JUSTICE, JUSTICE YOU SHALL PURSUE
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – August 9, 2013

1. This past Monday I participated in a conference call reviewing the findings of the new survey of American Jewish Giving in North America
    a. There are a number of these calls at this time of year for rabbis, ostensibly to help us prepare our sermons for the HHDs.
    b. The full report is not public yet
    c. The findings:
        i. North American Jews give more to charitable causes Jewish and non-Jewish than any other group in North America
        ii. Younger generations of NA Jews give less money and less frequently than older generations – not surprising.
            1. BUT when younger Jews give they tend NOT to give to Jewish organizations.
            2. Older generation gives to both, younger Jews seldom to Jewish causes.
    d. Is this success or failure?
    e. Should we be proud of our high level of giving to all causes or disappointed that younger Jews are turning away from traditional Jewish causes?
2. Last Week: Deut (15:7-8): "If, however, there is a needy person among you…do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy **kinsman**. Rather you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs."

a. Yet the Talmud states (Gittin 61a) "We sustain the non-Jewish poor with the Jewish poor, visit the non-Jewish sick with the Jewish sick, and bury the non-Jewish dead with the Jewish dead to create peace in the community."
b. So which is the Mitzvah? Give to the Jewish community, give to anyone in need regardless of religious affiliation?

3. DISCUSS
4. Enter this weeks' parasha and the powerful verse, "*Tzedek, Tzedek T'irdof* – Justice, Justice You **shall** pursue."
    a. Why repeat Tzedek? We don't repeat in Torah without a reason.
    b. Many explanations – but here is mine.
    c. Justice – by definition must be limitless.
        i. Its not enough just to create Justice for those we know, we must t'irdorf tzedek we must go out of our way and pursue tzedakkah beyond the familiar.
        ii. BUT why must Jews also give to non-Jewish causes?
            1. to create peace in the community
        iii. Rabbi Rebecca Sirbu explains the phrase "to create peace in the community" probably meant, at the time it was written, that Jews should take care of non-Jews in order to have good relations with the larger sometime hostile gentile community. However, with today's interconnected world, creating "peace in the community" can literally mean

world peace. Working to help everyone in the world to be fed, healthy, and honorably buried will in actuality cut down on war and strife between people.

iv. By giving beyond the familiar, by going outside and pursuing justice, we can really fulfill the prophet's vision that "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:3-4)

d. I understand that a local synagogue, federation or JCC would like to be the recipient of a large gift from a Jewish donor. But we often forget that the act of giving itself is a Jewish act, it is part and parcel of that person living out their Jewish identity and should be recognized as such. After all, we taught them how important it is to give in our synagogues and schools.

e. So let us celebrate Jewish giving and not make distinctions between those giving to Jewish and non-Jewish causes. In fact making this distinction has a very real negative effect. It creates yet another line between "us – the good Jews" and "them- the bad Jews." It pushes people, especially younger people away.

i. The Talmud in Baba Bathra 9a teaches: "Charity is equal in importance to all other commandments combined." The text states "charity," meaning all

charity – not just charity to the Jewish community. "It is equal to…all the other commandments combined" means giving is more important than going to shul on Shabbat and studying Torah.

ii. In our surveys of Jewish life, if we measured commitment to Judaism by how much tzedaka people give, then a much higher percentage of Jews would be seen as living active Jewish lives.

f. The giving of the younger generation to more and more non-Jewish causes is not a sign of failure, its success. The blue boxes, the trees planted, the mitzvah projects, the food drives. They worked – we taught our children to give and as young adults they are living Torah.

g. If there is failure it is that while our percentage of giving is higher than others it is not high enough for God.

h. The commandment is clear – when Moses asked for donations to help build a sanctuary so that God might dwell among them, everyone gave. Even the poor, even the needy. Not 50%, not 80% but 100%.

i. I'm proud that we are so high on the list of givers, and not disheartened that we give broadly. But I am not satisfied, and we should not be satisfied.

j. I'rdof tzedek we must pursue Justice – everyone must give something – then we will have justice without limits.