

# Cantor's Corner



Ways of Tzedakah

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*Presenting our new monthly column from Cantor Michael Rumack, sharing with us stories from his rich background and personal experiences.*

In our frenetic modern world, we often think in terms of **giving tzedakah instead of doing tzedakah**. In fact, our sages emphasize that the most altruistic and ultimately beneficial form of tzedakah is to provide the means for people to help themselves and become self-sufficient as a result. Two separate visits on my recent trip to Israel reminded me of this important distinction.

I joined my sister's carpentry class on their annual excursion to visit unique artists and craftspeople throughout the country. Our first stop was an immense state of the art woodworking factory in the Lower Galilee that produced children's toys, wagons and wall décor, sold worldwide. All 135 of the factory workers were individuals with varying degrees of special needs. While some could operate the complicated, computer-controlled machinery under supervision, others could do no more than sand blocks by hand, grouped around a table for mutual support. Each person however, was considered a full member of the Moshav (settlement), and once accepted, remained for life. They are able to enjoy the many social activities provided in addition to the dignity and satisfaction of having a meaningful, productive job. The factory is able to sustain an equal number of paid professionals to provide the technical support to the primary residents.

My second experience was very different, but equally enlightening. I was privileged to go on a personal walking tour of Meah Shearim the Ultra-Orthodox enclave in the part of Jerusalem, now inaccessible to most formal tourist groups. My guide was a close family friend of over 40 years, Nechama Ben Eliyahu; teacher, author, broadcaster and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Jerusalem resident. Our first stop, Nechama explained, was the Yemenite Quarter, established in the 1880's by the initial wave of immigrants from Yemen. What distinguishes this area physically is the significantly reduced height of doors and the very narrow outside

stairways. As the Yemenite people are by nature small in stature, they were able to save space, material and expense as they built the entire quarter themselves after being taught "en masse" the professional building techniques through the philanthropy of Moses Montefiore. Their benefactor wanted to ensure their future by "donating" very practical knowledge and skills to the entire community when they arrived.

I hope that we, communally and individually, can take inspiration from these examples to share our knowledge and expertise, by **doing tzedakah, to be an agent of change**, by helping the less fortunate become self-reliant, contributing members to society. Although giving a little **loose change can also be a blessing**.

**B'shalom, Cantor Michael**