

Jonathan Feldstein: Ugandans, Fish and Onions

Many are familiar with the saying, "If you give a person a fish you feed him for a day, but if you teach a person to fish you feed him for life." How about an onion?

It's not clear where the original saying came from, but the principle is still valid and important. In Judaism, while giving to charity is righteous (and the Hebrew word for charity literally translates as righteousness), Maimonides, a famous Jewish sage, once established the eight rungs of charity.

Lower on the rungs of such righteousness are when one gives a poor person money directly into his hand before being asked; when one gives to the poor person after being asked, when one gives inadequately, but gives gladly and with a smile; and when one gives, but gives unwillingly. At the top of the eight rungs is supporting someone with a gift or loan, anonymously, so he will become self-sufficient and no longer need charity.

In that light, I was privileged and blessed when Erisa, a friend in Uganda, recently shared plans to establish a cooperative group to plant and harvest onions, to start, as a way of creating self-sufficiency for 200 people. As he shared with me, "Our sole aim is to ensure that we can be able to support our families in health, education and also become self-sustaining."

Being someone involved with raising money professionally for some 25 years, I tend to be suspect of various ideas and schemes, even some that are well intentioned but come across as half-baked. Sometimes I give to a person or project reluctantly, and sometimes I am simply not convinced and don't give if I feel my limited resources can be best used

elsewhere.

While I have never met Erisa in person, we have shared numerous Facebook and email messages, and spoken via Skype, too. We have become good friends, sharing photos of family and holiday greetings among other things.

Other than his giving heart, one thing that's always impressed me about Erisa is a sense of entrepreneurship, not to make money for the sake of making money, but to do so to help others. That's why the idea to rent and prepare land, buy and plant seeds, cultivate and harvest the crop, and bring them to market as a cooperative venture and model to create self-sufficiency really excited me.

Erisa shared with me his simple plan, but with a detailed budget (that I am happy to share as well). "We propose to grow 4kg seeds of onion jamber type on four hectares of land," he said. "Each kilogram covers one hectare. In turn, one kilogram makes 20 tons, which is 3,400 kilograms. Therefore 4 kilograms will make 80 tons which is 80,000 kilograms. One kilogram of fresh onions costs 4,500 UGX (Ugandan shillings). Therefore 80,000 kilograms will raise 51,000,000 UGX. You see the expected profits made in the course of five years if we are to use the same amount of capital to invest."

I know nothing about growing or harvesting onions, but I do know that they have done their homework. They have created a five-year budget. Over five years, they will yield some 400 tons of onions. Since this is a new venture, it's clear that after their initial success, they will be able to expand the venture and involve more people.

If it were just a business, even with the potential of unforeseen loss, it's a return on investment that is solid and makes sense. As a business, I would invest for sure. In fact, when it came up, I was asked if I could help secure a loan that they would pay back. I could, but it is more meaningful

to give it to them as a gift, as an investment in them, not for me or anyone I know to derive a financial benefit.

So I set up a campaign and it's really very simple. If only 600 people donate \$25 each, we will reach our goal. More is better because even solid platforms such as Indiegogo charge fees, and I have committed Erisa to send photos and thank you notes to people who participate, an added expense. Maybe if we double the money they can lease and plant double the land, yielding 800 tons of onions to help hundreds more people.

I don't have the money to donate or invest it all myself, so I invite you to join me. Admittedly, once Erisa and others share photos and videos from Uganda, they won't be anonymous, but this opportunity allows many more to share the opportunity to reach the highest rung of charitable giving in a way that's meaningful and impactful. Since they have to acquire and prepare the land next month in order to be able to plant on time, please prayerfully consider joining me today by clicking [here](#).

I love cooking with onions, miss the sweet taste of being able to bite into a Vidalia onion, and know that when you cut an onion in half, sometimes you see something that's almost a heart. I also know that cutting into an onion sometimes makes people cry. It's an incredible thing to be able to give a small amount toward something that will make such a big difference, and bring tears of joy, and one that can be a model for others.

Clearly, the same way as teaching a person to fish is important, by teaching a person to grow and harvest onions, we can feed him for life!

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel

and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for Charisma's Standing With Israel. You can contact Jonathan at firstpersonisrael@.