

Educational Mini-Clip Script

Jewish Thoughts on Global Social Responsibility

1. Global Inequality

We live in a world which has significant inequality and injustice.

Some staggering statistics, currently reported on Oxfam's website (2020), highlight some of the current inequalities in our world:

- The world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.
- Almost half of humanity is living on less than \$5.50 a day.
- Every year, 100 million people worldwide are pushed into poverty due to healthcare costs.
- 1 out of every 5 will not be allowed to go school.

In many countries, basic human rights, such as access to clean water, education and healthcare has become a luxury that only the rich can afford.

2. Why is intervention required to help reduce global inequality?

Living in economic inequality can have a negative impact on other aspects of life, which contributes to the cycle of poverty.

Once poor, people can experience difficulty escaping poverty because many things that would allow them to do so require money they don't have, such as:

- Education and retraining with new skills, which increases job opportunities.
- Childcare which would enable a single parent or second parent to work or take classes.
- Transportation to a distant job.
- Migration to an area with better economic opportunities.

Communities facing such challenges may lack access to economic and social resources which may further perpetuate inequality for themselves and their children. As a result, intervention is essential to help individuals lift themselves above the poverty line.

3. The Jewish duty to be outward-facing and socially responsible

You may be asking yourself, as a Jew, surely, I should help those who are less fortunate in my own community before helping others? This is of course vitally important, but there is also

great significance to having a sense of social responsibility towards those in need around the world, as an integral part of our identity, as engaged and outward-facing Jews.

The principle of responsibility (achrayut) is at the heart of everything we do as Jews. And it extends beyond the responsibility of helping those in our own community.

The question is asked in the Jerusalem Talmud: “What is the most important verse of the entire Torah?” The great sage Rabbi Akiva famously replied, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

However, Ben Azzai offers a different verse, Genesis 5:1, which reads: “This is the book of the generations of man on the day that God created man, in the image of God he formed him.” Chief Rabbi Mirvis notes that Ben Azzai was pointing out to Rabbi Akiva that whereas his verse calls upon us to be considerate to our neighbours – those to whom we are already close – from Genesis we learn that since every human being is created in the image of God, our compassion must extend to one and all.

The late Chief Rabbi Sacks said the following. “One of Judaism’s most distinctive and challenging ideas is its ethics of responsibility, the idea that God invites us to become, in the rabbinic phrase, his ‘partners in the world of creation’. The God who created the world in love calls on us to create in love. The God who gave us the gift of freedom asks us to use it to honour and enhance the freedom of others.”

The Talmud teaches that if there is a person who believes in God but does not act in ways of lovingkindness, it is as if that person has no God. Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis has made it a particular priority to call attention to the plight of those in need of our support. Young Social Enterprise was inspired as a result of participating in his Ben Azzai Programme. “Countries are known to have a foreign policy, I believe that the Jewish people should have a foreign policy,” Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis said. “The way to develop that foreign policy must surely be in the area of social responsibility. In addition to acts of compassion for our own community and the State of Israel, we should be supporting the under-privileged around the world.”

4. What actions can the Jewish community take to be socially responsible and help humanity at large?

Every Jew is of course entitled to make their own personal decision as to how they choose to act on their responsibility to help humanity at large.

In some cases, one may choose to set aside a certain amount of money each year to give to a charity that helps alleviate extreme poverty. In other cases, one may simply choose to educate themselves and their children about Jewish thinking on global social responsibility.

And this is arguably a more important first step the Jewish community must take; to understand that global social responsibility is a mindset deeply rooted in Jewish teachings and values, voiced by many of our great leaders.

No one should ever be denied basic human rights, and with intervention required to “enhance the freedom of others”, Jewish people can play their part. Working with the right partners, in helping others around the world escape the cycle of poverty, will dramatically increase the quality of their lives, and make the world a better place for one and all.