


Israel, video helps to bridge the distance.

And yet, we can rely too heavily on technology. In San Diego, we've just completed a series of conversations with high school students and community members in their 20s and 30s about how we can best support and inspire their philanthropy. Many expressed passionately a desire for meaningful and substantive conversation. Though they are wired into the Internet, they complained that Facebook has pushed the limit of superficial connection and Twitter is a breeding ground for unevolved ideas.

Our foundation serves more than 700 donor-advised funds and family foundations — each with individual interests. All of our funders value the research we provide as well as the connections to other family foundations. We have a critical opportunity to help build their network so it serves both individual passions and established community priorities; we help make the obvious and not-so-obvious connections among funders, organizations, and sectors. The ideal system is one where the individual is informed but not controlled by the collective — where he or she is moved by individual interests to participate in a larger communal en-

deavor. Jewish traditions and values continue to offer many resources. Perhaps it's time to consider developing some fresh language to demonstrate how ancient ideas are actually quite robust and cutting-edge. *Tikkun olam*, the idea of repairing the world, may just be overused. What about *ha'atzmah* (empowerment) or *tikvah* (hope)? The Ohio-based Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation (primary funders of the Sh'ma Institute) reimagines the ancient concept of *moshiach* (the Messiah) as a sense of the possibility and, ultimately, the perfectibility of the world. Moses cites service in his article, and we would do well to help our constituencies think seriously about how they give to others without immediate personal gain. This is a powerful principle of Judaism and a tool for both self-actualization and community-enhancements.

Looking forward, there is much reason for optimism. On the whole, the millennial generation is more likely than any other to cite a desire to make the world a better place as its primary philanthropic motivator. We could not be in a better position to help this generation achieve its goals — for the benefit of both the individual giver and those in need. 



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Shattering Stereotypes: The Newest Philanthropists

RACHEL LEVENSON

In “Rethinking American Jewish Giving,” Larry Moses leaves the reader with important questions about how to reconcile the differences between traditional concepts of *tzedakah* and the more modern American model of philanthropy.

Tzedakah, as Moses reminds us, is a commandment required of all Jews — even those who are receiving help. But most Jewish communal philanthropic organizations (such as federations) have typically operated like a club reserved for an elite group of people with money. The list of people making the most important communal decisions often reads like a “who’s-who” directory of individuals with impressive resumes and/or the potential to be big donors. Although young Jews are taught about their obligation to help others, Jewish communal grant making, which represents a significant component of the community’s fulfillment of *tzedakah*, has been essentially off limits to us as well as to other subsections of the community.

I belong to a youth philanthropy movement that grew, in part, as a response to the narrowness of the philanthropic process. Over the past decade, the movement has launched numerous programs across the country. Despite their programmatic differences, all are shattering the stereotype of what a philanthropist looks like and who gets to make the funding decisions in the Jewish community.

With so many ways for Jews to “pursue justice,” why does it matter for teens to be involved in Jewish communal philanthropy? It matters, first and foremost, because these programs demonstrate that one doesn’t need to be wealthy to make a difference through grant making. Participants learn smart and effective philanthropy — the many ways of leveraging and maximizing impact with the money they have or are able to raise. These programs also show that the community values input, not just from the rich or the “experienced,” but also from the voices of all who care about how the

Rachel Levenson is a senior at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, where she is studying government and economics with a focus on African development. She began her philanthropic involvement in the seventh grade at the Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School in Palo Alto, Calif. In high school, Levenson was an active member, alumna, and staff member of the Community Teen Foundations of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco. She has also been involved in multiple national youth philanthropy boards. To mark her 16th birthday, she opened an endowment fund.

Rabbi **Yoni Gordis**, a Sh'ma Institute board member, is the founding executive director of the Center for Leadership Initiatives, a consulting group based out of Vancouver, British Columbia. For 20 years, he has served as a consultant for Jewish foundations.

Jessica Liebowitz is on the advisory board of the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary. For eight years, she served as a founding board member of Natan, a New York-based agency that seeks to inspire young philanthropists to become actively engaged in Jewish giving. She lives in Vermont.


Will Schneider is director of the New York-based Slingshot Fund, which works with next-generation funders — most of them involved in family foundations. He is the author of 'Slingshot: A Resource Guide to Jewish Innovation,' a compilation of the 50 most inspiring and innovative organizations in today's North American Jewish community.

Seth Cohen moderated the conversation. A corporate attorney for thirteen years, he recently joined the senior leadership team of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, where he leads a new agenda related to helping young adults to network with one another in inspired ways. In addition to his involvement in other Jewish initiatives, he has served on the board of Joshua Venture Group, which invests in the ideas of emerging Jewish social entrepreneurs.

community allocates its resources. In fact, youth philanthropy programs are effective at drawing in Jews who previously felt disconnected from the community; they often speak to a different segment of the population, offering people a new way to connect to their heritage.

As new, young philanthropists, we are struggling with the very same questions that Moses raises. We spend our Sundays and after-school hours mulling over the issues of how to balance and prioritize local and global needs, Jewish and non-Jewish interests, immediate and

long-term causes. We strive to infuse Jewish values into our giving — to create an effective, consensus-driven decision-making process, and to choose how to commit our limited time and resources to *tikkun olam*.

The young people engaged in philanthropy today will provide the “new thinking and strong leadership” to honor our “noble heritage,” embrace “promising possibilities,” and, we hope, continue to make the process ever more inclusive so that we, and others, can carry out our obligation of *tzedakah* through philanthropy. 

For Every Idea, a Nonprofit? A Roundtable of Innovation

Seth Cohen: *There's a lot of talk in the Jewish and secular world about innovation, philanthropy, new ideas and how all of this fits together. How do you personally define innovation in the Jewish world, and what advances and animates innovation?*

Will Schneider: For me, and for Slingshot, innovation is about relevancy. Innovative doesn't necessarily mean “young,” “new,” or “start-up.” We've seen innovation at mainstream establishment organizations and we've seen innovation in brand new projects, and it's really just about what's relevant to the Jewish community and what resonates with Jewish life today.

Yoni Gordis: Innovation is our ability to break habits and potentially develop new ones in how we approach, from the organizational side, programming and provision of services. It's about being limber and staying aware of market needs. I don't think innovation is a sector. There isn't an innovation sector. Rather, there's a large group within our generation of organizations who self-define as innovative. In part, grabbing that tagline is a response to philanthropic trends. Innovation describes an approach rather than a stage.

Jessica Liebowitz: If you're asking, “What would innovation in Jewish philanthropy look like?” I'd answer, “*tzedakah*.” If we think of Jewish philanthropy as fundamentally motivated by “righteousness,” by “doing the right thing,” doing right by people who don't have what they need to put food on the table or educate their children, or who are burdened by social, health, or civic problems that need real solutions in the world, I think this encapsulates much of what has been so moving to so many young people today about innovative philanthropy: the search

for effectiveness of outcomes. It's got to work to be meaningful. The best of innovation in Jewish philanthropy, to me, would turn back to re-examining the fundamentals of *tzedakah*.

Yoni Gordis: Jessica is using “innovative” to modify philanthropy rather than to describe a project. Both Slingshot and Natan are innovative approaches to philanthropy applied to innovative projects. But if we just use “innovative” as a modifier of philanthropy and ask the question, “What is innovative philanthropy?” I would agree with Jessica — that what today we call “innovative philanthropy” is actually what has been around for a long time, once fashionable and now returning. For example, *kupat tzedakah*, a *tzedakah* till, is a group of people who decide to collectively fund projects. To feel good, we tell ourselves we're inventing something new, but actually this rich tradition of philanthropy includes models of all of these “new things.”

Seth Cohen: *While tzedakah is an ancient core Jewish value, does it feel as if the philanthropic community is trying to uncover some new break-out idea that may simply be tzedakah wrapped in new terminology? How do we, as a community, balance the tension between constantly looking for something new and shiny in which to invest our philanthropic passions, while also acknowledging that this very activity is deeply rooted in our history as Jews? In essence, have we created a tension between our value of tzedakah and tikkun olam and the value we place on innovation?*

Yoni Gordis: I'm not sure the tension is between new and old values. We live in the