



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT RE'EH

The Best Financial Advice You'll Ever Hear

High blood pressure has long been recognized as one of the silent epidemics of the modern world. It quietly damages the heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and brain, often progressing unnoticed until it manifests as a life-threatening event. Physicians routinely recommend dietary changes, exercise, weight loss, stress reduction, and medications to bring elevated blood pressure under control. Yet several years ago, researchers explored a treatment that would sound almost absurd in a doctor's office.

They recruited adults with hypertension and gave each participant a sum of money every week. Half were instructed to spend it on themselves in any way they wished, while the other half were required to spend the money on someone else. The researchers expected that both groups might enjoy a temporary emotional boost. What they did not expect was that those who consistently spent their money helping others experienced measurable reductions in blood pressure — improvements that were comparable to the benefits often associated with well-established lifestyle interventions. [1]

The findings were remarkable not simply because generosity made people feel happier, but because it appeared to produce tangible physiological effects. An act that seems entirely outward-facing — giving to another person — was simultaneously healing the giver. Modern medicine has become increasingly aware that emotional well-being, purpose, and meaningful human connection are deeply intertwined with physical health. Chronic stress, loneliness, and isolation place enormous strain on the cardiovascular system, while acts of compassion and generosity can foster a sense of purpose, reduce psychological distress, and even influence measurable biological outcomes. In other words, the human heart is not merely a mechanical pump governed by physiology alone; it is profoundly shaped by the choices, relationships, and values that define a person's life.

Perhaps this should not surprise us as much as it does. Long before researchers could measure blood pressure with precision or analyze stress hormones in a laboratory, the Torah taught that acts of giving possess a transformative power extending far beyond the recipient. Charity is never portrayed merely as a financial transaction; it refines the giver, elevates the soul, and, in ways both visible and invisible, brings blessing back upon the one who gives. Modern science may have only recently begun to quantify these effects, but it is, in many respects, rediscovering a truth that Judaism has cherished for millennia.

"Tithe, you shall tithe" (Deut. 14:22) is a command written in this

week's parsha. Using a play on the Hebrew wording (עשר תעשר), our Sages expound: "tithe so that you will become wealthy" (עשר (בשביל שתתעשר). As clear from the Talmud and countless stories throughout Jewish history, this rule holds ground not just in the literal sense but in a deeper one, too. As we learn in Pirkei Avot (4:1): *Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot.* Aside from guaranteeing material success, acts of charity bestow happiness and tranquility to those who perform them.

One of the most unique things about the Jewish people is the sheer amount of organizations that collectively deal with literally any problem under the sun. And in the slightest chance that there exists a communal need that hasn't been addressed, rest assured that someone will open a *gemach* to handle it. As the amazing nation that we are, we are often confronted — or even *bombarded*, some may feel — with *tzedaka* campaigns. Whether it be for a yeshiva, shul, a family in need, or the myriad of organizations that exist within the broad Jewish communities worldwide, the fundraisers never seem to end. At times people can view these appeals as annoying and abundant; however, we must remember that giving is not a burden but a privilege. Find a cause that speaks to you, a mission that you resonate with, and when you give, realize that your contribution is a Godly act of being a giver.

Compassion and generosity have always been in our DNA. In recent years, roughly half of America's 25 largest philanthropists have been Jewish, despite Jews making up only about 2% of the U.S. population. While these individuals often give to a wide range of secular causes, the statistic underscores the outsized role Jews have played in American philanthropy [2]. And although Jews comprise only about 2% of the American population, roughly three out of every four Jewish households donate to charity each year — a significantly higher participation rate than the general U.S. population. [3]

In displaying that we use our material blessing not just for selfish purposes but to think and care about others, G-d promises to return that blessing with abundance. Not just with more money, but as modern science shows, with more health and happiness, too. Sometimes, one of the most effective ways to care for one's own heart is to use it in service of someone else.

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/16/wellbeing-selfcare-other-care-psychology-social>

[2] <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2024-8-1-report-examines-the-motivations-that-shape-american-jewish-giving>

[3] <https://www.jta.org/2013/09/03/united-states/survey-jewish-americans-are-more-generous-than-non-jews>