to speak certain words, to travel to a certain place, to liberate a people enslaved. A mitzvah is what we take with us after an encounter with God. It is not that God commands us to do such and such, but rather that our encounter with God compels us to do *it*. Our encounter with God fills us with godliness and the desire to repair the world, and we go about this in ways that reflect our personality, our history, and our circumstances.

Of course, if this were all there were to mitzvot, there would be very few and they would be anything but communal obligations. So there is more. Moshe Rabbeinu is our Law Giver. It is from him that most of our mitzvot are derived. It is from his encounters with God that our mitzvot draw their power. Moshe meets God and can no longer see the stranger as "other," so he commands us to love the stranger as we love ourselves. Moshe meets God and can no longer see people as being enslaved by work, so he proclaims the Sabbath, a day of no work when we can reclaim our original stature as divine beings in paradise. Moshe encounters God and can no longer look the other way when sellers steal from buyers with false weights and measures, so he proclaims honest measures and business integrity as the command of God. Moshe meets God and can no longer see the divisions among people, so he challenges us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Do you understand? I am not saying that each of us must meet God and follow only those mitzvot we take away from our meeting. I am saying that there have been and will continue to be great souls among humankind whose meetings with God will result not in personal mitzvot, but global mitzvot for humanity coming through those whose encounter with God surpasses all tribes and divisions.

But not all mitzvot are of this quality. Moshe proclaims the Sabbath and then worries about those who ignore him, so he says that anyone caught picking up sticks on a Saturday will be put to death. Moshe proclaims that children should honor their parents and then worries about those who do not, so he says that the rebellious son shall be put to death. Are these mitzvot of the same quality as the others? No. They are not rooted in encounter with God, they do not uphold the principle of *l'chayyim*, they do not speak from love. On the contrary they are commands rooted in fear, and resulting in violence.

Our obligation is only to the mitzvot of *l'chayyim* and love. A radical position to hold, I understand. But one that must be spoken loudly and clearly. I cannot help but hear you wondering just what impact my ideas would have on Judaism if more than just you, my friend, took them seriously. I do not wish to sound immodest, but I wonder if the

simple Judaism you and I are exploring is not a perfect fit for your America. A person chooses to be a Jew without parental imposition. A Jew has to make teshuvah for himself by seeing what God asks of him in the moment rather than by returning and conforming to an ancient code of practice and belief. Maybe I should move to America.

I am not serious about moving, but I must tell you it is not so good here. There is the usual violence against us, but it is more a mood I sense among the young. They do not have the faith of their parents and grandparents. They do not trust that this is all part of God's divine plan. We suffer for Him. We die for Him. Interesting the Christians say their God dies for them; we say we die for God. How sad that the central image of faith is death. No wonder there is a loss of hope among the young; despair is the true enemy of the spirit.

Discussion opportunity. The suggested way to start this discussion is to do a glossary review of the Hebrew words pertinent to this exploration of the inspiration for engagement in order to insure that all participants are clear on the principles which have been discussed to date, and their relationship to each other.

halachah - Jewish law

mitzaveh - command

mitzvot - commandments or religious obligations

teshuvah - return, referring to one's returning attention to the present and rediscovering one's true nature as a manifestation of God

tikkun- repairing the soul

tikkun hanefesh – repairing the soul, refers to the practice of engaging oneself in a manner that honors and reveals one's connectedness to God

tikkun haolam- repairing the world, refers to the practice of engaging others in a manner that honors and reveals their unity with all things in God

This selection is the opportunity to discuss service as commandment. This is a particularly Jewish perspective and has a different quality than the general view of charity or service in our culture.

Here are additional comments on mitzvot which the participants should discuss. Each participant could choose one of these statements and comment on it as a springboard For discussion.

The laws of the Torah cut across social and economic lines, affirming the infinite worth of all human beings, whether free or enslaved, whether Jewish or gentile, regardless of their wealth or prestige.

The striking insights embodied in the Torah and in subsequent Jewish writings, unprecedented in their time and still infrequent in their fulfillment, embody the infusion of a higher wisdom, a Guide who could transcend the limited perspective of consensus to reveal a sacred reordering of values.

The unparalleled depth of the Torah and of the talmudic traditions whispers the insights of God. Those insights and directions are implemented through the mitzvot, the network of sacred deeds that structure the life of a Jew and form the lifeblood of Jewish values, continuity and belonging Mitzvot are a path- the Jewish arena for knowing and experiencing God

“It is within our power to mirror God’s unending love in deeds of kindness, like brooks that hold the sky.” (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)

We considered Judaism as a path for spiritual growth and we note our age-old covenant with God. The time has now come to ask: Will growing as a Jew entail more than reading some books or quiet contemplation? Does it make any difference in the way we live our lives and spend our time? In short, does Judaism relegate spirituality, the emotional bounty of religious life, to the private recesses of our soul, or should it change the way we treat each other, ourselves and the world?

God is in the details We’ve all experienced the need to attend to the details in order to accomplish something far-reaching – I can’t even remember what my wife wants me to buy at the store without going to the trouble of making a list, the discipline of making the list, remembering to bring it with me and consulting it in the store makes it possible to shop successfully. That blend of foresight, preparation and persistence accompanies all human attainments, whether trivial or lofty. How much more is it needed to construct a richer spirit and to establish a sacred community! The shopping list that makes Judaism meaningful is its mitzvot: feeding the hungry, observing Shabbat; visiting the sick, caring for the earth...These are the precious details that enable us to achieve our larger objective – the creation of a holy, caring and sacred community.

The above are excerpted from It’s A Mitzvah by Bradley Shavit Artson.

The world is sustained by three things: by the Torah, by worship, and by loving deeds. Let your house be open wide, and let the poor be members of your household.

WEEK FIVE

Textual Citations on Repairing the World and Serving Others

Discussion opportunity: In Session Five the group will investigate biblical quotations related to repairing the world and serving others. Participants should choose a source in Session Four, then read and prepare to discuss it in Session Five. These scriptural readings all relate to service in some way. The task of the participants is to explain that connection or to surface questions about the connection.

Genesis 18:17-20; 23-33

Amos 5:14-15

Leviticus 19:1-4; 9-19

Genesis 18:17-20; 23-33

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13

Isaiah 33: 15

Micah 6:8

Habakkuk 2:4

Rabbi Simlai Babylonian Talmud *Makkot* 23b-24a

WEEK SIX

Can I do this?

Although we may be inspired, invigorated, and energized by the idea of bringing our spiritual understanding to fruition through volunteering and doing service, when it literally is time to commit, obstacles may arise. We can be challenged on two levels. One is the practical level of how to fit one more thing into our busy lives. The other may be a private concern that we may not be knowledgeable, experienced or compassionate enough to really help anyone in a substantial way.

In terms of making time to volunteer, the only suggestion is for each person to look at their values and then set priorities. In terms of individual capability, it is important in long-term volunteering to choose something which engages your passions. In short-term volunteering, there is the opportunity to learn about situations with which you usually have no contact at all. Many volunteer positions are also opportunities to learn new skills and make unlikely friends. Helping others is a subtle endeavor. Even when the type of help needed is defined, the biggest impact may be just your concern, desire to help and genuine friendliness.

Discussion opportunity: The participants should read the following excerpt from Open Secrets, review the scriptural references noted, then share their responses to the issue of worthiness to serve.

You want to talk about holiness. Holiness is not some abstract idea. Holiness is the way you and I are to live. This is the meaning behind God's command: "Be holy because I Adonai am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). What a strange demand to make of human beings! We are to be like God. Yet is that not what the serpent said to Eve to entice her to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? (Genesis 3:5) Can it be that the serpent was right all along?

I would say yes, the serpent did know the destiny of humankind. The serpent was the cleverest of all the animals and could discern the potential we humans possess. The mistake the serpent made was twofold. First he was premature. Humanity was not ready to be like God. Adam and Eve had not yet learned what it meant to be humans. To be like God at this point would have meant the Neshamah imagining itself to be God. The all-powerful self is the cause of great suffering, and never holiness.

The second error the serpent made was in equating knowledge with godliness. The serpent says that to eat of the Tree of Knowledge will make you like God. God says that godliness, holiness, is not a matter of knowledge but rather a matter of discovering your true nature.

This is what Torah means when it says we are to "be holy because I, God, am holy." It is because God is holy that we can be holy. The only way such a statement makes sense is if there is a direct connection between God and us. You would not say to a donkey: "Be human because I am human." There is nothing human in the donkey that it could use to comply with your command. So you would never make this demand. When God commands us to be holy we can imagine one of two things. Either God is speaking nonsense because holiness is beyond humankind, or God is pointing to our innate ability to be godly. If we would not speak nonsense to a donkey, we can assume that God would not speak nonsense to us. And if this is so, then we can also assume that when God says we are to be holy because God is holy, God is pointing to our highest nature and challenging us to live it.

How do we live it? Through the practice of teshuvah, returning our attention over and over again to the present moment and discovering in that moment both the presence of God and the path of godliness. You cannot be holy in the past or future. Holiness is in the now because God is the now: God and godliness manifest together in each moment. To know the first is to do the second. To do the second is to know the first.

Thus Torah teaches: "You shall love the Ineffable God with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 6:5) and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). I would argue that these are not two different mitzvot but two sides of the same mitzvah. To love God is to discover God present in and as all things. So to love God is to love your neighbor. In loving your neighbor you recognize your connection with your neighbor in the greater unity of God. So to love your neighbor is to love God. The two commandments are simply different ends of the same stick! And the stick itself is love. Where is this love to be lived? In the only place life can be lived, in the present moment. And teshuvah is the practice of returning to the present moment.

When we learn to see God as all in All, we no longer insist upon our absolute separateness, our absolute being, our absolute reality. When we see God as all in All we see everything as empty of absolute being. Our own separateness is surrendered and we are one with all and God.

To be holy, then, is to live the unity of Yesh and Ayn. Living this unity, we know what is right in so powerful a way that we feel commanded to do it. There is no real choice. The knowing is too strong. Neshamah is so open to Chayyah that it can no longer deny the love, justice, and compassion that shape Chayyah's understanding of reality and how to engage it.

Imagine your right hand trying to convince you to cut off your left hand. You would not do it. It is not a choice since cutting off your left hand isn't an option. You do not see your right hand and left hand as separate and competing beings. You know that to harm one would be to harm the whole. This same awareness is present when you practice teshuvah. When you become fully awake in the present moment you see all diversity linked in a greater unity. Harming another living being is a harming of oneself. It isn't a choice. This choiceless awareness is what our teachers call mitzvaveh, being divinely commanded. We are commanded not by a Commander outside of life, but by the commanding sense of unity that is life.

Having said all this, I do not wish to leave you with the impression that there are no guidelines for holiness. Whenever I wish to remind myself of what living a life of holiness is like I turn to the prophet Micah: "What does God require? To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Do justly. To do justly we must know and honor the diversity of Creation. Justice is the establishment of fair and equitable means of interaction between seemingly autonomous beings. Justice is the right running of the world. To do justly we must learn to respect, honor, and preserve the diversity that is the world.

Love mercy. To love mercy is to be motivated by compassion. Compassion arises from a sense of shared suffering. Shared suffering arises from our awakening to the oneness that underlies our diversity. We love mercy and act with compassion to the extent we identify with others. Perceiving the unity of self and other immediately translates into ahavah (love) for both self and other

Walk humbly with God. This means to walk lightly and not take yourself too seriously. You cannot walk with God and self at the same time. The self can maintain itself only by insisting it is separate from God and the whole. Walking humbly means to stop insisting you are more than you are. But do not imagine a humble self is a weak self. On the contrary, a humble self is a powerful self for it is grounded in all of life and filled with the spirit of the Source of life. It is just not a foolish self. A foolish self insists it is alone, and that it must defend itself against all other selves. A humble self knows there is no aloneness in the world, only connectedness. A humble self knows the truth of Hillel's saying "If I am not for myself who will be for me, and if I am only for myself, what am I?" (*pirke Avo!* 1:14). A humble self honors itself and others for it sees itself as one with others.

So, what am I saying with all these words? Being holy means making teshuvah and thus being present to each moment. Being present reveals your connection with all life, and calls forth justice and compassion. Doing justly and compassionately is loving your neighbor. Loving your neighbor is loving God. Loving God is loving it all. (From Open Secrets)

WEEK SEVEN

Jewish mantras and short tales of encouragement

Week Six was heavy duty. It is difficult to look at one's true nature and the ensuing demands that follow on this understanding. There is nothing in our American culture which prepares us for seeing that we have the intrinsic potential to be holy.

Week Seven is a lighter continuation of the topic of teshuva. The group participants have probably been considering the implications of last session's work and may want to continue discussing the topic. Contemplate the following:

We have free will. We can choose to do good or we can refrain from it. We should each see ourselves as personally responsible for the world. Each of us should see ourselves as if it all depended upon us.

The mitzvot are not just a set of values -- the life of mitzvah is a life of discipline. We grow in goodness the more good we do.

Studying torah and worship - avodah -- must lead to deeds of kindness. Our acts of kindness sustain the world. Our relationship to others is to be a balance between selfishness and selflessness.

The levels of tzedakah - the more one does to help another without seeking for oneself, the better. The highest level is to enable another to be self sufficient.

Don't look at others, especially the needy as, "them." Think of them as family - they are part of the one human family.

If we truly live our faith we will be righteous.

Love your neighbor as yourself' (Leviticus 19: 18). Rabbi Akiva said: This is the greatest principle of the Torah.

The Torah says, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." The Buddha says there is no "self."
So, maybe you are off the hook.

Man, the master choice, should say: The whole world has been created only for my sake. Therefore, man shall take care at every time and in every place to redeem the world and fill its want.

Who are they? They are the angels who watch over people. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: "An entourage of angels always walks in front of people, and messengers call out." And what do they say? "Make way for the image of the Holy Blessed One."

A Rebbe's Proverb (from the Yiddish) If you always assume the man sitting next to you is the Messiah waiting for some simple human kindness - You will soon come to weigh your words and watch your hands. And if he so chooses not to reveal himself in your time -- It will not matter.

A non-Jew once came before the sage Shammai and said to him: "I wish to convert to Judaism. Please teach me all the Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai pushed the man away with the builder's measure he held in his hand. The same man came before Hillel and

repeated his request. Hillel said to him: "What is hateful to you, do not do to any person. That is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary - go and learn it!" (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Moses's Jewish mother: "That's a good story! Now tell me where you've really been for the last forty years"

Participants may need to be reminded that our cultural humor is a powerful aid in difficult situations.

WEEK EIGHT

Relationship

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall revere every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths; I am the Lord your God ...

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and stranger; I am the Lord your God.

You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie one to another. And you shall not swear by my name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

You shall not defraud your neighbor, nor rob him; the wages of he who is hired shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God; I am the Lord.

You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; you shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people; nor shall you stand against the blood of your neighbor; I am the Lord.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reason with your neighbor, and not allow sin on his account. You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord ...

You shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary; I am the Lord ...

You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear your God; I am the Lord.

And if a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. But the stranger who dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19)

Discussion opportunity: The concern of Judaism is relationship, of oneself to God, of oneself to oneself and of oneself to others. This entire text is almost exclusively about relationship. Are humans so primitive that they need commandments about how to relate to one another. There seems to be a great contrast between our potential and our actuality. Why do you think this is? Is it true?

WEEK EIGHT

Relationship continued

When I asked a Chassidic rabbi, Rabbi Henschel Dov Hoffman, why so many of the chassidic stories are about money-lending. He replied that it was really about relationship, how can we collaborate with another person, without one being the loser or inferior and the other the winner or superior. He went on to further say that the stories in the Bible about pairs of brothers: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael. Esau and Joseph and other brother pairs, were profoundly about this same issue of how do we get on with another.

Have the participants read and analyze the following story from the perspective of relationship.

God, the Cosigner

This is a Chassidic story as told by Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev

At the home of the wealthy Reb Nasan, there once arrived a stranger with a request. "I had a thriving business here in Berdichev," the man, whose name was Daniel, told Reb Nasan, "but the business failed. If I could only have a nice-sized loan, then I would be able to get back on my feet once more, with God's help. Would it be possible for you to lend me the money, and I'll pay you back as soon as my business does well?"

"Who will cosign your loan?" inquired the rich man..."I don't have anybody to be my cosigner," sighed the poor businessman. Just then an idea flashed into Daniel's head. "God will be my cosigner!" he declared. "That's good enough for me," responded Reb Nasan smilingly. The two of them set a date by which time the loan would be repaid, and Reb Nasa lent Daniel the money he had asked for.

When the day arrived by which the loan was supposed to be paid, there was no sign of Daniel. More time passed, and still there was no word from the borrower. One day Daniel appeared. "I apologize for being late with the money," he said, "but I have it now." "That's okay," said Reb Nasan. "It's not necessary to pay me back." The business man was astounded. "What do you mean? I borrowed money from you, and I want to repay it. I'm truly sorry, I'm late, but the business didn't pick up as fast as I had hoped. Please accept the money now."

"I was paid back already," Reb Nasan assured him. "I don't need to be repaid twice." "You were paid back?" Daniel was perplexed. "How could that be?"

"Your cosigner repaid me," was the response of Reb Nasan. "My cosigner, my cosigner," muttered Daniel, trying to recall who the cosigner on the loan was. He suddenly remembered. "Why God was my cosigner!" "That's exactly right. I have done very well since I made you the loan, and I consider that God's repayment to me," said Reb Nasan with a tone of finality.

Daniel persisted, however. "If you won't take back the money, I'll take you to a Din Torah," he threatened. "That's fine with me," shrugged the wealthy man. So Reb Nasan appeared as a litigant before the rav of Berdichev. And Reb Levi Yitzchak ruled in favor of Reb Nasan, the so-called miser.

“So you see, my friends,” concluded the rav, “although the whole world thought Reb Nasan was a stingy miser, the truth was that he was a very kind and giving person. But when he helped people, he didn’t want anybody to know about it. Reb Nasan performed the very highest form of tzedakah – charity given in secret.”

WEEK TEN

Tzedakah and Gemilut Hasadim

Tzedakah has its own set of imperatives. *Tzedakah* is loosely translated as "charity," but that is a misrepresentation of the concept. The Hebrew has its root in another word, *tzedek/justice*. In the Torah we are strongly enjoined, "*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof/Justice, justice thou shalt pursue.*"

Rabbinical commentators have said that the repetition of the word justice is designed to underline the importance of the command. *Tzedakah* is not charity given out of *caritas*, in the Christian understanding of those words; it is given as an act of redress, as part of the process of seeking a just world.

We are enjoined explicitly to give *tzedakah*, particularly just before the Sabbath and festivals. The Torah tells us, "You shall surely open your hand to the poor and the destitute of your land." Elsewhere it is said that Israel will be redeemed by its acts of charity. And in the Book of Proverbs we are told, "The doing of righteousness and justice is preferable to [Adonai](#) than the sacrificial offering."

How we give *tzedakah* is as important as what we give. "Do not humiliate a beggar," the Talmud warns us. "God is beside him." Rabbi Eleazar said, "The reward that is paid for giving charity is directly related to the kindness with which it is given." Deuteronomy 15:10 cautions, "Your heart shall not be grieved when you give."

Everyone is required to give *tzedakah* according to her means. Even the poorest Jews, those who need help themselves, are expected to put aside something from what they receive in order to give *tzedakah*. But that poor Jew's tiny donation is as great as the large donation of the wealthiest. (If making a donation would impair the impecunious Jew's ability to sustain himself, he is absolved from giving. The doctrine of *pikuach nefesh* ["saving a life"] applies here: he must not endanger his life to perform this mitzvah.) It is forbidden to turn away a poor person empty-handed, but if one truly cannot give, a Jew is expected to at least offer words of comfort. (Excerpted from *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals* by George Robinson.)

Gemilut Hasadim, literally meaning "the giving of loving-kindness," is a fundamental social value in the everyday lives of Jews. It is a mitzvah that an individual completes *gemilut hasadim* without the anticipation of receiving something in return. There is no fixed measure of *gemilut hasadim*, which is one reason why rabbinic teachers articulate the importance of doing it all the time. Some examples of *gemilut hasadim* include clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, burying the dead, and visiting the sick.

The *Talmud* teaches that *gemilut hasadim* is more important than *tzedakah* (charity) for three distinct reasons: charity can be provided only to the poor, while *gemilut hasadim* can be given to the rich and poor; charity can only be given to the living, while *gemilut hasadim* can be bestowed upon the living or dead (by attending a funeral service); and, charity can only be offered with money, while *gemilut hasadim* can be given through money or assistance. The highest level of *gemilut hasadim*, is to attend a funeral service. This is because the dead have no future opportunity to repay the kindness. Ultimately, Jews can show faithfulness in the laws of God by performing acts of *gemilut hasadim*.

Discussion opportunity: What is the relationship of tzedakah and gemilut hasadim to tikkun?

WEEK ELEVEN

Maimonides Ladder

Discussion Opportunity: Although Maimonides Ladder uses the lens of money giving, we should consider it through the perspective of relationship. After examining the rungs of the ladder and doing an exercise relating to them, participants should discuss the implied attitudes of relationship embodied in the view of each rung.

Maimonides, Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (also known as Rambam) was born in 1135 and spent his early years moving from place to place to escape the religious persecutions taking place in Spain and North Africa. Eventually he settled in Cairo, Egypt, where he served as the court physician. Somehow, in spite of his difficulties and wanderings, Rambam became the greatest Jewish scholar of all time. At 16 he wrote a book on the terminology of logic. At 23 he began The Book of Light, a commentary on the Mishnah. At age 55 he finished his great philosophic work The Guide for the Perplexed. He died in 1204.

MAIMONIDES' LADDER OF CHARITY

There are eight levels of Tzedakah, each is higher than the other.

1. The highest rung of tzedakah is to help a person become self-sufficient
2. The next highest rung is when the person giving doesn't know the person receiving and when the person receiving doesn't know the giver
3. The next rung: The giver knows the receiver, but the person receiving doesn't know the giver
4. The next: the giver doesn't know the receiver, but the person receiving knows the giver
5. Next: a direct donation to the hand of the needy (given without being asked)
6. Next: a direct donation of sufficient size (given after being asked)
7. Next: a direct donation of small size, given cheerfully (after being asked)
8. Last: a direct, small donation given grudgingly (after being asked)

AN EXERCISE WITH THE MAIMONIDES LADDER

The Donors

Below are eight people who do tzedakah. Order them from the person who gives tzedakah in the best way to the person who gives tzedakah in the least way. Number them from 1-8. with #1 being the best kind of giver.

Marc

Marc has lots of money. He picks out people who he thinks both need and deserve help. Then he changes their lives. He finds them a job, makes a gift of money or in some way sees to it that these people can begin to build a new life for themselves. Marc never lets the individuals he helps know that he was involved, but he keeps a scrapbook of the people he has helped and how

heir lives have been changed. Outside of these private projects, Marc gives only minor amounts of money to other causes. **Rung**_____

Buddy

Buddy has a lots of money, too, but he doesn't want to have anything to do with tzedakah (or with most other people.) Every year, he takes 10% of his earnings and gives them to his lawyer. The lawyer is instructed to use her own discretion in giving the money away. If someone asks Buddy for a donation or for help, he simply tells them to call his lawyer. This even goes for hisfamily members who have, on occasion, come upon hard times. **Rung**_____

Gretchen Kaufman

Gretchen Kaufman is a housewife. She spends one day a week doing good. Part of the day she works at a soup kitchen ;the rest of the day she goes to the hospital and visits people who might have no other visitor. She collects toys and clothes and makes lots of phone calls. She will do anything to help people, but she doesn't like it when people ask her for money. She won't give a penny to a beggar or to a solicitor or in response to a mail request. **Rung**_____

Tammy

Tammy is a young successful accountant. Every time she goes to a store, she puts her spare change in the puske at the register. She gives a quarter to every beggar who asks. She will send \$10-25 in response to every solicitation she receives in the mail, and she will call and make the same kind of pledge to every charity telethon. Tammy is always glad to give. In total, these donations amount to less than 2% of her income. **Rung**_____

Norman

Norman hates it when people ask him for money .Here is a typical example of the way he operates The person from the Jewish Campaign will call and ask him if he would like to give the same pledge he made last year. Norman yells at the solicitor. "You are always bothering me. I'm sick of the phone calls and the bleeding heart stories." Just when the solicitor is ready to hang up, Norman tells him," Don't go – you made me feel guilty. I had a good year, increase my pledge by 10%. **Rung**_____

Sammy

Sammy runs a chain of supermarkets. Many of his markets are in the poor sections of town. In these stores his prices are often 5-10% higher than in the better parts of town. He also has been accused of using "bait and switch" tactics. Sammy sponsors Little League and soccer teams. He is one of the few big business people who work with the local schools to give minority teenagers jobs in his stores. He also started a work-study program for his employees to help them work their way through college. **Rung**_____

Sylvia

Sylvia is an aging widow from a rich and well-known Jewish family. She set up a scholarship fund at a local university. A large amount of money is given annually fro this fund in hr family name. She knows nothing of the students who receive the money. But each of the students must do some research into her family's history. This (not need or academic ability) is the single condition of the scholarship. Sylvia wants her family's name preserved. **Rung**_____

Abe and Ruth Chevrah

Abe and Ruth are a young couple. Abe is a dental hygienist and Ruth is a construction engineer. They belong to their local synagogue and are active in a chavurah. Each year the members of the chavurah pool all their charitable donations into one fund. The members each give 12% of their income (before taxes) to the fund. Together, the chavurah members research various charities and people in need, then meet to allocate their Tzedakah Fund. Abe and Ruth are very active in the group and feel that their participation is their “fair share.” **Rung**

It may have been easy for Rambam to create eight simple levels of giving. His rungs of tzedakah serve as good models for us, but applying them to the real world is far more difficult. You can't look at a person's actions and say, “He's on rung 5.” People are complex and the world is complex. In trying to get a better handle on the ways we should give tzedakah, Rambam leaves us with three values we should apply: 1.

1. Effectiveness – Does the tzedakah we give actually fit the need?
2. Fairness- Is the amount we give a fair share of our ability and in keeping with our responsibility?
3. Kavod – Does the way in which our tzedakah is given treat the recipient with dignity?

	Effectiveness	Fairness	Kavod	Final Rank
<u>Marc</u>				
<u>Buddy</u>				
<u>Gretchen</u>				
<u>Tammy</u>				
<u>Norman</u>				
<u>Sammy</u>				
<u>Sylvia</u>				
<u>Abe and Ruth Chevrah</u>				

This exercise was meant to be difficult and frustrating. It may be impossible to judge these eight mitzvah doers and rank them from 1-8. There are things about each which we admire, yet here are also actions which we see as selfish or shortsighted. This is the way of real people. This is the real world.

CONCLUSION

Concluding discussion

Discussion opportunity: Conduct a summary discussion of the Study Guide material and assess the groups desire to go further and to experience these ideas in the context of action.

This Study and Contemplation Guide has presented the perspectives on giving and service which are fundamental to being a Jew. The range of practicing them is broad. Hopefully an outcome of this group study has been to provide inspiration and knowledge to newcomers to volunteering and to provide support to active volunteers.

The need for your participation is immeasurable so that not only from the Jewish spiritual side but from the side of society, there is an invitation to participate, to engage. There are countless human social problems. Inclusiveness is one of the key words. By providing true hospitality to the hungry, sheltering the homeless, we can offer tangible relief from the suffering of fellow human beings. By reaching out to newcomers and greeting visitors with warmth we make the world a little more intimate, a little more caring. Usually the people in need are not seen as real people but as modern lepers, the secular equivalent of an untouchable.

Hospitality that leaves a segment of humanity out of the picture not only is less than inadequate but also is a denial of the presence of God's image in all people...The Torah teaches that there will always be needy people (Deuteronomy 15:11)

Care for the needy is a recognition that in a sense we are all one another's guest, or, perhaps, that every one of us, representing God's love to one another, must play the role of host on God's behalf... Rather than allowing us to abandon contemporary society, with its rush, its transience, and its outcasts, rather than allowing us to surrender to a faceless world of institutions and anonymity, these mitzvot reveal to us the human face in our midst and restore the caring heart to its rightful place in contemporary life. The torah does not obligate us to pursue the mitzvot, but only to fulfill them at the proper time, at the appropriate occasion.
Numbers Rabbah 19:27

Some Values that Jews fulfill through Community

1. *Ahavat Reah* - Love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus 19:18)
2. *Hachnasat Orchim* - Hospitality (as in Genesis 18:1.9)
3. *Bikkur Cholim* - Visiting the Sick (as in Genesis 18:1.9)
4. *Hiddur p'nay zakayn* - Respect for the elderly - "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the elderly .. " (Leviticus 19:32)
5. *Tzedek* - Social Justice - "Justice, justice shall you pursue ... "
(Deuteronomy 16 :20)
6. *Shalom* - Pursuit of peace - "Be as the sons of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving all people ... " (*Mishnah Avot* 1: 12)
7. *K'vod Ha-mayt* - Honoring the dead
8. *Nichum Avaylim* - Comforting the bereaved
9. *Gemilut Chasadim* - Acts of lovingkindness - "The world is sustained by three things: Torah (study), worship, and acts of lovingkindness." (*Pirke Avot* 1:2)
10. *Avodat Hakadosh* - sacred communal worship

Resources

These resources may not be exclusively from Jewish sources but they can all make a contribution to the development of volunteer service.

Artson, Bradley Shavit. *It's a Mitzvot*.

Babylonian Talmud

Ben Naimon, Rabbi Moshe (Maimonides). *The Book of Light
A Guide for the Perplexed*

Friedman, Rabbi Edwin. *Generation to Generation*

Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua .*Assorted Internet Sites presenting quotes from the Rabbi.*

Kushner, Lawrence. *The Book of Miracles*.

Luria, Rabbi Yitzach. *Apples from the Orchard*

Robinson, George. *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals*.

Shapiro, Rabbi Rami. *Open Secrets, the Letters of Reb Yerachniel ben
Yisrael*

Senge, Peter. The Fifth Discipline

The Old Testament

Wilson, Marlene. *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*.

When the Group is Ready

Choose a Volunteer Service Project

1. Is the group ready? Take a consensus.
2. If the general feeling is that people are inspired, and would like to try a volunteer project take the next step which is to explore possible areas for projects.
3. Discuss with whom you would prefer to work: children, youth at risk, single moms, prisoners, families, elderly, the disabled, animal welfare, environmental situations. Pick one area.
4. Would you prefer to volunteer as a group, or are you willing to work in one on one situations, and then bring your volunteer experience back for group discussion?
5. How much time would you like to spend: a morning, a day, one day a week for a period of time, as long as the project may take? The suggestion is to start small and see how it goes.
6. Contact the Volunteer Connection which hosts information for several hundreds of community projects. It is located at 2885 E Aurora Ave, Ste 32. It is best to call for an appointment to review the project listings, 303 444 4904 or email vc@volunteerconnection.net. You can also check out project listings on the website www.volunteernconnect.net

Miranda Dettmann, the Administrative Assistant sends out selected project listings to faith-based organizations on a weekly basis. She would be happy to add your congregation to the list of recipients.

7. The experience of the volunteer project should become the topic of a further session of the study group. Did the rubber hit the road? How did peoples' experiences relate to teshuva, tikkun, tikkun hanefesh and tikkun haolam?

Futures: Long-Term Service Opportunities

When and if the group or your congregation reaches the point that they would like, either as a group or as individual volunteers, to commit to ongoing service. Please contact Restoring the soul: Faith and Community Partnerships at 303-938-9916 or restoringthesoul@netzero.com We would be delighted to help you select a long-term project for collaboration with a service agency.

Our goal is to support a new paradigm in volunteering: Collaborations are formed in direct relationship to the capacity of the partners. Faith communities offer to provide anywhere from 3 to 50 or more volunteers on an ongoing basis, depending on their capacity at a given time. A collaboration might consist of more than one congregation partnering with an agency with a flexible number of volunteers from each, thereby meeting the total number of volunteers needed for a particular project. The ongoing needs of Boulder County human service agencies are so extensive that valuable partnerships can be formed to meet a range of criteria.

Innovative Approaches

We have defined a new volunteer arena for this project. Human service agencies have said that volunteerism is crucial to their operations but often, in terms of bottom line, the time it takes to put short-term projects in place, train and oversee them, is very costly. Restoring the Soul has undertaken to ask faith communities to commit to several year's support of a project. In this way, even if individual volunteers only commit to serve for six months, the faith community itself has committed to man the project for several years, enrolling additional volunteers from its congregation as necessary. This allows the service agency to actually build a long-term program on the basis of the faith community's commitment. This is an exciting paradigm for collaboration.

The second innovative approach is in response to faith communities' desire to build the strength of their own community while serving others. Often a volunteer project, such as mentoring, is based on a one-to-one relationship. The faith community cannot act as a group in the project, which is often the preferred format. The model that we are encouraging, and which has drawn significant interest, is the creation of a study group within the congregation made up of its volunteers. The study group explores the meaning of service within the particular spiritual path, both historically in scripture and commentary, and in the personal experience of service. The procedure enriches the volunteers and reinforces internal community. We are also in the process of formulating a model for interfaith study groups, in which all the faiths in a particular collaboration meet and share the history and experience of service