

Danny Siegel's Principles of Tzedakah

1. There are three essential elements in my approach to Tikkun Olam: (a) Mitzvah heroes, (b) Jewish texts, and (c) *doing* acts of Tzedakah and Gemillut Chassadim (using our time, energy, and effort for acts of caring, loving kindness).

2. My writings illustrate how these three elements interact at different times and in different situations for the ultimate benefit of the recipient.

3. Mitzvah heroes are everywhere — both sexes, every age (the ones I have met are from 7-98), every body shape (endomorph, mesomorph, or ectomorph), articulate or not, frumpy or dandy, gorgeous or as plain as can be.

4. Mitzvah heroes are experts, and they are our best Tikkun Olam teachers. Their area of specialization is Life.

5. The study of Jewish texts broadens our understanding of the all-important terms “Tzedakah”, “Gemillut Chassadim”, “Mitzvahs”, “Tikkun Olam”, and “Kavod”.

6. It's *not* the thought that counts, it's the doing, the action that changes the world. While strategies, long-range planning, and society-theory are crucial Tikkun Olam subjects to digest, ultimately it all comes down to *doing* — particularly “in the interim” while the long-range plans are being worked out.

7. Philosophizing about Tikkun Olam never takes the place of acts of Tzedakah and Gemillut Chassadim. Occasionally even, too much thought, research, and planning can be counterproductive.

8. Oxymoron though it appears to be, our tradition *requires* us to care and to give.

9. There is still abundant room for חלוציות-*Chalutzit*, pioneering, not only in Israel, but everywhere. If it is your nature to be a pioneer, look for opportunities to break new Mitzvah-ground. Innovation and radical change in Tikkun Olam activity can occur no less radically than it has in the world of computers.

10. If there, then here: A high percentage of our Mitzvah heroes' programs are replicable. If you like what they are doing, learn from them how to do it in your own community.

11. גל תשחית-Bal Tashchit, senseless waste also applies most definitely to Tzedakah money. Jewish tradition requires us to distribute our personal Tzedakah money judiciously.

12. There is no such thing as a “small” donation. If we do the appropriate research, every dollar, every penny, can make a difference.

13. Tikkun Olam is *not* all of Judaism. Jewish history, ritual, community, the centrality of Israel in our personal lives, and Hebrew language (to name a few), are no less a crucial part of what it means to be a Jew.

14. Our emphasis has always been on *personalized* Tzedakah and Tikkun Olam.

15. Human quality of Life and the condition of the world do *not* remain the same throughout history. Equal quantities of The Bad Things need not exist tomorrow.

16. Every individual has much greater power to change the lives of others for the better than he or she previously ever thought possible.

17. There *can* be an intimate connection between Mitzvahs and meaning-in-Life and Mitzvahs and personal happiness. HAMA's Avshalom Beni, interpreting the Talmudic text (Sukkah 52a) אורחין רחיקא וצוותין בסימא - *Orchin rachika vetzavtin basima* translates, "Our long road to being [through Mitzvahs] has been pleasant because we do it together."

18. We may discover new talents in ourselves, a greater personal depth, and new good feelings about ourselves when we engage in Tikkun Olam with a Mitzvah hero.

19. Though donors reap many benefits — among them good feelings, peace of mind, Life-perspective, a sense of personal and human accomplishment — the recipient of what our Tzedakah money purchases *always* benefits more. Consider: Buying an infant car seat and donating it to a family that cannot afford one. Consider: My late father's classmate who graduated from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathy, class of 1940, because some rich person (I think unknown to the student) "just wanted to put someone through med school." Consider: Fuel for Angel Pilots who fly patients from remote areas to uncongested airports for critical treatments.

20. The same is true for Gemillut Chassadim, Consider: The coat that you brought to Mississippi and gave to someone whose home was swept away in the storm, and who was so cold it tore your heart out.

21. **Not the least important:** It's all right to feel good about your Mitzvah work. It releases more endorphins and provides greater stamina and vigor to continue.

Danny Siegel
www.dannysiegel.com