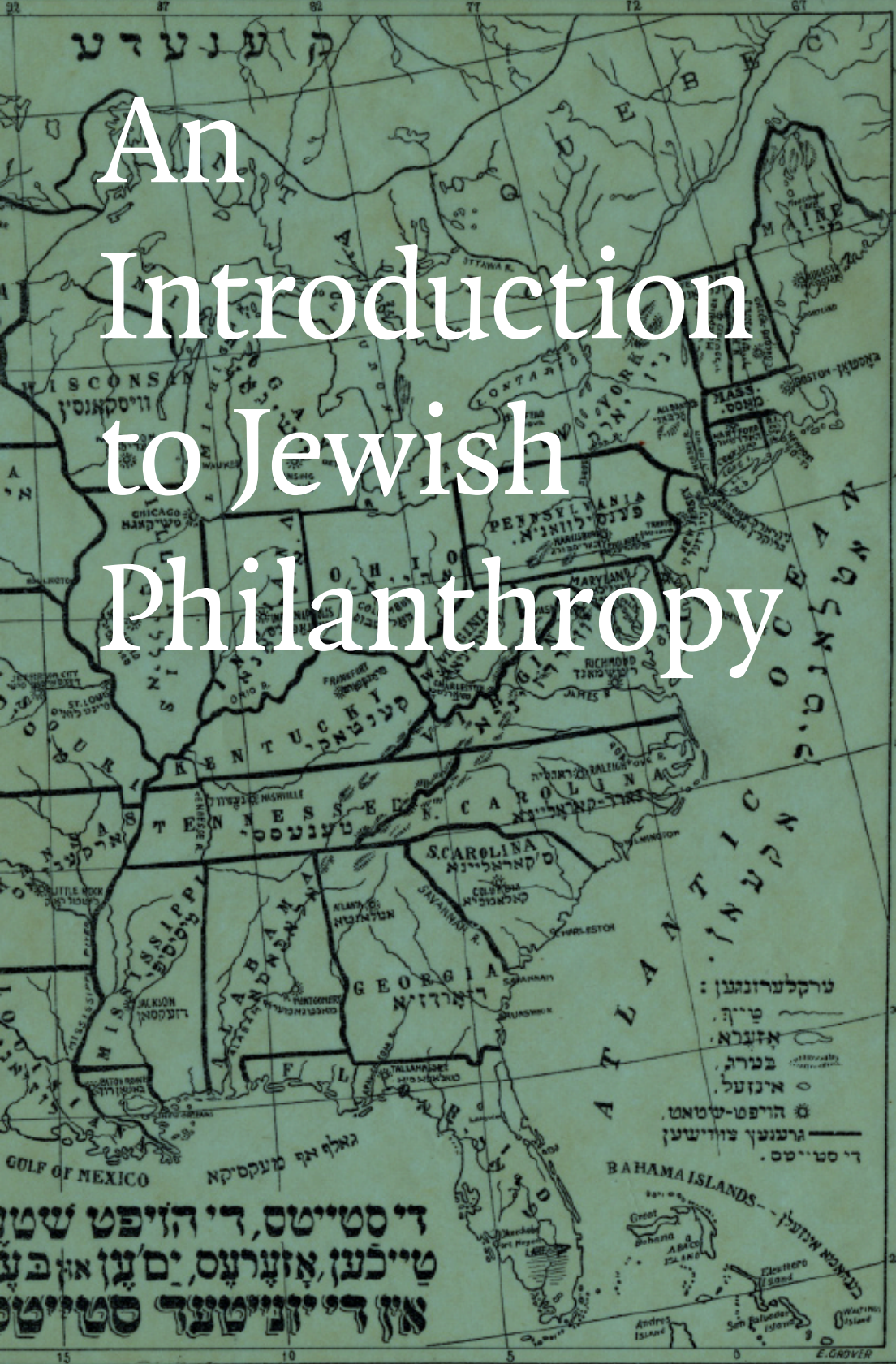


# An Introduction to Jewish Philanthropy



טורקלערוזונגען  
פירק  
אדענא  
בערג  
אינדעל  
הויפט-שטיט  
גרענעץ פון ייִשען  
די סטייטס.

די סטייטס, די הויפט שטיט  
טייען, אדערעס, ים'ען און בע  
אין די יוניטעד סטייטס



Cover & this page

Detail of United States map  
(date and provenance unknown)  
perhaps used by Educational  
Alliance in citizenship classes  
in the early 20th century.

Collection of the American  
Jewish Historical Society

עזרת  
עירי  
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*Contributors to the Cause* is a traveling exhibition that explores the ways in which Jewish philanthropists in America contributed to the formation of the United States; organized around charitable causes; established synagogues; built hospitals; improved the daily lives of working Americans; championed Israel; and forged the Soviet Jewry Movement and the future of Jewish philanthropy.

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רמבם

השלום א'  
אהרן חומי

## The Hebrew word for charity, *zedakah*,

has its root in the word for justice, evidence that charity was a social as much as a theological value in Jewish life. The history of Jewish charity is, therefore, to be examined not only in Jewish religious thought, but also in daily life, where it has been practiced for thousands of years over most of the globe. The mechanisms for Jewish giving have differed over time and from place to place, though the desire to create a society of greater justice, which expresses the values each generation of Jews has held dear, has been a guiding principle throughout. The roots of *zedakah* are found in the Bible, for although the term is not explicitly mentioned there, the obligation to care for the poor, needy and disadvantaged is given heavy emphasis. For Jews and others in the ancient world, poor relief was an essential religious obligation, one that allotted merit in heaven to the donor.

The Talmud gives more detail on the mechanics of charitable giving, outlining specific institutions to be established in Jewish communities: the *kuppah*, a collection of funds to be distributed to the poor on a weekly basis, and the *tamhuy*, a daily food distribution for the needy. This ideal was implemented differently in Jewish communities throughout the diaspora. Maimonides, writing in twelfth-century Egypt, famously describes that while he did not know of any community that did not

have a *kuppah*, not all communities had a *tamhuy*. Indeed, communities across the medieval world had different levels of communally organized public charity. Some northern European communities

Maimonides

Arthur Szyk (1894–1951)  
Watercolor and gouache on paper  
New Canaan, Connecticut, 1950

Collection of Yeshiva University Museum  
Gift of Louis Werner

lacked even the basic apparatus for collecting charity, while others had a *kuppah* as well as a communal hospice.

Alongside these public forms of charity, private giving by both men and women flourished. In certain European communities, poor relief was primarily provided voluntarily by individual donors, with special fundraising tasked to officially appointed collectors, called *gabba'ei tzedakah*, who collected money as the need arose. On occasion, female *gabba'ot/gabbetes* could be appointed to collect among the women.

As Jewish communal organization became more sophisticated, it took on the role of implementing the Jewish value of charitable giving. Public forms of donation became increasingly standardized, and communal charity was often mandated in the same way as taxes. By the seventeenth century, elite members of both Eastern and Western European communities were appointed to run these official funds and institutions, the demands on whose charitable resources grew dramatically. Money was now collected for the local and foreign poor, Jewish captives, the poor of the land of Israel and the incessant waves of refugees fleeing various persecutions.

Alongside the development of communal infrastructure aimed at caring for and regulating the presence of local poor, individual donors increasingly opted to support the causes they espoused through specially formed local institutions—a Europe-wide trend in these years. Benevolent societies for visiting the sick, burying the dead, and dowering poor brides were founded for both men and women. Participation in these societies, and particularly appointment to the role of charity-collector, conferred status and power that was often sought by wealthy Jews.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a new range of supra communal institutions with new demands began to arise, including the Lithuanian Yeshivot and the Hasidic Courts of Eastern Europe, both of which were advanced through the pledges of concerned Jews. Although this was

Workmen's Circle Camp  
souvenir book. 1930

Collection of  
American Jewish  
Historical Society

# ארבייטער רינג קעמפ בוד

1930



ספרות

פסח	269	כהן	ישיבת כהן	1.00
		אוי	ספר (השקפה)	87
	402	לשון	יהודה וירושלם	5.00
	393	היסטוריה	אורח חיים	4.00
	354	חשבון	גם ספרות	9.00
	254	פסיכ	לשון ספרות	4.00
	247	הג	ישיבת ארז	1.00
	368	ת	לשון עם ספרות	1.00
	333	כהן יוסף	ישיבת ארז	3.00
	356	לשון	מה יהיה בני	3.00
	262	היסט	הקולנוע	3.00
	305	חשב	היסטוריה קיימת	3.00
	288	פסיכ	ישיבת ארז	14.00
	"	פ	" "	5.00
	395	הג	הג' בירושלם	88
		ת	מה לשון	2.00
		ה	לשון	89
	301	הג	לשון הישיבה	1.00
שנה	273	ת	הישיבת קהל	2.00
	255	כהן	מהי לשון	3.00
	336	לשון	קולנוע	1.00
	357	היסט	היסטוריה קיימת	1.00
	341	חשב	לשון אוסטרליה	3.00
	304	לשון	מהי לשון וירושלם	3.00
	332	היסט	יהודה ארז	1.00
	281	פסיכ	לשון בירושלם	3.00
		59 קולנוע	היסטוריה	90
		205 היסטוריה	קולנוע	91
פסח	280	כהן	ישיבת ארז	4.00
	353	אוי	מהי לשון ארז	3.00
	326	לשון	ישיבת ארז	4.00
	313	היסט	קולנוע	3.00
	316	חשב	לשון קולנוע	4.00
	315	פסיכ	אורח חיים	4.00
ח פסח	279	כהן	אורח חיים ישיבת ארז	12.00
	307	לשון	קולנוע	2.00
	398	היסט	פילוסופיה	4.00
	346	לשון	אורח חיים	3.00
	298	פסיכ	מהי השקפה	10.00
		הג' 74 קולנוע	היסטוריה	92
		1 אוסטרליה	היסטוריה	93
		הג' ישיבת ארז	הג' ישיבת ארז	94



not the first time that scholars and religious leaders were supported by charitable donation, these cases point to a shift from local charity to broader philanthropic donation. Of course, the Hasidic courts often used their incomes to help the needy, but they were never obliged to do so and could also use the funds for conspicuous consumption on the part of their leaders.

In Western Europe, the emancipation of the Jews and granting them citizenship as individuals also changed the face of charitable giving. Since participation in the Jewish community and its institutions became voluntary, poor relief could no longer be mandated as part of communal taxation. Nonetheless, social expectations and norms continued to serve as factors “obligating” donors to help the Jewish poor. The rise of this voluntary philanthropy, in which women played key roles, was also encouraged by the increasing *embourgeoisement* of Jewish society.

As western Jews became more integrated into the general society of the countries in which they lived, patterns of donation broadened still further, with non-Jewish charities and organizations becoming beneficiaries. Still, much money was donated to institutions aimed at improving the lot of poor Jews by helping them internalize the values of western society. This effort flourished particularly in the international arena, with figures such as Moses Montefiore and newly founded organizations such as the Alliance Israelite Universelle active internationally, providing financial, political and educational support for disadvantaged Jews worldwide.

In the twentieth century, it was largely Jews in the United States who gave new impetus to Jewish charitable giving. The status afforded to Jews in the Bill of Rights had created voluntary membership in the Jewish community from the colonial period onward. Donations, too, had been voluntary, and organized through the synagogues. This changed toward the

Donations given to the Eldridge Street Synagogue in exchange for the honor of being called to the Torah. 1904

This record is from Passover time and notes the Torah portions assigned to each honoree.

Collection of American Jewish Historical Society

end of the nineteenth century, with the influx of a mass of extremely poor Eastern European Jewish immigrants who knew neither English nor anything of American society. Charitable giving shifted to include a wide range of independent institutions aimed at helping immigrants survive and, particularly, integrate. Prominent among these was the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and women's organizations such as the National Council of Jewish Women.

The American Jewish community continued to support Jews internationally. Concern for the plight of family and friends in the Old Country led individuals to remit a great deal of money to Eastern Europe. This also led to the creation of charitable institutions and, eventually, the Joint Distribution Committee. A competing force on the international stage was the nascent Zionist movement, which raised increasingly large sums of money to support Jewish settlement in the land of Israel. Here, too, women's organizations, such as WIZO and Hadassah, played a major role.

Within the United States, much Jewish philanthropy was directed at specifically Jewish institutions such as hospitals, schools and institutions of higher education, especially in the early part of the twentieth century, when Jewish integration into wider American society was still in question. As Jewish society began to feel more confident about its place in the United States, patterns of philanthropy changed again. With children of immigrant families moving up the socio-economic ladder, less money was needed for directly charitable causes. Jewish institutions, perhaps because they were felt to symbolize a separatist Jewish existence, also became less popular, with more money devoted to causes not specifically Jewish.

On the other hand, giving within the Jewish community continued. The young state of Israel, facing massive problems of creating a western society under conditions of war, attracted huge amounts of money from American Jews, for whom it formed a crucial part of their Jewish identity. The struggle to allow Soviet Jewry freedom to migrate in the 1970s also played a similar role in Jewish identity building. The integration on the

home front came with intermarriage and the fear that American Jewish society and culture would cease to exist. To ensure “Jewish continuity” in the American environment, donations to universities and institutions of higher education in the last decades of the twentieth century included the establishment of a whole range of chairs and research institutions devoted to Jewish studies. A new generation of Jews educated in Jewish culture was thus created.

Looking back from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, the history of Jewish charity and philanthropy seems particularly dynamic, with new institutions and new goals developing in each new environment in which Jews found themselves. Nonetheless, some continuities can still be seen: Jewish charitable giving always seemed to express the donors’ quest to improve the society in which they lived and to strengthen the values on which they wished to base it. The goals of giving also exhibited much continuity. In addition to helping the poor and needy, Jews throughout the ages also devoted much of their money to strengthening Jewish education, supporting those Jews who chose to live in the land of Israel and rescuing Jews who were under various threats. Finally, though a whole range of charitable and philanthropic institutions developed over the centuries, the responsibility for giving was always felt by individuals across gender lines.

As the changing social and economic climate of the new millennium leads to further changes in the world of Jewish philanthropy, these trends will continue to shape the new forms it takes.

Debra Kaplan, Yeshiva University

Adam Teller, Brown University

Debra Kaplan and Adam Teller presented on the history of Jewish philanthropy at a special event for philanthropists, professionals and communal leaders hosted by the Center for Jewish History and the Jewish Funders Network.

Debra Kaplan was also a co-convener of the Center’s international symposium “History of Jewish Giving: Jews and Charity” in October 2012.



CANADA

NORTH-DAKOTA

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SOUTH-DAKOTA

IOWA

NEBRASKA

WYOMING

COLORADO

KANSAS

OKLAHOMA

INDIAN TERRITORY

NEW MEXICO

NEW MEXICO

ARIZONA

TEXAS

טעט  
צערט  
אויס