The Power of Charity (Tzedakah)

Part 2



**#1**

**Jerusalem Talmud Shekalim 1:45**

*One cannot understand the nature of these people. If they are appealed to for a calf (reference to the sin of the golden calf when the Jews donated their Jewelry to build it), they give.*

*If appealed to for the Tabernacle (Holy Temple), they give (Jewish people donated enormous amounts of money, precious stones etc. for the building campaign).*

**On Jewish Character, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

The common factor was generosity. Jews may not always make the right choices in what they give to, but they give.

**Rambam, Laws of Gifts to the poor, 10:1-2**

*We must be more meticulous about the mitzvah of Tzedakah than about any of the other positive commandments. Tzedakah is the trademark of the righteous descendants of Avraham, our forefather, as it is written, “For I [God] have chosen him because I know he will pass on his heritage to his progeny, and they will thus keep the path of God, doing justice and Tzedakah.” The throne of Israel and the true faith only stand upon the merit of Tzedakah …*

*Someone who is cruel and shows no compassion casts doubt upon his Jewish ancestry …*

After a miraculous victory in war against four kings, Avraham gives a tenth of all he has to the priest Malchi Tzedek. This is the first time that the giving of a tenth is mentioned in the Torah:

**Torah Bereishis 14:20**

*… and he gave him a tithe from all.*

**Questions:**

* **What motivates you to give?**
* **What motivates you to give to certain causes?**
* **Why would you choose not give to other worthy causes?**

**#2**

**Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 249:1**

*The amount one should give: one who has enough should give as much as the poor need; if one does not have that much, he should give up to a fifth of his wealth – this is the ideal way to perform the mitzvah. One-tenth is mediocre; less than that is stingy.*

**Question: Why 10% across the board? Why not different income tax brackets?**

**#3**

**The Atlantic, March 22, 2011, Should You Give Money to Homeless People?**

Giving money to the homeless is an economic crisis of the heart, a tug-of-war between the instinct to alleviate suffering and the knowledge that a donation might encourage, rather than relieve, the anguish of the poor.

**Questions:**

* **You see a person on the sidewalk asking for money - should you donate some spare cash? Is this the best way to be helpful?**
* **Does what he’ll use it for make a difference? What about concerns that your donation will go toward alcohol or drugs?**
* **Would you give charity to a person who is probably faking and is not really poor?**
* **Would you investigate someone before you give?**
* **Under what circumstances would you give without investigating?**

**Talmud Bava Basra 9a**

*When a poor man says, “Provide me with clothes,” he should be investigated ; when he says, “Feed me,” he should not be investigated.*

**#4**

**The Duties of the Heart, Rabbi Bachya ibn Pekuda**

*G-d lacks nothing - so there is nothing that you could ever do for Him.*

**Question: G-d has no lack of resources. He could easily have created a world of universal wealth, wherein everyone was wealthy and no one was poor. What could be the reason why He did not do so?**

**#5**

**Torah Devarim 15:10**

*Surely give him, and don't let your heart be grieved when you give to him, for because of this thing the Lord your G-d will bless you in all your deeds, and in all you set out to do.*

**Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 34:10**

*The blessing of tzedakah is greater for the person who gives than for the person who receives.*

**Question: What are the benefits of giving tzedakah for the giver?**

**#6**

**Talmud Pesachim 8a-b**

*If a person says, “I am giving this coin to charity so that my child will live,” or “so that I will make it into the next world,” he is regarded as completely righteous.*

**Questions:**

* **What are your thoughts about this statement? Why would self-centered motives not make an act of charity less valuable?**
* **How is granting life in this world and the next a commensurate reward (“measure for measure”) for the mitzvah of giving charity?**

**#7**

**On Jewish Character, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

There is a fascinating feature of the geography of the land of Israel. It contains two seas: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of life. The Dead Sea, as its name implies, is not. Yet they are fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee receives water and gives water. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. To receive but not to give is, in Jewish geography as well as Jewish psychology, simply not life.

**Question: What can make it easier for us to give?**

**#8**

**Rabbi Nachman of Breslov**

*A person's drive for profit should be prompted by the desire to give tzedakah.*

**Question: How would such an approach change one's relationship to money and work?**

**Chafetz Chaim, Ahavas Chesed Part II, 20:6**

*Those who give a tenth or fifth from all of their profits are much greater than those who just give Tzedakah, even if they give the same amount. The reason being that those who just give Tzedakah only have the mitzvah of Tzedakah, with their business being no different than any other business. Whereas [those who give a tenth or fifth] their business itself is in a partnership with G-d – therefore the business itself has an advantage, for it is a business dedicated to observing mitzvos.*

**#9**

**Question: What's your takeaway from today's discussion?**