

WHY WE GIVE

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Why do people give charity? That's a question on which I've based my entire career.

We like to talk about how intrinsically selfish people are, how they use their money for themselves, or their family only. There's been a lot of talk in the news about politicians abusing their positions for money, of people abusing their influence for power. It feels like everyone is out for what they can grab for themselves.

Biologically, life is hard-wired to be selfish. From single-celled fungi to plants to animals to humans, life is bio-engineered toward passing on DNA. And we're pretty specific about it. A parson spider doesn't want to ensure that there are more parson spiders in the next generation, she wants to ensure that HER DNA is in the next generation of parson spiders. An oak tree wants its acorns to grow, even at the expense of other tree's acorns. Every species is fighting for its own space, and every member of each species is fighting for its own DNA.

But humans are different although it might not seem so from the news. Humans truly do care about people who do not share their DNA. Much was made of the recent tax plan and how it might negatively impact charitable giving by changing deductions, but people have been giving charity long before there were deductions, long before there were taxes, long before there was currency. People have been living in community, and living in community means caring about each and every member of that community.

Perhaps it's what makes us "in G_d's image." After all, G_d got no benefit from creating the world, except the benefit of charity, except the benefit of creating a legacy.

Giving is a leap of faith. It's handing over control of something to someone else and trusting in the outcome. It's like handing over the family name to our children and hoping that they make us proud. It's scary, but rewarding too.

Why do people give charity? That's not really the question we need answered. The question is, "Why do I give charity?" When each of us answers that for ourselves, personally in our hearts, we will know the answers to some of the biggest philosophical questions out there.

Why do you?

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