



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון  
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

## **Educating a Giving Society:**

### **Four Historic Models – Rabbinic, Christian, Greek, and Maimonidean**

**Noam Zion, Hartman Institute**

An introspective session that will explore the cultural roots and purpose of your tzedakah and help you assess your own practice and refocus as needed. Consider all the ways you support those in need (donating money, expertise, good name, time, spaces) and all the ways you appeal to others to join your projects for making a better world.

We will examine the historic rationales for a giving society and how major religious cultures have educated people to generosity in very different ways

### **Four Models of Giving Societies – Rabbinic, Christian, Greek, and Maimonidean**

- A. Tzedakah as Social Welfare Tax, as Brotherly Social Insurance (Biblical and Rabbinic Model) – obligatory acts of responsibility**
- B. Charity or *Hesed* (loving kindness) (Christian Model) – selfless acts of love**
- C. Philanthropy (Greek model) – elite contributions to cultural institutions**
- D. Tzedakah as Empowerment, problem-solving (Maimonides model) and Tikkun Olam /Repairing a Broken World – social justice (prophetic model)**

#### **A Typology of Giving**

- rationales for the giver,
- preferred recipients (priorities),
- varied modes of operation,
- understanding of needs,
- hopes for a better world,
- religious and social visions

#### **Writing Your Identity in your Checkbook**

“Suppose you get hit by a truck and someone finds your checkbook. What would the check stubs reveal about your giving habits? How recently did you make your last contribution, and how generous was it relative to your means? Who were the beneficiaries of your giving, and why did you choose those causes?” - Letty Cottin Pogrebin, a novelist

## Tzedakah as Social Welfare Tax, as Brotherly Social Insurance, as an Obligation among Fellow Citizens (Biblical and Rabbinic Model)

- **obligatory** giving to the poor (tithe - 10-20%), but not too much because the first priority among recipient is your own self-sufficiency. Self-lessness is not the ideal of tzedakah.
- the rabbinic invention of the **social welfare state** (bureaucracy of collection and standardized distribution according to need): "from each according to their ability and from each according to the needs" (socialist slogan), so proportional taxation
- **a citizen's duty**: even the poor are obligated to give and even if their gifts are meager gifts the community ought to accept them because human dignity is defined by the ability and the obligation to give. **anonymity** in giving to protect the honor of the recipients who are ashamed that they cannot support themselves
- **social insurance** needed because life's ups and downs ( political, economic, health, aging) i.e. **life is vulnerable**. Typically Jewish life has been particularly vulnerable. "Two are better than one for if one falls who will be there to pick him up?"- Ecclesiastes
- society as an **extended family** since humans who have longest period of socialization of any mammal needs longterm support. a society of mutual help forms a **social fabric**.  
Responsibility for my brothers in contrast to "Cain: Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4). "All Israel are guarantors each for the other" (Talmud Shavuot)
- **Priorities**: In a humanitarian crisis all are included in human brotherhood. But on an everyday basis a policy of triage graded by proximity, concentric circles of decreasing obligation where priority of recipients are "the poor of my city and my people" come first, my nearest brother in need is first recipient and first to owe me support
- tzedakah responds to **all human needs** and to **individualized needs**– not only material (food and shelter), but emotional and social needs (for love and for honor). For example, J- date as a tzedakah to help establish families and to provide love for God said: "It is not good for the human to be alone. I will make him a helper to complement him" – Genesis 2). For example, provide even "luxury" items to those whose have fallen from wealth and status and hence feel shame.
- **solidarity and empathy** for my brothers and for all strangers because we were "strangers in the land of Egypt" (common destiny, common history)

a. **Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> C. Egypt) - Brotherhood is Mutual Aid**

וכל ישראל והנלוה עליהם כאחים הם שנאמר "בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם."  
ואם לא ירחם האח על האח מי ירחם עליו, ולמי עניי ישראל נושאין עיניהן, הלעכו"ם ששונאין אותן ורודפים  
אחריהן הא אין עיניהן תלויות אלא לאחיהן.

All Jews and those attached to them are like brothers, as it is said, "You are sons to the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1), and if a brother will not show mercy to his brother, then who will have mercy on him? And to whom can the poor of Israel look for help-to those other nations who hate and persecute them? They can look for help only to their brothers. (Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10: 2)

b. **The Meiri (13<sup>th</sup> C., Provence) – Mixed Motives for Generosity**

"האומר סלע זה לצדקה בשביל שיחיו בני או כדי שאזכה לחיי העולם הבא" אינו מפקיע שכר צדקתו בלשון  
זה אע"פ שדומה כעובד על מנת לקבל פרס.

Even "the one who says: I donate money to tzedakah so my son will live or so I will merit the world to come" (Talmud) has not eviscerated the reward due for giving tzedakah, even though it is not an act done for its own sake but only in order to win a prize.....

**The act of tzedakah is greater than the actor**, so that even though one is forced to give and it is not a voluntary gift of the heart, it is still a credit to them as tzedakah."

c. **The Shiva Box: German Jewish Community (19<sup>th</sup> C.) - Anonymous Giving and Receiving**

"If someone lost a relative and had to observe *shivah* (the week of mourning), the local *Fuersorge* (social service organization) would send two boxes to the mourner's home, one filled with money, the other empty. If the mourner was poor, he emptied the full box. If he was well-to-do, he filled the empty one. The boxes went back to the tzedakah office and nobody but a trusted official knew what had been done with them.

In the twenties of 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the German mark was engaged in a downward race, people gradually lost their life savings. I remember receiving, for one dollar, one hundred thousand marks one morning, and one hundred and ten thousand marks the next day. Ultimately, paper money having become worthless, one paid millions of marks to the barber and the shoemaker. It was fine for Americans, but a dreadful tragedy for the people dependent upon their salaries or pensions for which they had contributed solid service and valuable gold marks.

The Jewish community of Berlin then arranged for a popular restaurant. Money was available only in paper. At the entrance to that community restaurant stood a big box in front of which were heaps of envelopes. Anyone entering for a meal put into the envelope whatever he wanted. It could have been a one thousand mark note of utterly insignificant value or a million mark note or a miraculous dollar bill. The cashier accepted the envelope and the customer could obtain a simple wholesome meal. But, lest it come to be known as a poor man's soup kitchen, there had been a definite arrangement whereby some of the surviving wealthy members of the community came, several times a week, in order to uphold the self-respect of those for whose relief it had been established."

## A. Charity or *Hesed* (Christian Model) – selfless acts of love

- a. **PAUL:** "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love ...does not boast, it is not proud. it is **not self-seeking**, ... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (charity)."
  - b. **PAUL:** "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" ( New Testament II Corinthians 9:7)
  - c. **Jesus preaches:** "When you give a dinner or a banquet, **do not invite your friends or brothers or kinsmen or rich neighbors**, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14:12-14)
- Acts of love as free donation for the helpless and the sinner out of pity, not recognition of their rights to support and not out of legal obligation
  - Selfless acts without sin of pride, without expectation of reciprocity and without worrying about what you will have left for your own support
  - Religious model of pure and virtuous Jesus dying for the sins of others out of condescending love, pity, sympathy, not empathy
  - Support in time of suffering (for example, hospice work), but not problem solving (Mother Theresa); faith in providence, but not planning and saving
  - Priority to those most distant from you, not family or fellow citizens, and who are most needy and hence will not be able to reciprocate (burying the homeless as highest form of *hesed* – acts of loving kindness)
  - Anonymous giving is highest because it is most unselfish
  - Jewish parallel: *hesed shel emet*, truest loving kindness shown in burial of dead who cannot reciprocate

## B. Philanthropy (Greek model) – elite contributions to cultural institutions

- Aristotle:** "The magnificent man is an artist in expenditure: he can discern what is suitable, and spend great sums with good taste."
- Wealthy aristocratic elites of a polis donate their largesse to cultural institutions that will make their city great (for example, chamber of commerce, supports opera, NFL stadium, arts that make us truly human in cultural sense, not humanitarian sense)
  - Named gifts out of civic and family pride will immortalize the contributor by attaching his name to immortality of a city with a glorious culture of greats who will go down in history

## C. Tzedakah as Empowerment, Problem-solving (Maimonides' highest rung) and Tzedakah as Tikkun Olam /Repairing a Broken World –and social justice (Prophetic model)

**Tzedakah as Empowerment:** Maimonides' lower levels vs highest level of tzedakah; maintenance vs empowerment; shameful dependence vs dignity of labor and supporting oneself; anonymity vs partnership; priority for the most needy vs priority to those with greatest potential for self-help,

- being your brother's redeemer means providing capital and freedom to labor (Jubilee - "Proclaim liberty to all the inhabitants thereof" – **redemption of land and of slaves** -Lev. 25)
- my power to change the world for myself becomes my empowering of others to change their world (for example, interest free loan society, micro-finance, job training, investment and partnership in business, education grant, Andrew Carnegie's public libraries and Julius Rosenwald's matching grants for Negro elementary and vocational schools in the segregated south, Jewish National Fund, JDC and Jewish Agency refugee resettlement and land reclamation)
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- **Preemptive tzedakah** to give a hand and to prevent people from falling (for example, helping a person with a stumbling, overloaded donkey before it collapses)

**Tzedakah as *Tikkun Olam*:** the world is broken, (symbolized by broken glass at a Jewish wedding connecting private joy at finding completeness with public pain of broken reality), but I am empowered to fix it incrementally and I can even help God bring redemption

- The **system is broken**, the laws may make things worse, so *tikkun* begins with **reform** (structural changes), but not with revolution
- Prophets: **poverty is the result of injustice**, not just bad luck, misfortune, not God's inscrutable, not bad *mazal*. Therefore protest human exploitation of weak, of strangers.
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- **Two kinds of repairing the world: for progress versus for justice;** for problem solving (such as Gates Foundation and illnesses of the third world) vs fighting evil though political, social and economic reform (prophetic anger at exploitation of the poor)
- Priority to problems that can be solved and to populations that have been persecuted (such as Half the Sky program for women in the Third World)
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- a. *The Diary of Anne Frank*: “How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment before making the world better. We can start now slowly changing the world You can always, always, always give something, even if it is only kindness. Give, give again, don't lose courage. Keep it up and go on giving.” (Amsterdam, March 1944)

**b. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat 63a**

אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש : גדול המלוה יותר מן העושה, צדקה, ומטיל בכיס יותר מכולן

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Greater is the lender than one who does tzedakah.

Yet the one who puts (money) in a kitty (*kis*) as a partnership [with someone in need] is greatest of all.

**c. Maimonides – Tzedakah as Empowerment: Social Entrepreneurship? Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, Gifts to the Poor 10:7-14**

מעלה גדולה שאין למעלה ממנה--זה המחזיק בידי ישראל שמך, ונותן לו מתנה או הלוואה, או עושה עימו שותפות, או ממציא לו מלאכה, כדי לחזק את ידו עד שלא יצטרך לבריות ולא ישאל; ועל זה נאמר "והחזקת בו, גר ותושב וחי עמך" (ויקרא כה, לה), כלומר החזק בו שלא ייפול ויצטרך.

The highest, supreme level of tzedakah is one who supports a member of the Jewish people who has come by hard times, by handing him a gift or a loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding work for him, in order to strengthen his hand, so that he would have no need to beg from other people. Concerning such the Torah says, "*you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a resident, that he may live with you*" (Lev. 25:35) – meaning: sustain him, so that he will not lapse into poverty.

**d. Isaiah 58:5-9 – The Prophetic Criticism of Economic Injustice (Yom Kippur Haftorah)**

הֲכִזָּה יִהְיֶה צוֹם אֲבַחְרֶהוּ יוֹם עֲנוּת אָדָם נִפְשׁוֹ  
הֲלִכְף כְּאֶגְמוֹן רֹאשׁוֹ וְשָׁק וְאָפֶר יִצְיַע הַלְזָה תִּקְרָא צוֹם וַיּוֹם רָצוֹן לִיקוֹק:  
הֲלוֹא זֶה צוֹם אֲבַחְרֶהוּ פִּתְחַת חֲרָצְבוֹת רֶשַׁע  
הֲתֵר אֲגִדּוֹת מוֹטָה וְשִׁלַּח רְצוּצִים חֲפָשִׁים וְכָל מוֹטָה תִּנְתְּקוּ:  
הֲלוֹא פָרַס לָרֶעִב לְחֻמֶּדָּה וְעֲנִיִּים מְרוּדִים תִּבְיֵא בַּיִת כִּי תִרְאֶה עָרֹם וְכִסִּיתוֹ וּמִבְּשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם.

Is such the fast that I desire, A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a reed  
And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day favored by Adonai?

No, this is the fast I desire: **To unlock the chains of evil, And untie the ropes of the yoke [of injustice]**  
**To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke.**

It is to share your bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home;  
When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.

#### e. Hosea 8:14; Jerusalem Talmud Tractate Peah 21b – Critique of Philanthropy

אמר רבי חמא בר חנינא לרבי הושעיה : כמה ממון שיקעו אבותי כאן.  
אמר ליה : כמה נפשות שיקעו אבותיך כאן. לא הוה אית בני נש דלעיין באורית?

"Rabbi [Judah the Prince] showed Rav a synagogue gate that [his family] had built, and exclaimed: **'How much money my ancestors invested here!'**

He replied: 'Rather, how many *lives* have your ancestors invested here! Was there no person studying Torah [whom they might have supported], or sick people lying in a dump?' He referred him to the following verse, *Israel forgot its Maker and built palaces [and Judah built cities].*" (Hosea 8:14).

### Appendix:

#### 1. Charles Bronfman, *The Art of Giving*, **New and Old Philanthropy**

**Introduction:** "Old philanthropy is being replaced by new philanthropy. While Charles Bronfman's father, head of Seagrams, used to donate to the major umbrella organizations of the Jewish and general community out of a sense of social obligation as one gives taxes regularly and annually with fluctuations by the economic success of one's own business, his son Charles sees himself as a new kind of philanthropist. His book, *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan* (2010), is an attempt to articulate that difference and help other donors make that transition in streetwise ways. The old philanthropy was about fulfilling a social obligation, while the new is about fulfilling my life by making a difference in the world."

- a. **"Few donors are selfless. That is fine. The question is what self governs these philanthropic choices?"** Therefore we must know the narrative of *who we are* to be able to identify **the self that governs our choices**. The motives may be past, present or future oriented – social obligation growing out of our communal and historical identity including guilt; ephemeral and idiosyncratic whims like hobbies; the needs and crises encroaching on our society now; or the visions of what we can do to change the world. Since giving is highly individual without a sense of social obligation deriving from membership, it must fit one's self. It requires much sorting of one's preferences and values which means **self-reflection**. Therefore choosing one's philanthropic thrust is 'doing what's right for you.'"

- b. "In the old philanthropy, donors gave largely out of **obligation**, routine, and guilt, if not to gain influence, **social** standing, or a place in heaven....[It was social as a reflection of one's communal identity, out of nostalgia for the values of old, out of a desire to meet an emergency or support those too weak to support themselves]. In the new philanthropy, the donor's giving is like their doing: it is **individual**, forward looking, leveraged for effect, and bent on changing the world...It signifies the transformation of society from **noblesse oblige** to one of **entrepreneurial problem solving**. The new philanthropist looks at her activities with a refreshing frankness and realism. She is less saint than engineer."
- c. "The new philanthropy is the business of change; it is not so much about process as it is about outcomes." "The invention of the new philanthropy is credited to the successful young entrepreneurs of the dot-com world of 1990s. Thus they are called social entrepreneurs or strategic donors who have a founder's attitude to their projects, a sense that this is mine and I will succeed. Therefore they give their 'energy, enthusiasm, creativity, passion, and connections.'"
- d. "In the new philanthropy donors have sought to make a difference. They are ready for their second act [after making a name for themselves in business]. And they are ready to make use of sophisticated management instruments they have developed in their business life to achieve greater performance in this new, more challenging arena, and with potentially more impact. They give purposefully, think strategically, rely on measurements and regular monitoring. In short, they are relying on the focus and rigor of for-profits to enhance the effectiveness of their philanthropy... **Business' best attributes of purposeful, honed intelligence and strategic-mindedness have a place in philanthropy.**"
- e. "Old and new philanthropy may be contrasted as downstream or upstream interventions, as rescue or preventive projects. We are like the parable of two men who see a series of people drowning in a river. One responds by jumping in to save each person. The other races up stream to try to keep any more people from falling in. This is the essential dilemma in philanthropy – whether to address consequences or causes?"

## 2. What Marks a Bar Mitzvah? An Italian Celebration and a Bay Area BM

### a. 17<sup>th</sup> Century Italian Celebration

*In one of the first ever reported Bar Mitzvah ceremonies, in Italy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, we have an eye witness report from a Jew who later converted to Christianity. This is how he presented his former religion:* The boy aged 13 comes with his father to the synagogue where they are greeted with blessings. Then the cantor calls up the new Bar Mitzvah to read publicly from the Torah. **Then the Bar Mitzvah thanks God for making him a Bar Mitzvah and publicly announces how he will contribute his own Tzedakah.** How much to this? How much to that. How much to the *hazan* (cantor). How much to the *shamash* (synagogue caretaker). Then he descends from the *bimah* and receives everyone's blessings and kisses the hands of his father and his teacher.

### b. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Celebration

*In a Bay area Jewish day school the educators agonized over the fancy self-aggrandizing Bnai Mitzvah celebrations that suggested a lack of concern for others less fortunate. They also worried about the high cost of gifts for families who must give a significant gift for every other child in class – minimally \$30 – since the whole class was invited to each **Bar Mitzvah party**. So the school developed the following custom in consultation with parents and students:*

All the children's families contribute a lump sum of \$500 for Tzedakah and the children voted to relinquish the expectation of receiving gifts from their classmates. Twenty students means \$10,000. With that they wrote to corporations describing their project for giving meaning to their adolescent rite of passage by making a financial commitment to the good of the community. Each corporation was

asked for matching funds at various levels and then the class worked on fund raisers to raise another \$10,000.

Then after studying the laws of Tzedakah and the needs of the community, selected nonprofit organizations are asked to make formal presentations and answer hard-nosed questions from the young philanthropists about overhead charges and long term results. This is how they inaugurate their entrance into the yoke of mitzvot.

### **3. The UJA and the Obligation to Give Tzedakah**

An anecdote from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, in 1943 captures the hands-on significance of defining a Jew by his willingness to give to his people in time of need. It also shows how tzedakah remained a mitzvah that one may "coerce" even after the Emancipation and even without the legal force of halakha. My father Rabbi Moses Sachs recalls how he served the small mountain town of Pottsville as a rabbinical student intern. The Jewish community was chiefly run by one community activist who was wealthy enough to control every Jewish organization. He was president of the synagogue, the Zionist organization, the United Palestine Appeal (which after 1948 became the United Israel Appeal), the local federation (which funded community services and aided the needy, especially recent refugees) and the *hevra kaddisha* or burial society. Everyone was expected to be a dues paying member of those organizations. If a person did not contribute an amount in keeping with what the president knew he or she could afford, then the president would imperiously return the contribution and wait for a higher sum. Those who refused to up their gifts were excluded from the synagogue and the *hevrah kaddisha*. Their names were publicized in the community book of annual contributions for not having contributed. My father recalls funerals being delayed as the heirs of the deceased negotiated to "pay back" missed contributions from the life of the deceased.

The president was unapologetic about the pressure he put on reluctant donors. He said, if you want to be buried as a Jew, you must behave as a Jew in life – that means giving adequate tzedakah according to your capacity. A Jew must take responsibility for his community. His argument was rendered more urgent by the greatest threat to Jewish existence in history. It was 1943, news of the Holocaust in Europe was trickling in and the Zionist Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael was very vulnerable. Jews, he felt, may not exclude themselves from these crucial struggles for national survival.

#### 4. Mentoring for UJA Fundraising:

“One January, as a young leader, I [Gordon Zacks] remember accompanying Bill Rosenwald - son of Sears, Roebuck founder Julius Rosenwald - and one of three co-founders of the United Jewish Appeal—on a solicitation in Miami Beach. Bill, who was about seventy five at the time, was mentoring me on this call. He flew in from Chicago, and I arrived from Columbus. Bill was a mild-mannered and humble person who shunned the spotlight. His commitment to Israel and Jewish causes was absolute and breathtakingly deep. Bill also, coincidentally, suffered from an illness that made him feel chronically cold, no matter what the climate or how warmly he was dressed. Bill and I found the prospect (whom I'll call 'X') in his swimming trunks poolside at the Fontainebleau Hotel. Bill wore a heavy overcoat, a wool scarf, and a fedora hat. It was ninety-five degrees, and the entire crowd stared at us with total bewilderment.

Bill delivered his request in a soft-spoken voice asking for a \$250,000 gift from a man who had given \$10,000 the prior year. X was unmoved. Bill explained the reasons the money was needed. Still no answer. But it was plain to see that X wanted nothing more than to disappear. Well, extracting himself from the scene is exactly what he tried to do. Slowly but resolutely, he got up and walked toward the sand. Bill followed him, never missing a beat in his appeal. I was mystified—frozen in my tracks poolside. X moved toward the shoreline. So did Bill. Then X started *walking into the water*. So did the fully dressed Bill Rosenwald! With a steady rhythm, X was now wading out into the waves one step after another. In just a couple of minutes, both he and Bill were waist high, and the waves were splashing on top of Bill's fedora. Finally X turned to Bill and shouted: ‘All right, you win! I give up! I'll give the \$250,000.’ That's commitment!”

(Gordon Zacks, *Defining Moments: Stories of Character, Courage and Leadership*, 2009, xiii)

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