A Jewish Tradition of Giving Back
By Steven Mandel MD
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Rabbi Harold Kushner *"When you are kind to others, it not only changes you, it changes the world."*

On a raining Sunday morning in NY, I volunteered with my friend Les Agisim to deliver packages to older people in NY before the Jewish New Year. We said that we were delivering as part of the DOROT Program and as members of the NY JMC. One woman responded after the delivery. "*It has been a very bad year for me. Taking the time to bring me this gift is so meaningful to me. May your holiday be filled with kindness and joy. You have made me happy today.*"

By volunteering, I have learned many skills: teamwork, task management, problem solving, work ethic, leadership, compassion, and effective communication. I have a better understanding of what people are going through, and I am a better listener. It reduces my stress and gives me a positive feeling of accomplishment.

When you volunteer, you make connections and you feel gratification that you are making a difference in your life and those of others. It can be delivering packages, preparing Food for the homeless, sending cards, making phone calls, clothing drives, writing letters to newspapers and government officials, advocating for those underserved/ marginalized and promoting Social Justice.

Volunteering is a core Jewish value and a traditional way for Jews to be involved in the community. It is an expression of our Jewish identity, and our commitment to the Jewish community. There is a Hebrew word "*am echad*", one person responsible for another. It is an act of loving kindness (*chesed*), and our commitment to heal the world (*tikkun olam*).

I volunteering to gain a better perspective on life, and to better understand the value of helping people in need. I find it to be very fulfilling, to building communication, and being present in their lives of those I serve.

Social isolation and loneliness can have adverse effects on one's physical and mental health. Volunteering can give you a sense of purpose, gain new skills, improve self-confidence, and nurture new relationships. For older people, volunteering will reduce the burden of age with cognitive decline, reduce depression, and reduce the cardiovascular effects of aging including the risk of heart attack and stroke and a lowering of blood pressure. With intergenerational connections, sharing stories and perspectives, you break down barriers of ageism, and respect for intergenerational communication. (Journal of the American Heart Association 2022, Journal of the American Medical Association, 2022)

It is also our responsibility to model for the younger generation that volunteerism will benefit them in the years to come. They will meet people with similar interests and learn how to emphasize with others with purpose and accomplishment. They will feel their importance as members of a vibrant community. It is a value that I teach my own children.

Volunteering involves generosity and willingness. First, you make the commitment, discover what is most important to you, stretch your comfort zone, and find good training and resources.

DOROT's mission is to alleviate social isolation among older adults and provide services to help them live independently as valued members of the community. They engage volunteer of all ages, bringing the generations together in a mutually beneficial partnership. DOROT is a thought leader in the intergenerational, volunteer engagement, and social isolation and loneliness space.

For more information and to volunteer:
visit the website: http://www.dorotusa.org/volunteer
email mailto:volunteers@dorotusa.org or call 212-769-2850