

PAUL SUTHERLAND is the chief investment officer of the FIM Group and founder of the Utopia Foundation.

“CAN I BECOME A VEGAN INVESTOR?”

I'm very concerned about animal cruelty in our society. From the dinner table to the clothing industry to cosmetics and pharmaceutical testing—it's everywhere. I'd like to purge my finances of any investments that support cruelty to animals. Is there such a thing as vegan investing? How can I research this to make an educated decision about where to put my money?

Paul Sutherland: I admire your desire to express your values through your investments. From killing animals for food, to animal testing, and of course the lingering practice of blood sports like cockfighting, there is a lot of cruelty, injustice, and insensitivity toward animals in our world. Look to organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (peta.org)—resources like cruelty-free shopping guides can be used to check companies in your investment portfolio.

But be prepared to accept that it can be difficult, if not impossible, to keep your investments perfectly in line with your beliefs. Whole Foods CEO John Mackey, the author of *Conscious Capitalism*, is himself a vegetarian, and yet he sells meat in his stores. As a nondrinking, hybrid-driving, nonsmoking, recyclable-recycling, committed-vegetarian portfolio manager, I try to be an ethical, values-driven investor, but I can tell you it is hard to find a company that is completely pure. Some would steer you toward the tech industry, and yet even those companies provide services to others you might find unethical.

My suggestion is to remain conscious about the connections in your portfolio, and then use your leverage as an investor to urge the companies you do support toward more ethical practices. Want to use your dollars to effect change? The organizations As You Sow (asyousow.org) and Caux Round Table (cauxroundtable.org) can provide inspiration and resources to support shareholder advocacy and corporate responsibility.

I've worked hard in my career and now find myself financially secure with no children. I'd like to use my money to do some good in the world, but I can't seem to settle on a cause or charity to support. There are just so many problems in the world. It's overwhelming. How should I choose the right cause for me?

I ask two questions to help people find their “cause” passion. First, what really makes you angry—not just something you think is wrong, but something that upsets your whole heart? Is it child labor and the mistreatment of orphans in the developing world? Or poverty, hunger,

and economic injustice in your own backyard? Research the organizations and charities that are already involved in those issues. Second, who inspires you? When I look at my personal giving over the years, it has tended to be hero oriented. I look for those rare individuals who have the ability to see a need and really get their hands dirty trying to fix it. Think of champions like Hanley Denning, the founder of Safe Passage in Guatemala; Twesigye Jackson Kaguri, founder of the Nyaka AIDS Orphan Project in Uganda; or Pushpa Basnet in Nepal, who “mothers” the children of women who are incarcerated in Kathmandu. Many

individuals who are doing great work don’t have the marketing muscle to tell their story—keep your radar up, and then give them your support.

What do you think about charities like GiveDirectly, which simply gives cash to poor people, on the principle that they know how to spend the money best? At least one study found that most of the recipients didn’t waste the money but used it to better their lives. Isn’t this a more efficient way to help the poor than bloated charities with high overhead costs?

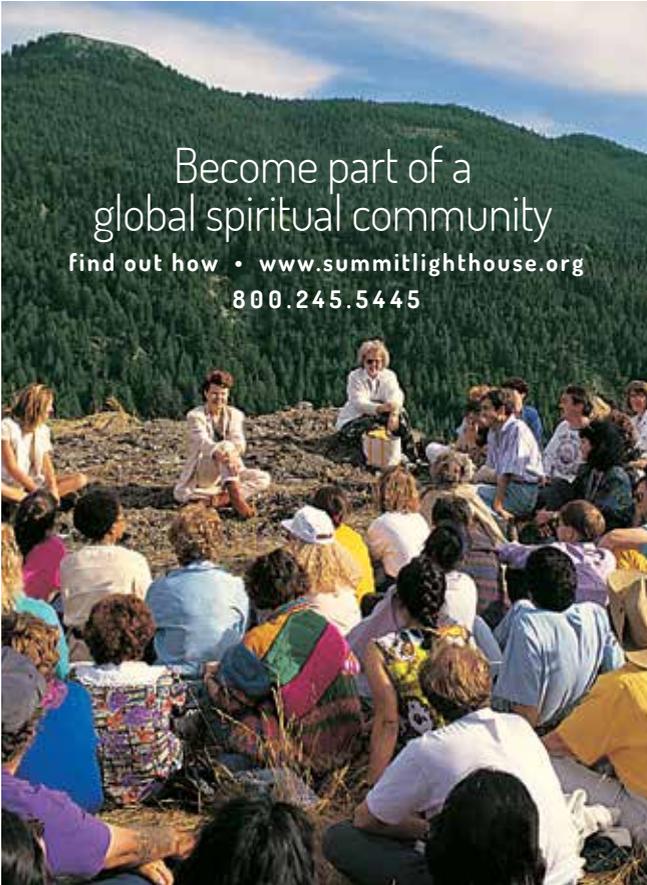
I agree that supporting “bloated charities with high overhead” is unproductive, wasteful, and inefficient. The GiveDirectly model is quite compelling, in that it places trust in the recipient to do what is best with the funds. As a financial adviser, I find that when a client gets a windfall, it is

usually used wisely. The money goes to educate the kids, pay off debts, and such. So, intuitively, the direct-giving model for charity makes sense over those fancy, overstaffed “nonprofits” that spend more time fund-raising than working toward their mission.

However, I worry about what we are communicating to the recipients in the GiveDirectly model. One of Gandhi’s seven social sins was “wealth without work,” and along those lines, I do feel that I would rather help someone through employment—a good job, livestock for their farm, tools for a home business.

I admire what GiveDirectly has done to shake up the charitable world, and I believe it is a better option for giving than many other nonprofits, but microloans with education and skills building would trump a one-time “handout” for me. —S&H

To ask Paul a question, email him directly at paul@spiritualityhealth.com.



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