JEWISH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Judaism has deep connections to Giving Tuesday

By Sharon Chisvin

It is unlikely American non-profit theatre director Carlo Lorenzo Garcia was aware of the connection between Tuesdays and the offering of charity in Jewish law when he proposed the idea of a global day of giving back in 2011.

His idea, which he promoted through the Huffington Post, was that on the Tuesday following the shopping frenzy that traditionally follows American Thanksgiving, consumers stay away from stores and online shopping portals, and instead make donations to charities of their choosing. Garcia's idea caught on, and a year later Giving Tuesday was formally institutionalized by the United Nations Foundation in partnership with New York City's 92nd Street Y.

Arguably, some members and staff of that Y, a central Manhattan institution that has served as a Jewish cultural mecca for decades, may have known that, according to the Torah and those who parse and interpret its every word, Tuesday has always been considered a special day in Judaism, and a day designated for the giving of charity.

"Tuesdays do have a special place in Judaism and there is a lovely convergence to our new modern tradition of #GivingTuesday," explains Rabbi Allan Finkel, spiritual leader of Winnipeg's Temple Shalom. "It goes back to our creation story, where it is said God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

"At the end of each day," Finkel continues, "God would look back at what had been accomplished, with the comment, 'and it was good.' However, on Tuesday, our

equivalent to the third day of creation, God said that phrase, 'and it was good,' twice."

As a result of that anomaly in the creation story, Tuesdays became known as an auspicious, or doubly-blessed, day in Judaism — and because of that, it also evolved into a day on which many Jewish couples choose to get married.

This idea that Tuesdays are lucky and doubly blessed, Finkel said, ties in beautifully with the contemporary initiative of Giving Tuesday.

"It is always a mitzvah, a good deed, to give to others," he says, "but we can almost imagine the extra spiritual push and the power of those acts of giving when they are done on a Tuesday."

The giving of charity, or philanthropy, is referred to in Judaism as tzedakah. Tzedakah — which is derived from the Hebrew word tzedek, meaning justice — is one of the most often mentioned, and therefore one of the most important, of the 613 commandments in the Torah, the foundational text of Judaism. Tzedakah is a religious act, a righteous act and a moral obligation. It should be done happily and, ideally, anonymously.

Philanthropy in Judaism — whether it is the donation of money, clothing, food, shelter or other means of support — falls under the umbrella of tikkun olam, the repair of the world. Tikkun olam, a central concept in Judaism, exhorts the Jewish people to look beyond themselves towards the greater good.

That is exactly what Giving Tuesday does. It invites those who are fortunate to think about, and do something about, those who are not. Here in Manitoba, the generosity of donors on Giving Tuesday in the last few years has made it possible for hundreds of charities to better respond to the needs of thousands of clients. This year, those needs have been greatly impacted by growing social inequality, unprecedented inflation

and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, making Giving Tuesday more welcome and necessary than ever before.

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