3 Things to Remember When Doing Mityrahs

1. Mitzvahs give us the power of life and death.

We can save lives. Anyone. Through Mitzvahs.

I have asked thousands of teen-agers, "How many of you have a parent who is in a life-saving profession?" Almost every single hand raised was from a child of a doctor.

Incomplete answer. Wrong answer.

All of us are in a life-saving profession. Just consider the well-known and truly awesome teaching from the Talmud (Mishna Sanhedrin, Chapter 4, end):

וכל המקים נפש אחת... מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו קים עולם מלא....

...Whoever saves a single life — it is as if that person had saved an entire world.

For nearly 30 years a considerable portion of my Mitzvah work has been devoted to preventing people from dying or suffering for all the wrong reasons. To put it more bluntly, many people are in pain and without hope for all the wrong reasons. Just a few of those reasons are in anguish and danger include loneliness, helplessness, boredom, powerlessness, uselessness, chronic human unhappiness, fatigue of the spirit and weariness of the soul; loss of the will-to-live, a sense of abandonment, wariness of those who mean well but perform poorly or maliciously — all their energies being exhausted fighting off *the good intentions* of those who harm them in the name of their personal health and welfare, and not being listened to when they say what is in their hearts because they wouldn't look into their eyes while they were pouring out their hearts.

This so-called fact-of-life — "People die. What can I do about it?" — can be reversed significantly through Mitzvahs, as our tradition teaches us (Midrash on Psalms 41:3):

אמר ר' יונה...

מהו משכיל שמסתכל וחושב עליו היאך להחיותו

Rabbi Yonah said,

....The person-doing-Tzedakah should take an intense look at the Mitzvah situation at hand

71

3 Things to Remember When Doing Mitzvahs

and consider the best way to give the other person back his or her decent and dignified Life.

2. Judaism asks us to use all our talents and human resources — *all* of them — to solve difficult, even terrible, human situations. Our brains, our ability to sew, to dance, to hug, to dream, to use our imaginations, energy, wisdom and insight in any combination which best suits our own spiritual, physical, and psychological make-up. When we are fixing the world, every ability *can* be and *should* be put in the service of Mitzvahs, as our tradition teaches us (Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah 8:8):

א'ד יונה...

הרא דמסתכל במצוה היאך לעשותה

Rabbi Yonah said,

....The person-doing-Tzedakah should examine the Tzedakah-situation thoroughly

in order to find the best way possible to perform the Mitzvah.

3. Mitzvahs are a privilege...not a burden, not something to get credit for, not something to grumble about while doing them. A *privilege*, and surely one of Life's great blessings. Once again, our tradition addresses this all-important subject (Leviticus Rabba 34:1 [Margoliot 4:773]):

א"ר יונה...

חוי מסתכל בו היאך לזכות בו

Rabbi Yonah said,...

....The person-doing-Tzedakah should examine the Tzedakah-situation thoroughly

and keep in mind how *it is a privilege to do the Mitzvah* through that person.