

Grab 'n' Go Lesson  
**RANYA KELLY**  
**THE REDISTRIBUTION CENTER**

*Good People Grab 'n' Go Lessons are designed to provide educators with all of the education materials needed in one document to teach a 60- to 90-minute lesson on a specific topic. Some Grab 'n' Go Lessons will require photo copies while others will require internet access and a projector and speakers; some will require markers while others will require post-it notes .... each one is unique. We encourage educators to adapt the materials to their environment and learners.*

*SUPPLIES: giant post it notes, markers; participant cell phones or land lines and computers/tablets/internet; copies of the Good Person profile; copies of the Text Resources sheets; blank paper of various sizes, pencils, scissors, other miscellaneous art supplies*

**15-20 minutes**

**Arrival Activity:**

1. Brainstorm: What are all the reasons a retail business might not be able to sell a product on their shelves (overstock, slightly damaged goods, unsold seasonal items, out-of-date technology, shipped to wrong part of country at wrong time of year, etc.)?
2. Divide your group into sub-groups (about 3-4 people per team).
3. Assign each group a different retail category: shoes, furniture, household goods, children's clothing, sporting goods, grocery, electronics
4. Have each group research the following corresponding to its category:
  - a. The cost of 5 pairs of new brand name tennis shoes
  - b. The cost of 5 new 3-seat sofas
  - c. The cost of 5 new Toaster Ovens
  - d. The cost of 5 new children's pajama outfits
  - e. The cost of 5 new baseball gloves
  - f. The cost of 5 family-sized boxes of cereal
  - g. The cost of 5 Kindles
5. Instruct the group to find one local store that fits into that category. Call and ask to speak to a manager and explain that they are a part of a learning session about what stores do with overstock, slightly damaged goods, or unsold seasonal items. Ask the manager what their particular store's policy is.
6. Have the group create giant post-it note poster with their category and store name listed at the top, the answer the manager gave them in the center, the cost research they discovered at the bottom.
7. Have them hang their post-it on the wall of the room.
8. When everyone has finished have them do a quick "museum walk" to examine the answers everyone found

9. Discuss:

- Overall, did your group find that products are wasted or used to help the community/those in need?
- Did the group(s) meet resistance when asking the question of the manager(s)?
- Did any of the answers surprise you?
- If you calculate the total of each poster where the manager said they “throw-away” the items, how much money is being wasted?
- If every store you called donated their items, how much collectively in the room would they be financially donating (add the money totals from the bottom of each poster)?
- If someone couldn’t afford to buy one of these items, where might they go to get them? (emphasize, typically they get very used items from resell shops or shelters)

**5-7 minutes Set Induction**

1. Explain: Billions of dollars each year are wasted in items retail stores destroy. Share these examples:
  - In 2010, an Abercrombie & Fitch store manager relayed to the media, “Any clothing that has any type of blemish, including things such as a stitch missing or a frayed fabric, gets sent back to the company for immediate disposal,” the source said. “Abercrombie & Fitch doesn’t want to create the image that just anybody, poor people, can wear their clothing. Only people of a certain stature are able to purchase and wear the company name.”
  - Some stores destroy (i.e .burn or shred) unsold clothing so they can claim it on their insurance as a loss.
  - In 2016, it was reported, “According to the New York Times, a majority of returned items aren't actually resold in stores. After being transferred to liquidators, wholesalers and resellers, much of the undamaged merchandise ends up in landfills. It is estimated that as much as two million tons of returned items are thrown away every year, enough to fill up nearly 200,000 garbage trucks.”
2. Today we are going to learn about a woman who created an entire non-profit organization to save items from destruction and deliver them into the hands of people in need.

**8-12 minutes      The Good Person Profile: Ranya Kelly**

*Read aloud Ranya's story or copy and distribute to participants (handout for copying at end of lesson)*

Over 20 years ago, most people did not think about ecology or pollution or how to best recycle the excess products factories produce or businesses fail to sell. We were a "throwaway nation." For Ranya Kelly, mother of a young child, ideas like pollution, recycling or sustainability were the furthest things from her mind. Then one day that changed forever.

How many of us have looked for a box to ship out a gift package? That was exactly what Ranya was doing one afternoon while checking out a big dumpster behind a local strip mall. Surely some business had tossed out a cardboard box she could repurpose to ship her package. Searching through that dumpster, Ranya found herself face to face with 500 pairs of brand new shoes thrown away by a nearby shoe store! Amazed by her find, she took the shoes home and invited family and friends to take what they wanted. But, 500 pairs of shoes? She decided to bring the hundreds of pairs left to the nearby Samaritan House Shelter in downtown Denver. As Ranya remembers, "I never knew about the shelters or people who really needed anything...I grew up in an upper middle class family...I was never involved with people who had so little. There was a pregnant woman standing in the doorway (of the shelter), her pants were dragging on the floor. She had a two or three-year-old in tow. And she had no shoes. It was the middle of January. I just couldn't comprehend that somebody didn't have a pair of shoes when I had found 500 pairs in the garbage."



It was the discovery of those shoes and the sight of a barefoot woman in the cold of winter that changed Ranya's life forever. Looking around her, she realized just how much we all throw away; so much of it perfectly new and usable items that people who have little could put to good use. It was not only the realization of how so many people could be helped that stunned Ranya. It was also the very real problem of how much waste was going into landfills around our country--truly an ecological disaster in the making.

From that defining moment has come The Redistribution Center, Ranya's all-volunteer organization that today picks up much more than shoes. Local home improvement stores give her unsaleable building supplies, appliances, tools and even plants and flowers which she revives in her on-site greenhouse and then distributes to beautify local parks and other public spaces. In fact, a few years ago, Ranya had enough of these supplies that she was able to make possible the building of three Indian "hogans" (traditional Navajo Indian homes) on a nearby reservation. High-end furniture stores give her items that might have been damaged in some minimal way or merchandise customers special order and then no longer want. Big office supply stores and those that sell bed linens and towels and appliances also trust Ranya with their rejects knowing that she will get them into the hands of people who cannot afford them. Clothing stores contribute, as do local dry cleaners who have so many items like warm winter coats, that remain unclaimed. One day, the nearby Jolly Rancher factory sent her an entire truckload of candy that had been mistakenly wrapped- what was actually "watermelon" was marked "raspberry!"

Today, Ranya's work benefits soldiers, elders, families that have lost their homes in fires and poor people who struggle to survive. Around her house is a greenhouse where she grows hydroponic vegetables, numerous fruit trees that produce luscious summer fruit and a small food pantry that offers help to people when the larger pantries nearby have run out of food.

In 1991, Ranya never knew that what she started would eventually become a truly "green" business. Imagine how much more could be saved if others followed her lead? Why not?

Discuss:

- What are two societal issues Rayna is trying to solve? (helping people in need and helping the environment)
- Do you think these stores are prioritizing these issues in their daily work? Or is profit their only priority?
- Do you think that the employees of these stores are comfortable throwing out usable goods? Or do you think they do it because they are told to but are unhappy doing it?
- If they are unhappy doing it, why do you think they aren't able to convince their managers to make a different choice? (Do you think they try?)
- Why do you think Ranya is successful in convincing store owners and managers to donate goods instead of destroying them? (You might have to explain about the role donations play in helping companies save money in taxes.)
- Why do you think Ranya cares so much about these issues?
- Why do you think Ranya has focused much of her work on veterans, military families, and those who lost a home due to a disaster?

**7-15 minutes      Getting to Know The Redistribution Center**

If you have access to multiple computers, cell phones or tablets and enough internet bandwidth, you can have individuals in the group do some research about The Redistribution Center by looking at these references:

**Website:** <http://www.redistributioncenter.org/>

**Watch these videos:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uX6rkJzZH5M> (3:29) Ask the participants to consider the role that “word of mouth” plays in how Rayna helps people.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4qWYQ-xpjA> (2:15) Have the participants consider why The American Red Cross would honor Ranya (make the connection to the role Red Cross plays in disaster response).

**Watch this video and read the accompanying article:**

- <http://kdvr.com/2016/05/10/shoes-thrown-in-dumpster-launched-new-mission-in-life-for-one-woman/?iframe=true&preview=true> (2:01) Have the participants consider what motivates the volunteers to help.

**Read this article:** <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/rabbis-without-borders/meeting-the-shoe-lady-of-denver/> Have participants discuss the risks Rayna takes to “rescue” these discarded items.

Discuss:

- Would you be willing to “dumpster dive” to rescue new products? Why or why not?
- Discuss the role dignity plays in Rayna’s work.
- What can we learn about the needs of veterans and military families as a result of Ranya’s work?
- Do you think helping people in need or helping the environment is more central to Rayna’s work? Or both equally? Which one matters to you more?

**15-25 minutes      What’s Jewish About Ranya’s Work?**

Included in this Grab ‘n’ Go is a Jewish Text Study sheet for your use.

Depending on the age of your participants, you may want to choose one Jewish text to explore via a projector, a few values via posters, or provide them with the entire text sheet. For advanced learners, you may want to provide a *Tanakh* for access to some of the original texts.

One method for engaging these texts:

1. You will note that the texts are broken into two categories: Caring for the Environment/Waste Reeducation and Uplifting Those in Need
2. Divide your group into two sub-groups giving each group one of the topics.
3. Have the group read through the texts and choose three they feel are the best to represent Ranya’s work with The Redistribution Center.
4. The group must decide how to share these texts with the other group (skit, song, billboard, bumper sticker) and be prepared to make the case on how this text best represents Ranya’s work.

Some questions for consideration:

1. Review the text labeled “Sefer Ha-Hinukh: The Book of [Mitzvah] Education.” Why do you think the text here mentions the saving of a “mustard seed.” What is this supposed to teach us?
2. Read the text Deuteronomy 8:4 closely. What does this text have to do with not wasting? If retailers took this text to heart, how would they treat items that are only slightly damaged?
3. In examining the text Mishnah Torah, Laws of Contributions to the Poor, ch. 9:1-3, how are Ranya and her volunteers like the *Kupah* collectors?
4. Take some time to explore the “Advanced Text.” Challenge learners to equate this text with Rayna’s work “dumpster diving.”



4-8 minutes

**The Good People Making a Difference with The Redistribution Center**

In addition to providing funding to The Redistribution Center for gas, delivery vehicle maintenance and some management expenses, The Good People Fund has partnered with Ranya to provide the financial support for several service trips. While The Redistribution Center is based in Denver, Colorado, this partnership has allowed Ranya to serve a small Appalachian community (2012 and 2013) and over a dozen service agencies based in New Jersey communities (2014 and 2015).

**The Redistribution Center Profile on our website:**

<https://www.goodpeoplefund.org/program/the-redistribution-center/>

Articles on our website about the partnership :

- <https://www.goodpeoplefund.org/press/interfaith-food-pantry-of-the-oranges-receives-grant-to-do-more-good-in-new-jersey/>
- <https://www.goodpeoplefund.org/news/founder-redistribution-center-colorado-returns-millburn-truckload-goods-area-organizations-serve-need/>
- <https://www.goodpeoplefund.org/news/millburn-residents-participate-in-annual-service-trip/>
- <https://www.goodpeoplefund.org/press/fifteen-local-nj-social-service-agencies-benefit-colorado-womans-good-work/>



### Getting to Good

Depending on the time you have, this can either be a short conversation about some options to get involved or can be a hands-on project adjusted to your needs. Here are some hands-on ideas:

- Partner with the local shelters to determine their most pressing needs. Contact locally-owned businesses and advocate for them to donate overstock or slightly damaged goods to those shelters according to the need.
- Hold a “gathering dust” collections drive to gather donations for unworn clothing or household items people have never used. Donate these items to local shelters or veteran’s groups.
- Contact a local veteran’s group and ask them to partnership with you on a “dumpster dive” event where found items are donated back to the veteran’s group for distribution to families in need.
- Write letters to the editor for your local paper expressing the need to protect the environment while simultaneously helping people in need via the rescuing of unwanted/unused new products.
- Create informational flyers about the benefit of donating unwanted/unused new products to shelters and veteran’s groups. Distribute the flyers to stores in strip malls and shopping plazas.

Any *tzedakah* monies your group collects can be contributed to The Good People Fund and earmarked for our work with The Redistribution Center:

<https://www.goodpeoplefund.org/mitzvah-donate/>.



## Why donate to The Good People Fund to distribute your *tzedakah*?

### **Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 249:6**

One able to motivate others to contribute receives greater reward than the giver.

### **Shulhan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 249:7**

A person should not contribute to a *tzedakah* fund unless he knows that its management is reliable.

### **Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 256:1**

Every Jewish community is obliged to appoint charity administrators, respected and reliable individuals who will collect from each person what they are able to contribute...and give to each poor person sufficient for their needs for the week.

### **Mishnah Peah 8:7**

A public fund needs to be collected by no less than two people, and distributed by no less than three people.

*For a copy of our Annual Report, visit:*

<https://www.goodpeoplefund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2016-GPF-Annual-Report.pdf>





## Grab and Go Lesson

# REDISTRIBUTION CENTER

### Text Resources

#### CARING FOR ENVIRONMENT & WASTE REDUCTION

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13, Vilna edition

G-d said to Adam, "See My works, see how pleasant and good they are. Everything I have created, I have created for you. Be careful not to spoil and destroy My world. If you do so, no one will repair it"

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 67b

One who covers an oil lamp [causing the flame to burn inefficiently] or uncovers a kerosene lamp [allowing the fuel to evaporate faster] violates the prohibition of Bal Tashchit (avoiding waste).

Sefer Ha-Hinukh: The Book of [Mitzvah] Education

*by Rabbi Pinhas haLevi of Barcelona, 16<sup>th</sup> century*

*translated by Charles Wengrov. Feldheim Publishers: Jerusalem, vol. 5 p. 145*

They will not destroy even a mustard seed in the world, and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage that they see; and if they are able to do any rescuing, they will save anything from destruction, with all their power

Deuteronomy 20:19

thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them

Deuteronomy 8:4

I led you through the wilderness for forty years; the clothes on your back did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet...

Rabbi Shampshon Rafael Hirsch (19th century, Germany), Horeb, sections 397,398

[Lo tashchit], 'do not destroy', is] "the most comprehensive warning to human beings not to misuse the position which God has given them as masters of the worlds and its matter to capricious, passionate, or merely thoughtless wasteful destruction of anything on earth."

Pirke Avot 4:1

You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors; you shall be happy and you shall prosper.

Hosea 10:12

Plant your seeds justly but reap them with compassion.

Talmud Succah 49b

When one plants, he may or may not eat [from what he planted], but once he reaps, he will certainly be able to eat.

Isaiah 40:4

Let the rugged ground be made level, and the ridges become a plain...

Leviticus 19:9-10

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and stranger; I am the Lord your God.

OVER



## UPLIFTING THOSE IN NEED

Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, founder of Chassidism, 1698–1760)

We must seek the welfare of all precisely because we are equally God's works, created to perform His will.

Leviticus 25:35

Now in the case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, they you are to sustain him, that he may live with you.

Pirkei Avot 2:10

Your friend's dignity should be as precious to you as your own.

Isaiah 32:17

And the work of tzedakah shall bring peace.

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 249:7

One should give up to a fifth of one's possessions – that is the mitzvah to an extraordinary degree. One tenth is an average percentage and less is considered miserly.

Psalms 72:2, 4

May the ruler of the land judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice... May the ruler champion the cause of the poor among the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush those who wrong them.

Midrash Vayikra Rabba 34:14

Some say that careful inquiry should be made in regard to beggars who ask for clothing, but no inquiries should be made in regard to food. Others say that in regard to clothing also no inquiries should be made.

Mishnah Torah, Laws of Contributions to the Poor, ch. 9:1-3

Every city with even a few Jewish people must appoint tzedakah collectors, people who are well-known and trustworthy, who will go door to door each week before Shabbat and take from everyone what they are expected to give. And they distribute the money before each Shabbat and give to each poor person enough food for 7 days – this is called the kupah.

1. Collectors are also appointed to travel through public places to gather the bread and foodstuffs and fruits and money from whomever volunteers it, and they distribute it in the evening among the poor, giving each poor person enough to get through the day.

## ADVANCED TEXT

Baba Metziah 21b

Figs found on the road, even if found beside a field [covered with figs], and also figs found under a fig-tree that overhangs the road, may be appropriated by the finder without him being guilty of robbery, and they are free from tithing . . . [why?] Rav Papa answered: Figs become filthy/ disgusting when they [drop to the ground].

## The Good Person Profile RANYA KELLY: The Redistribution Center

Over 20 years ago, most people did not think about ecology or pollution or how to best recycle the excess products factories produce or businesses fail to sell. We were a “throwaway nation.” For Ranya Kelly, mother of a young child, ideas like pollution, recycling or sustainability were the furthest things from her mind. Then one day that changed forever.

How many of us have looked for a box to ship out a gift package? That was exactly what Ranya was doing one afternoon while checking out a big dumpster behind a local strip mall. Surely some business had tossed out a cardboard box she could repurpose to ship her package. Searching through that dumpster, Ranya found herself face to face with 500 pairs of brand new shoes thrown away by a nearby shoe store! Amazed by her find, she took the shoes home and invited family and friends to take what they wanted. But, 500 pairs of shoes? She decided to bring the hundreds of pairs left to the nearby Samaritan House Shelter in downtown Denver. As Ranya remembers, "I never knew about the shelters or people who really needed anything...I grew up in an upper middle class family...I was never involved with people who had so little. There was a pregnant woman standing in the doorway (of the shelter), her pants were dragging on the floor. She had a two or three-year-old in tow. And she had no shoes. It was the middle of January. I just couldn't comprehend that somebody didn't have a pair of shoes when I had found 500 pairs in the garbage."



(above) Ranya [on right] with The Good People Fund Executive Director Naomi Eisenberg [center] and The Good People Fund Rabbinic Advisor Steve Bayar.

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(above) Ranya being interviewed as part of an American Red Cross Hero video.

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