

Danny Siegel's List of Useful Quotes About Mitzvahs, Tzedakah, and Gemillut Chassadim

I. Mitzvah Heroes/Role Models

1. Charismatic leaders make us think, "Oh, if only I could do that, be like that." True leaders make us think, "If they can do that, then...I can too." (*John Holt, Educator*)

2. "A time to embrace" (Ecclesiastes 3:5):

If you see a group of Tzaddikim-Good People standing near you, stand up and hug them and kiss them and hug them again.

עת לחבוק אם ראית כת של צדיקים עומדים עמוד וחבק ונשק וגפפם
(*Ecclesiastes Rabba 3:5, 1*)

3. When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people. (*Abraham Joshua Heschel, ז"ל*)

4. Rabbi Elazar Says: Tzaddikim-Good People say little and do much.

אמר רבי אלעזר...שצדיקים אומרים מעט ועושים הרבה (*Bava Metzia 87a*)

5. Rabbi Akiva says...: and whoever bonds with/hangs out with/sticks to people who do Mitzvahs – even though that person did not do as they did – that person still receives the same reward as the other person. (*Avot DeRabbi Natan A 30:3*)

רבי עקיבא אומר... וכל המדבק בעושי מצוה אף על פי אשל עשה כמעשיהם הרי זה מקבל שכר כיוצא בהן

6. Shimon [the son of Rabban Gamliel] says:

It is not what one says, but rather what one does,
that makes all the difference in the world. (*Pirke Avot 1:17*)

שמעון בנו אומר...ולא המדרש הוא העקר אלא המעשה

7. Nothing is so contagious as an example. We never do great good or great evil without bringing about more of the same on the part of others. (*La Rochefoucauld*)

II. Life/Being

1. There must be more to life than having everything. (*Maurice Sendak*)

2. We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

(Winston Churchill)

3. Tzedakah is not about giving;
Tzedakah is about being. (*Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson*)
4. To be is to stand for. (*Abraham Joshua Heschel, ל"ר*)
To be is to do. (*Myriam Mendilow, Founder of Life Line for the Old, ל"ר*)
To be Jewish is to be an idealist. (*Unknown Source*)
To be is to be-with-dignity. (*Anonymous*)
5. Living is not a private affair of the individual.
Living is what man does with God's time,
what man does with God's world. (*Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*)
6. The meaning of man's life lies in his perfecting the universe. He has to distinguish...and redeem the sparks of holiness scattered throughout the darkness of the world. (*Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*)
7. There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle. (*Einstein*)
8. It's not what you are, but what you don't become that hurts. (*Oscar Levant*)
- 9...every single person is required to say, "The whole world was created for my sake." (*Mishnah Sanhedrin, end of chapter 4*)
כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם.
10. The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And, the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference. Because of indifference one dies before one actually dies. (*Elie Wiesel*)
11. When the great, sweet Rabbi Zusia of Hanipol was on his deathbed, his students gathered all around him. The Teacher said to them:
When I get to the Next World, I am not afraid if God will ask me, "Zusia, why weren't you Moses, to lead the people out of this land where Jews are so oppressed and beaten by the people?" I can answer, "I did not have the leadership abilities of a Moses."
And if God asks, "Zusia, why weren't you Isaiah, reprimanding the people for their sins and urging them to change their ways, to repent?" I could answer, "I did not have the eloquence of Isaiah, the Great Master of powerful and dazzling speech."
And if God should ask, "Zusia, why weren't you Maimonides, to explain the deeper meaning of Judaism to the philosophers of the world, so they would understand the Jews better and perhaps treat them better?" I can answer, "I did not have the vast intellectual skills of Maimonides."

No, my students, I am not afraid of those questions. What I fear is this:
What if God asks me, “Zusia, why weren’t you Zusia?”
Then what will I say? (*Chassidic Tale*)

III. Mitzvahs and Mitzvah Power

1. For I have selected him [Abraham]
so that he may instruct his children and his posterity after him
to keep God’s ways:
to do what is just and right. [Tzedakah U’Mishpat] (*Genesis 18:19*)

כִּי יִדְעֶתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת־בְּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו
וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט

2. Rabbi Simla’i explained in a sermon:
The Torah begins and ends with acts of caring, loving kindness. (*Sotah 14a*)

דרש ר' שמלאי: תורה תחלתה גמילות חסדים וסופה גמילות חסדים

3. Whatever I want for myself,
I want the same for that other person.
And whatever I do not want for myself or my friends,
I do not want for that other person.
This is the meaning of the verse, “And you shall love the other person as yourself.”

וכל מה-שארצה לעצמי ארצה לו כמוהו
וכל-מה-שלא ארצה לעצמי ולידידי לא ארצה לו בשבילו כמוהו
והוא אמרו יתעלה ואהבת לרעך כמוך

(*Leviticus 19:18*) (*Maimonides, Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Mitzvah #206*)

4. Assuredly, thus says God:…
If you produce what is noble out of what is worthless,
You shall be My spokesperson. (*Jeremiah 15:19*)

לָכֵן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה...וְאִם־תּוֹצִיא יָקָר מִזּוּלָל כִּפְּי תִהְיֶה

5. [God says:] Just as I create worlds and bring the dead back to life,
you, human beings, are also capable of doing the same. (*Midrash Psalms 116:8*)

מה אני בורא עולמות ומחיה מתים אף אתם כן

6. Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing because he could
only do a little. (*Edmund Burke*)

7. Most of the things worth doing in the world had been declared impossible before
they were done. (*Justice Louis Brandeis*)

8. Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the

world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does. (*Margaret Mead*)

9. I would say to young people a number of things...I would say let them remember that ***there is meaning beyond absurdity***. Let them be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power, and that we can, everyone, do our share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and all the frustrations and all disappointments. (*Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*)

10. What we want to change we curse and then pick up a tool.
Bless whatever you can with eyes and hands and tongue.
If you can't bless it, get ready to make it new. (*Marge Piercy, poet*)

11. What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. (*Ralph Waldo Emerson*)

12. A person who runs to do just, good, and kind deeds
attains Life, success, and honor. (*Proverbs 21:21*)

רִדְף צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד יִמְצָא חַיִּים צְדָקָה וְכָבוֹד

13. This is happiness: to be dissolved into something completely great. (*Willa Cather*)

14. How wonderful it is that no one need wait a single moment to start to improve the world. (*Anne Frank*)

15. It is not the critic who counts, or how the strong man stumbled and fell, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; and if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that he will never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. (*Theodore Roosevelt*)

16. When I was younger, my dreams of what I hoped to write woke me from my soundest sleep. (*Stephen Dobyns, poet*)

17. Please make sure my red bear gets a good home. (*Lisa, a Jewish communal worker, on donating one of her favorite stuffed animals during her agency's campaign to provide for others.*)

18. Each man has inside him a basic decency and goodness. If he listens to it and acts on it, he is giving a great deal of what it is the world needs most. It is not complicated but it takes courage. ***It takes courage for a man to listen to his own goodness and act on it.*** (*Norman Cousins*)