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## **Connecting With the Jewish Community** **By Katherine Wertheim, CFRE**

Would you like to approach Jewish people about donating to your organization, but you're not sure how to do it? Here are some tips to help you understand the Jewish concept of giving.

There are several common phrases that Jewish people use when talking about charity. It helps to speak the same language. The following encompass three of the most important concepts.

*Tzedakah* (pronounced like the last name of the singer, Neil Sedaka) is generally used to mean "charity" but it actually means "justice" – and knowing this tells you a great deal about how Jews think of charity. To give charity is a requirement, and, according to Jewish law, if someone asks, you should not turn them down. Many people do say "no" but many also feel required to give something. Many people believe that giving is not "charity" per se, but a form of justice. Even little children are taught to give tzedakah. For example, the coin boxes you see at cash registers for various charities would be called "Tzedakah boxes" and most Jewish homes have them.

*Tikkun Olam* (pronounced t'kun o-lahm) means "to repair the world." Many Jews feel that giving money helps to make the world a better place.

*Mitzvah* (pronounced mitz-va) is commonly used in "bar mitzvah or "bat mitzvah." Mitzvah is translated as "good deed" but it actually means "commandment." When a boy becomes a bar mitzvah or a girl becomes a bat mitzvah, usually at the age of 13, it means that they are now responsible for their own good deeds, which are required. So, if someone were to help you, you could say, "What a mitzvah you did!" Or, if you needed their help, you could say, "It would be a real mitzvah if you could help us."

Jewish congregations generally use either "synagogue" or "temple" in their names, but will occasionally use the word "congregation." If you don't know the ones in your community, ask a minister or priest of another faith for a referral. Then call the rabbi's office to schedule a meeting. You should seek to connect with the congregation in a number of ways: referrals to potential care receivers and volunteers, as well as donors. The rabbi usually has a discretionary fund for donations, but it would be more beneficial to connect with the entire congregation. You might ask to meet with the Social Action Committee (the equivalent of a Missions Committee in a protestant congregation). It is often a good idea to seek volunteers first, to create connections, and donations will follow.



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If you have questions, you are welcome to write to me directly at [Katherine@werth-it.com](mailto:Katherine@werth-it.com).  
I'm happy to help you. Good luck!