



Congregation Agudat Achim

Over 120 years of Conservative Judaism

Tzedakah

Living a Jewish Life

19 November 2020

Roleplay / Discussion

You are the director of an urban homeless shelter, or on the board of a homeless shelter.

How would you react/respond/resolve the following situations?

Director of an Urban Homeless Shelter Scenario One

- You are speaking to a group of kids in a school. One of the kids asks, “When I go into the city, and we see homeless people in the subway, one of my parents always gives them money, and my other parent never gives money to any of them. What do you recommend that people do in this situation?”
- How do you answer?

Director of an Urban Homeless Shelter Scenario Two

You want to be as supportive as possible to help the people at your shelter to get jobs so they can get their own apartments and they won't need to stay at the shelter anymore. What kinds of activities and programs might you try to run at the shelter in the afternoons and evenings to help people to get jobs?

Director of an Urban Homeless Shelter Scenario Three

You want to put an inspirational biblical quote on the door of the shelter. Which of these quotes is the best choice? Why does that quote resonate?

- “Open your hand to your needy brother, lending him sufficient for his needs.” (Deuteronomy 15:8)
- “God listens to the prayer of the poor; God will not reject their supplication.” (Psalm 102:17)
- “May you be blessed in your coming in, and may you be blessed in your going out.” (Deuteronomy 28:6)

Obligation to repair the world

Mishna Avot 2:19

R. Tarfon used to say

“It is not upon you to complete the work, but you are not free to refrain from trying.”

Tithes – the Origin of Tzedakah

- *Peah* – Corner of the Field left
- *Lechetet* – Collecting produce that falls during threshing
- *Shichacha* – Sheaves that are forgotten



The Severity of the Obligation

Shulkhan Arukh Yoreh De'ah Hilkhhot Tzedaka 247:1

There is a biblical transgression in ignoring [a poor person] because it is possible that it will come to bloodshed, that the poor person will die if one does not give to him immediately.

Deut 15:7-8: If there be among you a needy man, one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy needy brother; but thou shalt surely open thy hand unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for whatever he needs

Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 9a

Rav Yehuda says: Charity distributors **examine** the level of poverty of one who asks **for clothing, but they do not examine** the level of poverty of one who asks **for food.**

Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 9a

If a poor person **was going door to door** asking for charity, one is **not** required to **attend to him** and give him **a large gift**, since he is already collecting money as he goes door to door, **but one does attend to him** and give him **a small gift**.

Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 9a

**Rav Asi says: Tzedakah is
equivalent to all the
other mitzvot combined**

Maimonides' 8 Levels of Tzedakah

Mishneh Torah Gifts to the Poor 10

- There are eight levels of *tzedakah*, each one greater than the other. The greatest level, higher than all the rest, is to fortify a fellow Jew and give him a gift, a loan, form with him a partnership, or find work for him, until he is strong enough so that he does not need to ask others [for sustenance]. Of this it is said, (Lev. 25:35) *[If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority,] and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side.* That is as if to say, "*Hold him up,*" so that he will not fall and be in need.¹⁸⁶ See Babylonian [Talmud Shabbat 63a](#).

Maimonides' 8 Levels of Tzedakah

- One level lower than this is one who gives *tzedakah* to the poor and does not know to whom he gives, and the poor person does not know from whom he receives.
- *Maimonides holds the anonymity of both giver and receiver of great importance, but he does not require anonymity at the highest level of giving. This is perhaps because the highest level of giving addresses the source of poverty whereas giving something to a beggar only alleviates a person's temporary need.*

Maimonides' 8 Levels of Tzedakah

- One level lower is one who gives *tzedakah* and the giver knows to whom he gives but the poor person does not know from whom he takes. Such did the great sages who would go in secret and throw money onto the doorways of the poor.

Maimonides' 8 Levels of Tzedakah

- One level lower is when the poor person knows from whom he takes but the giver does not know to whom he gives. Such was the way of the sages who would tie coins to their garments and would throw the bundle over their shoulder so the poor could come up [behind them] and take [them] without being embarrassed.

Maimonides' 8 Levels of Tzedakah

- One level lower is to give to him with one's own hand before he can ask.
- One level lower is to give to him after he has asked.
- One level lower is to give him less than one should but with kindness.
- One level lower is to give to him begrudgingly.

Maimonides' 8 Levels of Tzedakah

1. Giving an interest-free loan to a person in need; forming a partnership with a person in need... finding a job for a person in need.
2. Giving anonymously to an unknown recipient.
3. Giving anonymously to a known recipient.
4. Giving publicly to an unknown recipient.
5. Giving before being asked.
6. Giving adequately after being asked.
7. Giving willingly, but inadequately.
8. Giving "in sadness" (giving out of pity)/ "Giving unwillingly."

To Whom To Give?

Bava Metzia 71a

Rav Yosef taught: The verse states: “If you lend money to any of My people, even to the poor person who is with you” (Exodus 22:24). The term “My people” teaches that if one of My people, i.e., a Jew, and a gentile both come to borrow money from you, My people take precedence. The term “the poor person” teaches that if a poor person and a rich person come to borrow money, the poor person takes precedence. And from the term: “Who is with you,” it is derived: If your poor person, meaning one of your relatives, and one of the poor of your city come to borrow money, your poor person takes precedence. If it is between one of the poor of your city and one of the poor of another city, the one of the poor of your city takes precedence.

To Whom to Give?

Gittin 61a

One sustains poor gentiles along with poor Jews, and one visits sick gentiles along with sick Jews, and one buries dead gentiles along with dead Jews. All this is done on account of the ways of peace, to foster peaceful relations between Jews and gentiles.

To Whom To Give?

Shulchan Aruch 251:6

Supporting oneself takes precedence over everyone, and he is not obligated to give tzedakah until he has his own sustenance, and afterwards he prioritizes the support of his father and mother, if they are poor, and they take precedence to sustaining his sons. And afterwards, his sons, and they take precedence to his brothers, and they take precedence to other relatives, and relatives take precedence to neighbors, and neighbors to the people of the city, and the people of his city to the people of another city.

To Whom To Give?

Shulchan Aruch 251:9

If there were many poor before him and there is not enough money to provide for, clothe, or redeem all of them, the Kohen (priest) takes precedence over the Levi who takes precedence over the Israel... This is when they are equal in wisdom, but if there is a mamzer-sage and an uneducated high priest, the mamzer-sage takes precedence.

To Whom To Give?

BT Ketubbot 67a

Our Rabbis taught: Male and female orphans who come to be supported, we support the female orphan and afterward we support the male orphan because it is regular for a man to go door to door but not for a woman. Male and female orphans who come [for support] to be married, we marry off the female orphan and afterward we marry off the male orphan because the embarrassment of a woman is greater than a man.

How to Give

- *Bach [Bayit Hadash; R. Yoel b. Samuel Sirkis, (1561-1640)] Orach Hayyim 695*

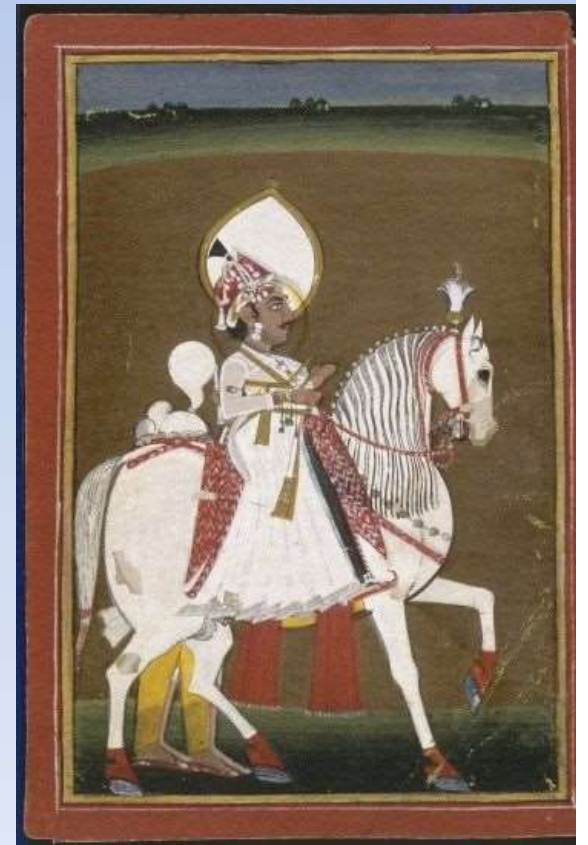
One who has 100 gold coins to give to the poor, his reward is greater when he divides them among 100 poor people rather than giving all 100 gold coins to one, two, or three poor people, because one who gives to 100 [poor people] sustained 100 lives.



How to Give

Shulkhan Arukh Yoreh De'ah Hilkhhot Tzedaka 250:1

How much should one give to a poor person? *Sufficient for whatever he needs* [Deut. 15:8] How so? If he is hungry, feed him. If he needs clothing, cloth him... Even if it was his custom to ride on a horse with a servant to run in front of him when he was rich, and he became poor, purchase a horse and slave for him. And so for each person according to what they need.



How Much to Give?

- Share Rabbi Nevins' form!

Gimilut Hasadim

(Acts of Kindness)

- Tzedakah is for the poor but *gimilut hasadim* can be given to the rich and poor
- Tzedakah can only be given to the living, while *gimilut hasadim* can be bestowed upon the living or dead (by attending a funeral service)
- Tzedakah can only be offered with money, while *gimilut hasadim* can be given through money or assistance.

“Gemach”

Gimilut Hasadim (“Acts of kindness”)

- Jewish Free-Loan Fund/Society
- Israel Free Loan Association
 - Personal
 - Small Businesses
 - Students
 - Young Couples
 - Immigrants
- Hebrew Free-Loan Society of New York

Ways of Conceiving of Tzedakah

- Honor for People (Kavod habriot)
- Image of God (B'tzelem Elohim)

Tzedakah / תְּדָקָה	The obligation or commandment to give righteously, associated with justice (קְדוּשָׁה)
Charity	A voluntary action or donation to help those in need
Justice / קְדוּשָׁה	The quality of being fair, right or moral

Ways of Conceiving of Tzedakah

1. Tur, Yoreh Deah, Laws of Tzedakah, 247

A person shouldn't ask, "How can I spare my money to give to poor people?"

Because he should know that the money is not his but rather a deposit with which to do the will of the depositor (God) which is to distribute some of it to the poor.

Roleplay / Discussion

You are the director of an urban homeless shelter, or on the board of a homeless shelter.

Have any of your answers shifted?