

The Menoras Hamaor Midrash Anthology

The Mitzvah of Tzedakah

An Annotated Excerpt from
The Light of Mitzvos,
the third Light of the Menorah

Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav

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&&Translator's Foreword

MENORAS HAMAOR, one of the great classics of Jewish literature, was written by Rabbeinu Yitzchak Abohav in the fourteenth century. It is a systematic arrangement of the chronicles and timeless wisdom of the Agadic portion of the Talmud. It takes the reader by the hand and leads him on a tour of the intricate maze of the Agada. It is a window to an enchanting world hitherto accessible only to Talmudic scholars.

MENORAS HAMAOR is a masterwork consisting of seven separate and distinct works, each dealing with a separate and distinct area of Jewish thought. It is now being translated, for the first time, into English. At this point, the only book of the series in print is the First Light of the Menorah — The Light of Contentment.

THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH is excerpted from the Third Light of the Menorah — The Light of Mitzvos — which will not be in print for another year. It appears in the book as Section VII, Part 2.

Because of the brevity of the Hebrew language, as compared with the English language, some parts of the original text were synopsisized to gain readability. These parts are essentially concerned with the derivation of concepts rather than with the concepts themselves.

MENORAS HAMAOR

The Mitzvah of Tzedakah

Chapter One

&&In the times of the Bais Hamikdash, the Jewish people were able to fulfill the mitzvah of giving tithes from the produce of the land. Now that the Bais Hamikdash has been destroyed, the giving of charity has taken the place of the tithes. Therefore, the rewards outlined in the Torah for the giving of tithes apply to the giving of charity in our times.

The Talmud tells us that the giving of tithes makes a person rich and, consequently, so does the giving of charity (Taanis 9a). The Talmud derives this from that which is written, Surely you shall tithe all the produce of your seed (Devorim 14:22). There is an intimation in the Hebrew usage that giving tithes makes one rich. The Talmud also brings a verse that states this explicitly, Bring all of the tithes to the storehouse, so that there be food in My House, and please test me through this, said God of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of the heavens, and I will pour out on you blessings without limit (Malachi 3:10).

There are other direct references to the fact that giving charity makes one rich. It is written, There is a man that scatters, and yet, his wealth increases, and one that holds back more than is rightful, only to have losses (Mishlei 11:24). It is also written, One that gives to the pauper will have no loss, and one that shuts his eyes will have many curses (Mishlei 28:27).

The Pesikta explains the proper attitude one should have towards giving the tithes and, consequently, towards giving charity (Piska 11, 99a):

%%It was taught in the name of Rabbi Nachmeini: "In the way of the world, a person owns a field and gives it over to a sharecropper to work the land. The sharecropper gets either a half, a third, or a fourth of the crop, the owner taking the rest. Not so is the way of the Holy Blessed One. He makes the wind to blow. He makes the clouds to appear. He makes the rains to come down. He makes the dew to fall. He makes the plants to sprout. He

makes the fruit to ripen. Yet all He asks is that one set aside one tenth for His tithe.

&&The Pesikta also mentions some of the blessings that come as a reward for giving the tithe (Piska 11, 96b; Piska 1, 5b):

%%*Rabbi Yehoshua of Sachnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: "By the merit of two of their deeds did the Jews find grace before the Omnipresent: keeping the Shabbos and giving the tithes.*

"How do we know that keeping the Shabbos brings such merit?

"For it is written, If you shall restrain your legs because of the Shabbos, nor handle your affairs on My holy day... (Yeshayahu 58:13). What is the following verse? Then you shall be delightful to God (Yeshayahu 58:14).

"How do we know that giving the tithes brings such merit?

"For it is written, And you shall rejoice in all the good He has given to you (Devarim 26:11)."

It is written, Who went up to the heavens and came down again? (Mishlei 30:4) Who is the one whose prayers went up to the heavens and brought down the rains?

It is the one who gave out his tithes by the handful. He is the one that brings dew and rainfall! to the world.

The verse concludes, Who gathered the wind in his hands, who bundled water in a garment? (Ibid.)

Who is the one whose prayers went up to the heavens but did not bring down the rains?

It is the one who did not give out his tithes by the handful. He holds back the heavens from sending down dew and rainfall.

&&The Midrash tells of the importance of tithes and charity (Tanchuma 10,12):

%%*There was once a pious man whose fields would bring him a thousand measures of grain each year. He used to say: "What the Holy Blessed One has given me is enough for me, and I will set aside a tenth of it for His tithe."*

On his deathbed, he summoned his son and told him: "My son, be very careful to observe the laws of the tithes. It is because I gave the tithes that I merited all of this wealth."

After the first year of his inheritance the son set aside a tithe of one hundred measures from the thousand measures that the fields had produced.

After the second year he thought: "Why should I give away so much?"

He set aside only ninety measures for the tithe.

The following year the fields produced only nine hundred measures of grain. The son again set aside a tithe that was ten measures less than it should have been. The following year the fields again produced a hundred measures less than the year before.

This went on year after year. The son would give ten measures less than the tithe required, and the fields would produce one hundred measures less that following year. Finally, the point was reached where the fields were producing only one hundred measures per year. The pious man's son was very dejected.

His brothers and other members of his family came to visit him. They were all dressed in beautiful clothing.

He said to them: "Are you all coming to some kind of festivity that you have dressed up so nicely? You should have come to console me."

They replied: "Why shouldn't we be festive? At first, you were the owner of the fields, and the Holy Blessed One was the kohen; you kept nine hundred measures of the produce of the fields, and you gave but one hundred measures for His tithe. Now, the Holy Blessed One is the owner, and you are the kohen; He keeps nine hundred measures of what the fields can produce, and He gives but one hundred measures to you."

Immediately, he began to give the proper amounts for his tithes, and the fields returned to their former productivity.

It also happened that there was a man that gathered stores of wine and oil, but he did not set aside the proper amount for the tithes. He became

crazed, grabbed a stick, and started smashing the casks. His son began to yell at him. What did the man do? He took the stick and hit his son over the head.

His son also became affected by the obsession and said: "Give me the stick, and I will also smash some casks."

The man gave his son the stick, and they took turns smashing the casks. The man would smash one, and his son would smash one. Then the man would smash two, and his son would smash two.

Whose fault was it that this happened?

It was the man's fault in that he did not set aside the proper amount for the tithes.

In reference to such a one is it written, One who loves wine and oil shall not become rich (Mishlei 21:17).

Rabbi Levi said: "There was once a man who tithed his produce properly. He had only one field. The Holy Blessed One implanted in his mind the idea of dividing his field into two parts. In one part he planted wheat. In the other part he dug pits and collected reservoirs of rainwater.

"Soon after, there was a drought. The man was able to sell a se'ah measure of wheat for a seta, but each se'ah measure of water he was able to sell for three selas.

"He rejoiced: 'I can sell one se'ah measure of water and it will bring me as much as three se'ah measures of wheat.'

"Who should take credit for what happened?

It is the man himself in that he set aside the proper amount for the tithes."

It is written. Blessed are you in the city, blessed are you in the field (Devarim 28:3).

Rabbi Yitzchak said: "This means that a person should not say: 'If the Holy Blessed One had given me a field I would have set aside the tithes from its produce.'

"If a person has no fields, he should set aside the tithes from that which he owns in the city."

&&Thus, it is only wise for a person to be very meticulous in observing the laws of the tithes and to make sure that he sets aside the proper amounts. In our times this applies to the giving of charity. It is important to set aside the proper amount from one's income, regardless of how one earns it, and give it to charity. In this way he will make sure that his wealth is preserved. In this way he will find that it will be multiplied manifold.

THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Two

Any person of intelligence would give away everything he owns if by doing so he could avoid being punished by the courts. Certainly he should be willing to give only some of his wealth to charity, for by doing so he can avoid the punishment of Gehinom. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 10a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Meir used to say: "There would seem to be an opening for an antagonist to say: 'If your Lord loves the poor people, why doesn't He feed them?'

"You should answer him: In order to give all of us the opportunity of fulfilling the mitzvah of charity and thereby being saved from the judgment of Gehinom. ' "

Indeed, this was the question that Turnus Rufus asked of Rabbi Akiva. He asked: "If your Lord loves the poor people, why doesn't He feed them?"

Rabbi Akiva replied: "In order to give all of us the opportunity of fulfilling the mitzvah of charity and thereby being saved from the judgment of Gehinom."

Turnus Rufus persisted: "On the contrary! It is the presence of poor people in the world that brings the judgment of Gehinom upon you.

"Let me draw you an analogy to this situation. A mortal king of flesh and blood became angry with one of his servants and locked him in the dungeon. He commanded that no one should bring food or water to the imprisoned servant. One person, however, went and fed the imprisoned servant and gave him to drink. When the king heard of this, did he not become angry with the one who violated his commandment?

"You, the Jewish people, are called servants of God, as it is written, For the people of Yisrael are servants to Me (Vayikra 25:55). Therefore, if He has decreed that a man be poor, how can you violate His Will and feed the poor man?"

Rabbi Akiva answered him: "Let me draw you a different analogy to this situation. A mortal king of flesh and blood became angry with one of his

sons and locked him in the dungeon. He commanded that no one should bring food or water to the imprisoned son. One person, however, went and fed the imprisoned son and gave him to drink. When the king heard of this, did he not send gifts to the one who took care of his son?

"We are called the children of God, as it is written, You are children to God, your Lord (Devarim 14:1). Therefore, if we feed the poor man who is His child, He is happy with us and rewards us."

Turnus Rufus said: "Indeed, you are called His children, but you are also called His servants. When you fulfill the Will of the Omnipresent you are called His children; when you do not fulfill the Will of the Omnipresent you are called His servants. In these times you are not fulfilling the Will of the Omnipresent. Therefore, you are His servants, not His children, and my analogy is the appropriate one."

Rabbi Akiva replied: "It is written, Is it not to distribute your bread to the poor, and you will bring the wretched poor into your house (Yeshayahu 58:7). Certainly the second part of this verse applies to our times when the gentiles, to whom 'the wretched poor' refers, have conquered our country. Still we are commanded to distribute bread to the poor."

...Rabbi Chiya the son of Aba said: "Rabbi Yochanan pointed out an apparent redundancy in two verses. It is written, Fortunes shall be to no avail on the day of wrath, but charity will deliver from death (Mishlei 11:4). It is also written, Treasuries of evil shall be to no avail, but charity shall deliver from death (Mishlei 10:2). What is the significance of the repetition of this phrase?

"One is to deliver from an unnatural death, the other to deliver from the judgment of Gehinom."

Which verse refers to the charity that delivers from the judgment of Gehinom?

The first one, for it mentions wrath, and it is written in reference to Gehinom, That day is a day of wrath (Zephaniah 1:15).

What form of charity delivers from an unnatural death?

If the giver does not know to whom he is giving, and the taker does not know from whom he is taking.

How does one accomplish this?

By giving one's charity to a charitable fund.

...It is written, And he wore charity like a suit of armor (Yeshayahu 59:17).

Just as armor protects a person in battle, so does charity protect him from the judgment of Gehinom.

&&Elsewhere, the Talmud again makes this point (Gittin 7a):

%%In the school of Rabbi Yishmael it was taught: Whoever shears off some of his wealth and gives it to charity will be saved from the judgment of Gehinom.

&&Clearly, it is in a person's best interest to be especially careful in the fulfillment of a mitzvah that can save him from a dreadful fate.

MENORAS HAMAOR

Chapter Three

The giving of charity protects the giver from various catastrophes to which he might otherwise fall prey. The Talmud lists the giving of charity among the four or five things that can effect a reversal of an unfavorable decree (Rosh Hashanah 16b). There are many examples throughout the Talmud of the power of charity as a protection against misfortune.

The Talmud gives an example of charity prolonging the life of a gentile (Baca Basra 4a):

%%Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: "Why was Daniel punished by being thrown into the lions' den?

"Because he gave Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Bavel, advice that prolonged his normal life.

"It is written, Therefore, O king, let my advice find favor with you, and cast off your sins through charity, and your guilt through kindness to the poor, perhaps they will extend your tranquility (Daniel 4:24).

"The fate that Nebuchadnezzar had foreseen in his dream - that he would lose his kingdom and be forced to live as an animal in the fields - still befell him, as it is written, All of this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:25).

"Yet, because he followed Daniel's advice, the fulfillment of his dream was delayed, as it is written, At the end of twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Bavel (Daniel 4:26)."

&&If the giving of charity could delay the execution of a heavenly decree against the evil gentile king, Nebuchadnezzar, certainly it would completely rescind a heavenly decree against a Jew.

The Talmud also tells of how the giving of charity protects against a decree of untimely death (Bava Basra 11a):

%%It was taught: It was said of Binyamin the Just that he was the trustee of a charitable fund.

Once, during a period of drought, a woman came and stood before him.

She said: "My master, feed me."

Binyamin the Just replied: "I give you my oath that the coffers of the fund are bare."

She said: "My master, if you do not feed me a woman and her seven children will surely die of hunger,"

Binyamin the Just fed her at his own expense.

A short time afterwards, Binyamin the Just fell ill and was on the verge of death.

The angels of service said before the Holy Blessed One: "Master of the Universe! You said that whoever saves the life of even one Jewish soul is considered as if he has preserved the existence of the entire world. How can it be that Binyamin the Just, after having saved the lives of a woman and her seven children, should die after so few years!?"

It was taught: Twelve years were added to the life of Binyamin the Just.

&&The Talmud also tells us Bava Basra 10a):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Yehudah... used to say: "Ten strong things were created in the world:

"A rock is strong, but iron cuts it. Iron is strong, but fire melts it. Fire is strong, but water extinguishes it. Water is strong, but clouds absorb it. Clouds are strong, but wind scatters them. Wind is strong, but the human body withstands it. The human body is strong, but fears destroys it. Fear is strong, but wine dispels it. Wine is strong, but sleep sobers. Sleep is strong, but death overpowers it. Death is strong, but charity overpowers it, as it is written, And charity shall deliver from death (Mishlei 10:2)."

&&The Midrash also tells of how the giving of charity protects against a decree of untimely death (Bereishis Rabbah 59a):

%%Rabbi Meir went to Mamla. He saw that the people of the town all had dark hair; there were no older, gray-haired people among them.

Rabbi Meir asked the townspeople: "Are you possibly descended from the children of Eli of whom it is written, And all the increase of your house shall die in the prime of manhood (Shmuel I 2:33)?"

They replied: "Indeed, it is so. Pray for us."

He said to them: "Occupy yourselves with the giving of charity, and you shall live to be old, as it is written, A grizzled head is a crown of glory, it shall be found on the pathway of charity (Mishlei 16:33)."

&&The Talmud tells of how the giving of charity protects against unnatural death (Shabbos 156b):

%%As Shmuel and Avlet were sitting together, they saw some young people going into a swamp to collect bundles of reeds.

Avlet pointed out one of them to Shmuel and said: "That man goes, but he will not return. He will be bitten by a snake and die."

Shmuel disagreed: "If he is a Jew he will return, for the Jewish people are not bound by destiny; they can change their destiny through prayer and charity."

Presently, the man went and returned.

Avlet got up and untied the bundle of reeds the man had collected. In it he found a dead snake that was cut in half.

Shmuel asked the man: "What have you done that saved you from the snake?"

The man replied: "Every day our group would collect everyone's bread into one common mound, and we would all eat together.

"Today, one of our group had no bread to contribute to the common mound, and he was embarrassed.

"I said to my fellows: 'Today I shall be the one to get up and collect the bread:

"When I came to the one that had no bread I pretended to take bread from him, but I actually put in another piece of my own to save him from embarrassment."

Shmuel told him: "You have fulfilled the mitzvah of giving charity, and it has protected you.

"Thereupon, Shmuel expounded: "It is written, And charity shall deliver from death (Mishlei 10:2).

"Not only does the mitzvah of giving charity assure a natural death in place of an unnatural death, it protects against death itself."

... Rabbi Akiva had a daughter. He was told by astrologers: "On the day that she goes under the bridal canopy she will be bitten by a snake and die."

This prediction caused Rabbi Akiva great distress.

On her wedding day a poor man appeared on the doorstep of Rabbi Akiva's house. Everyone was busy with the preparations for the banquet and did not notice the poor man. Rabbi Akiva's daughter, however, noticed the poor man standing there. She took the platter of delicacies that had been prepared especially for her and gave it to the poor man.

When she was standing under the bridal canopy, she took off her golden tiara and hung it on the wall by driving its prong into a hole in the wall. Unknown to her, she had driven the prong into the eye of a snake that was lurking in that hole in the wall.

The next day, she came to retrieve her tiara. As she pulled it out of the wall, the body of the snake came along with it. She brought it to her father and showed it to him.

Rabbi Akiva asked his daughter: "What have you done that saved you from the snake?"

She told him about the poor man who had appeared on their doorstep and how she had fed him.

He said to her: "You have fulfilled the mitzvah of giving charity, and it has protected you."

Thereupon, Rabbi Akiva went out and expounded: "It is written, And charity shall deliver from death (Ibid.)."

"Not only does the mitzvah of giving charity assure a natural death in place of an unnatural death, it protects against death itself."

&&THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Four

The Holy Blessed One has created poverty to test both the rich man and the poor man. He tests the rich man to see if he will give of his wealth to charity. If he is generous, Hashem is generous with him and increases his prosperity. If he is miserly, Hashem takes away his wealth. If he himself does not lose his fortune, his descendants will lose it.

From the Hebrew usage of that which is written, For because of this thing (Devarim 15:10), the Talmud derives that there is a wheel of fortune in this world that is constantly turning; the wealthy of today may be the beggars of tomorrow (Shabbos 151b).

The wheel of fortune does not turn haphazardly; its turns are determined by the merit or guilt of individuals and nations. If a rich man wants to ensure that the fortune he has amassed will endure for him and his children after him, he should do so by giving charity. Thus will he show that he has passed the test of wealth and is worthy of keeping it. The Talmud tells us (Ibid.):

%%It was taught: Rabbi Shimon the son of Elazar said: "Use your wealth to give charity of it as long as you are able to find people that need it, as long as your wealth endures, and as long as you are alive and able to dispense it.

... It was taught: Rabbi Elazar Hakapor says: "A person should always beg the mercy of Heaven that he not be subjected to the affliction of poverty. For if it does not come upon him, it may come upon his son, and if it does not come upon his son, it may come upon his grandson, as it is written, For because of this thing (Devarim 15:10)."

And it was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: The Hebrew usage in this verse intimates that there is a wheel of fortune in this world that is constantly turning.

And Rav Yosef said: "We have a tradition that Torah scholars do not become impoverished."

How can this be? Do we not see that they do become impoverished?

Indeed, they do. But never to the point where they must go begging from door to door.

Rabbi Chiya told his wife: "Whenever a poor man comes, hurry to give him bread so that people will hurry to give bread to your children."

She asked: "Are you cursing our children that they should become beggars?"

He replied: "...There is a wheel of fortune in this world that is constantly turning."

It was taught: Rabban Gamaliel the son of Rabi said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, And He will give you mercy, and He will have mercy on you... (Devarim 13:18)?"

"He will give you the opportunity to have mercy on His creatures, and if you do so, Heaven will have mercy on you."

&&The Midrash also tells of the rich man's test (Vayikra Rabah 34:8-9):

%%Rabbi Seemon said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi: "The kindness that the poor man shows the rich man is greater than the kindness that the rich man shows the poor man, as Rus said, The name of the man with whom I have done kindness is Boaz (Rus 2:19) — not the kindness that he did with her but the kindness that she did with him."

Rabi said: "The poor man stands in your doorway, and the Holy Blessed One stands on his right, as it is written, For He stands to the right of the pauper (Tehillim 109:31).

"The Holy Blessed One says: 'If you give charity to the poor man, be advised that I am standing on his right, and I will reward you. If you turn him away, be advised that I am standing on his right, and I will exact retribution from one who does so, as the verse concludes, To save him from those that condemn his soul (Ibid.).'"

...Rav Nachman said: "This world is like a waterwheel with two pails suspended from the ends of its diameter. As the wheel turns, one pail fills, and the other empties; then the other fills, and the first empties."

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: "We must be grateful to the impostors who ask for charity even though they have no need for it. Because of them, people who do not give charity have an excuse to save themselves from instant retribution. For if a genuine poor man asks for charity and is turned away the one who turns him away should, by rights, be punished immediately. For it is written, And he shall call to God because of you, and you shall have sin (Devarim 15:9). And it is written, It is the sinful soul that shall die (Yechezkel 18:4)."

&&Poverty is a test of a different sort for the poor man who is subjected to it. Hashem tests the poor man to see if he will accept his affliction with good grace, if he will not become bitter and morose, if he will put his faith in Hashem and find joy in the Torah and mitzvos. If he passes the test, the Holy Blessed will either give him wealth in this world, as he did to Iyov (Iyov 42:10), or He will give him his entire reward in the world to come.

THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Five

The Torah does not require a person to give all he has to charity and leave himself with nothing. It does not require him to give charity to the point where he himself will have to take from charity to exist. Indeed, it is written, And your brother shall live with you (Vayikra 25:31). And our Sages have interpreted this to mean that your own livelihood takes precedence over the livelihood of your brother. The Torah outlines an exact system of priorities for the responsibility of a person towards himself, towards the members of his family, and towards other people.

A person's first responsibility is to provide for his own livelihood. If his own livelihood is provided for, he must see to the livelihood of his parents and, after them, to the livelihood of his children. This is derived from what Yaakov's sons said to him, And we shall live and not die, also ourselves, also you, also our small children (Beraishis 43:8).

Interestingly providing for one's own small children is considered charity. The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 50a):

%%It is written, Praised are those who guard justice and give charity at all times (Tehillim 106:3).

Is it possible for a person to give charity continuously?

Our rabbis of Yavne say, or according to another version, Rabbi Eliezer says: "This refers to someone who provides for his sons and daughters during childhood."

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachmeini said: "This refers to someone who rears orphans in his home and marries them off."

&&After providing for his immediate family, a person's first responsibility is to his relatives who are in need. After them, his responsibility is to the poor people of his own town, and then, to the poor people of other places.

It should be noted that there are also priorities within each category of priority. If he can give his charity either to a man or to a woman he should

give to the woman; women are not so aggressive as men and have more difficulty making their own way. If the choice is between an old man and a young man, a sick man and a healthy man, he should give his charity to the old man and the sick man because they are less capable of providing for themselves.

Also, within each category, he should give preference to people of higher birth. A kohen takes precedence over a levi, a levi over a yisrael, a person of legitimate birth over a person of illegitimate or questionable birth. However, a Torah scholar always takes precedence over an ignorant man, regardless of their respective status according to birth. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 8a):

Rabi opened his storehouses to the poor during a period of drought.

He announced: "Let those who studied the Scriptures, the Mishnah, and the Talmud enter, but let no ignorant people enter."

Yonasan the son of Amram, however, pushed his way through and entered.

He said to Rabi: "My master, feed me."

Rabi asked him: "Did you study the Scriptures?"

He said: "No."

Rabi asked him: "Did you study the Mishnah?"

He said: "No."

Rabi asked him: "Did you study the Talmud?"

He said: "No."

Rabi asked him: "Why then should I feed you?"

Yonasan the son of Amram replied: "Feed me as you would feed a hungry raven or a hungry dog that comes to you begging for food."

Rabi took pity on him and fed him.

After Yonasan the son of Amram left, Rabi was sitting in distress. He said: "Woe is to me that I have given of my bread to an ignorant man!"

His son Rabbi Yishmael said to him: "Is it possible that this man was the Torah scholar Yonasan the son of Amram who refuses to benefit from the glory of Torah?"

They investigated and found that this was, indeed, the case.

Rabi then announced: "Let everyone enter who needs to be fed."

Rabi had originally acted according to his opinion that ignorant people bring calamity upon the world.

&&The amount of charity one is required to give to the poor man is determined according to each individual case. If the poor man is of simple origin it is enough to give him what he needs for his bare necessities. If, however, he is an aristocrat who had fallen on hard times he must be given more. Since he is accustomed to a more luxurious life, his needs are greater. The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 67b):

%%Our rabbis have taught: It is written, Enough for his needs (Devarim 15:8).

You are commanded to feed him, but you are not commanded to make him rich.

The verse concludes, That he is lacking (Ibid.).

This includes even a horse upon which to ride and a servant to run before him, if he had been accustomed to it.

It was said of Hillel the Elder that he used to provide a horse for a poor man of aristocratic origin to ride upon and a servant to run before him.

One day, Hillel the Elder could find no servant to run before the poor man, and he himself ran before him for three miles.

Our rabbis have taught: It once happened that the people of Upper Gallilee provided a poor man of aristocratic origin with a litra measure of meat every day.

What is so exceptional about a litra of meat?

Rav Huna said: "It was a litra of a rare, expensive poultry."

Otherwise: "They spent a litra of gold to buy him meat every day,"

Rav Ashi said: "This happened in a small town. They would slaughter an animal every day to provide him with fresh meat, and the rest would go to waste."

There was once a poor man who came to Rabbi Nechemiah.

Rabbi Nechemiah asked him: "On what are you accustomed to dine?"

He replied: "Rich meats and old wine."

Rabbi Nechemiah asked him: "Would you like to join me in my meal of lentils?" The poor man ate the lentils with Rabbi Nechemiah, and he died.

It was said: "Woe is to that man that was killed by Rabbi Nechemiah."

On the contrary, they should have said: "Woe is to Rabbi Nechemiah, for he killed that man."

Only, the poor man had brought it on himself by letting his body become accustomed to eating only rich foods.

There was once a poor man that came to Rava.

Rava asked him: "On what are you accustomed to dine?"

He replied: "Stuffed hens and old wine."

Rava asked him: "Are you not concerned about the expense to the community because of you?"

The poor man replied: "Am I then being fed from their bounty? I am being fed from the bounty of the Holy Blessed One.

"For we have been taught: It is written, The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in his time (Tehillim 145:15).

"The verse mentions 'his time', not 'their time', to teach that the Holy Blessed One provides for each person according to his individual needs."

Presently, Rava's sister arrived to visit him. She had not seen him for twelve years, and she brought him a stuffed hen and old wine.

Rava was not accustomed to this kind of food, and he asked in wonderment: "What is the meaning of what has just happened here?"

Realizing the justice of the poor man's remarks, Rava told him: "I have spoken too much. Come and eat the food to which you are accustomed."

&&The Sifrei also makes this point (Piska 118):

%%It is written, Enough for his needs that he is lacking (Devarim 15:8).

What is the significance of this apparent redundancy?

To teach you that if it is appropriate to give him ready-baked bread, he should be given ready-baked bread; if it is appropriate to give him dough, he should be given dough; if it is appropriate to give him money, he should be given money; if it is appropriate to give him warm bread, he should be given warm bread; if it is appropriate to give him cool bread, he should be given cool bread; if it is appropriate that the food should be fed directly into his mouth, it should be fed directly into his mouth.

&&The Talmud also tells us Bava Basra 9a):

%%A wandering poor man should not be given less than a loaf of bread worth a pundion if four se'ah measures sell for a sela. If he sleeps over, his lodging expenses should be provided for.

What are appropriate lodging expenses? Rav Pappa said: "Enough for a bed and a pillow."

It was taught: This obligation is on the community collectively. It applies only to a poor man who takes from the community charitable fund but does not go from door to door.

&&THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Six

Giving charity towards the feeding of orphans is a very great mitzvah indeed. If someone brings up an orphan in his home he has a continuous fulfillment of the mitzvah of charity (as previously mentioned in Chap. 5). The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 67a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: If an orphan boy and an orphan girl need to be fed, the girl takes precedence over the boy. This is because a boy is more capable of fending for himself.

If an orphan boy and an orphan girl need assistance towards marriage, the girl takes precedence over the boy. This is because a girl is more bashful than a boy.

Our rabbis have taught: If an orphan needs assistance toward marriage, the community must rent him a house, buy him bedding and household furnishings, and only then, find him an appropriate match...

&&The Talmud also tells us (Taanis 24a):

%%Elazar of the village of Bar Tusa loved to give charity. Whenever the trustees of the village's charitable fund would see Elazar in the distance they would run and hide from him, because if they didn't do so, they knew that Elazar would give them everything he had.

One day, Elazar went to the marketplace to buy a trousseau for his daughter's wedding. He saw the trustees of the charitable fund there, and they immediately ran off to hide from him. Elazar gave chase and caught them.

He asked them: "For what are you collecting?"

They replied: "We have to marry off an orphan boy and an orphan girl."

Elazar said: "I take an oath that they surely take precedence over my daughter."

He gave them all the money he had saved for his daughter's trousseau. All he had left was one zuz with which he bought some grain. When he came

home, he tossed the grain into his storehouse and went to the house of study.

When Elazar's wife, who had been out for the day, returned home, she asked her daughter: "What did your father buy for you today?"

Her daughter told her: "Whatever he bought he threw into the storehouse."

His wife went out to look for herself and found that the storehouse was full of grain, so full that it was pouring out of the pipes.

When Elazar returned from the house of study, his wife said to him excitedly: "Come and see what the One who loves you has done for you."

He said: "I take an oath that this grain belongs to the holy estate, for it was created by a miracle, and it is forbidden for anyone but a poor Jewish person to have benefit from it."

&&MENORAS HAMAOR

Chapter Seven

There are some people who fall on hard times, but they are too proud to take from charity, even though they need it. In such cases, the mitzvah of giving charity requires one to get money to them in some other way, such as lending it to them. The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 67b);

Our rabbis have taught: "If a poor man has no money but doesn't want to let other people support him, one is required to lend him money and then let him have it as a gift," so says Rabbi Meir.

The Sages say: "At first one is required to give him money as a gift and then to give it to him as a loan."

How can he be given the money as a gift first if he refuses to accept other people's money?

Rava explained: "At first, the money should be offered to him as a gift. If he doesn't accept it, it should be offered to him as a loan."

If someone is starving because he refuses to spend his own money to feed himself, but he is willing to live off charity, one is required to give him money as a gift and to ask for its return at a later time.

How can this be? If he is asked to repay the money, will he ever take again? Surely he will starve.

Rav Pappa said: "After his death, the money is collected from his estate."

Rabbi Shimeon said: "If someone has money of his own, but he is starving because he refuses to spend it to feed himself, we are not responsible for him.

"If he has no money of his own, but he refuses to accept charity, one is required to lend him money and take collateral from him in order to set his mind at ease."

&&The Midrash suggests another method of giving charity to someone who needs it but refuses to accept it (Vayikra Rabah 34:1-2):

%%It is written, Praised is the one who is sensitive to the poor, God will rescue him on the day of evil (Tehillim 41:2).

Rabbi Muna said: "The verse does not praise the one who gives to the poor but the one who is sensitive to the poor. It teaches you to be sensitive to his feelings and give him charity in such a way that he will find it easy to accept it."

Rabbi Muna used to follow this practice. Whenever he would see a poor man from an aristocratic or a prominent family who had fallen on hard times he would approach him and say: "I heard that you have inherited a fortune from a relative in a distant country. Take this now, and pay me for it when you collect your inheritance."

When the poor man would come back to repay him, Rabbi Muna would say: "Keep it as a gift."

&&If the poor man absolutely refuses to accept charity, no matter in what form it comes, one is required to bring it to him in the night without his knowledge. The Talmud tells us (Berachos 58b):

%%Ula and Rav Chisda were passing by the doorway of the house of Rabbi Chanan the son of Tuvi. Rav Chisda became faint and sighed.

Ula asked him: "Why do you sigh? Do you disagree with that which Rav said: 'A sigh destroys half of a person's body'?"

...Rav Chisda replied: "How can I avoid sighing?"

"This was once a house in which sixty bakers were busy day and night baking bread for anyone that might need it.

It's master, Rabbi Chanan the son of Tuvi, never took his hand out of his wallet; he thought that a poor man of aristocratic origin might come by, embarrassed to ask for charity, and in the time it took him to reach into his wallet, the poor man might reconsider and leave.

"This was a house that was open to the four directions of the world. Everyone who entered it hungry left with a full stomach.

"In times of famine, they would leave wheat and barley outside so that anyone who was embarrassed could come take it at night under cover of darkness."

Ula replied: "This is what Rabbi Yochanan said: 'From the day that the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, it was decreed that the houses of the just shall be destroyed, as it is written, He spoke in my ears, the God of Hosts, surely many houses shall be laid waste, be they great and beautiful without inhabitants (Yeshayahu 5:9).'"

Ula saw that Rav Chisda was not consoled. He continued: "It is sufficient for a servant to be like his master, for the Bais Hamikdash, the House of Hashem, has also been destroyed."

Rav Nachman the son of Yitzchak said: "In the future, the Holy Blessed One will rebuild the houses of the righteous. For it is written, Those that trust in God are like Mount Zion that will not be moved, that will be settled forever (Tehillim 125:1). Just as the Holy Blessed One will resettle Mount Zion, so will the Holy Blessed One resettle the houses of the righteous."

&&Sometimes a poor man does not want to accept charity in any form whatsoever, not even as a long term loan with collateral backing. Instead, he just wants to borrow for a short while until he can earn enough money or sell some of his possessions to repay the loan. The Talmud tells us that to lend a poor man money in such circumstances is a greater mitzvah than to give him money outright. The Talmud goes on to say that to invest some money with him in a venture that will help him get back on his feet is the greatest mitzvah of all (Shabbos 63a).

If the poor man who refuses charity in any form whatsoever is a Torah scholar one's responsibility to him is even greater. In this case, it is not enough just to lend him money. One is required to personally assist him by selling him goods cheaply and buying from him at the full price. If he wants to go into trade one is required to invest capital with him and to help him manage his business so that it will be profitable. The Talmud tells us that one who does so earns a place in the yeshiva of Heaven (Pesachim 53b).

It cannot be denied that not all people that ask for charity are genuinely in need of it. There are certainly some unscrupulous people who pose as poor people out of greed. Indeed, if it were not for these people those refusing to give charity would have unbearable guilt. As it is, they can excuse themselves somewhat by claiming that the supposed poor man might have been an impostor. These impostors will surely have to answer for taking money from charity under false pretenses and for causing mistrust of and difficulty for genuine poor people. Nevertheless, one should not use these people as an excuse for not giving charity to anyone that asks for it. Better to give wholeheartedly to anyone that expresses need than to be distrustful and chance turning away someone who is truly in need. The Talmud tells us (Kesubos 67b):

%%Rabbi Chanina used to send four zuzim to a particular poor man every Friday for the Shabbos expenses. Once he sent the money with his wife.

She came back and told him: "That man has no need for the money."

Rabbi Chanina asked her: "How do you know this?"

She replied: "I heard his family asking him on what kind of tablecloth he would like to be served, on white linen or on colored silk."

Rabbi Chanina told her: "Rabbi Elazar was referring to such as he when he said: 'Come let us express our gratitude to the impostors, for if not for them, we would always have sin, as it is written, And he will call to God about you, and you will have sin (Devarim 15:9).'"

...Our rabbis have taught: Whoever pretends to be blind, or that his belly is swollen from hunger, or that he is stricken in his legs, in order to collect charity although he has no need for it will truly fall victim to that condition sometime during his life.

&&THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Eight

Charity must be given wholeheartedly and with no ulterior motives. It should not be used to flaunt one's wealth and generosity in order to impress other people and gain their admiration. Therefore, it is best to give charity in private wherever possible and not to give it in public — unless doing so will serve a constructive purpose, such as inspiring other people to give too. The Talmud tells us (Chagigah 5a):

%%What is the meaning of that which is written, For the Lord will bring every deed to judgment of all that has been hidden, whether it be good, or whether it be bad (Koheles 12:14)? Why should someone be punished for doing a good deed?

In the school of Rabbi Yanai it was said: This refers to someone who gives charity to a poor man in public.

For example, Rabbi Yanai once saw someone giving a zuz to a poor man in public.

Rabbi Yanai told the giver: "Better not to have given it to him at all than to have given it in a way that embarrassed him."

In the school of Rabbi Shaila it was said: This refers to someone who gives charity to a poor woman in secret, for anyone that notices it might put the wrong interpretation on it.

&&The Talmud also tells us (Bava Basra 9b):

%%Rabbi Elazor said: "Someone who gives charity in secret is, in a way, even greater than Moshe Rabbeinu. Of Moshe Rabbeinu it is written, For I was terrified of the anger and the wrath (Devarim 9:19), while of someone who gives charity in secret it is written, A secret gift shall suppress anger (Mishlei 21:14)."

&&Even better than giving charity in secret is to give it in such a way that one doesn't know who the recipient will be. The Talmud tells us that Rabbi Aba wrapped some coins in a bundle. He slung the bundle over his back and went out among the poor people, keeping watch out of the corner

of his eye that none but a genuine poor man should take it off his back (Kesubos 67b).

It is also preferable that the poor man should not know the source of the charity. The Talmud tells us (Ibid.):

%%Every day, Mar Ukva used to put four zuzim in the niche behind the door hinges of a particular poor man who lived in Mar Ukva's neighborhood.

One day, the poor man thought: "Let me go see who it is that is being so generous to me."

That day, Mar Ukva was detained in the house of study. Coming home, he thought: "Today I will take along my wife, whom I love as I do myself, when I go to hide the money in the poor man's doorway."

Mar Ukva and his wife went together to leave the money for the poor man. As soon as the poor man, who was watching for his benefactor, saw Mar Ukva and his wife pattering at the doorpost of his house he ran out to greet them.

Mar Ukva and his wife ran away from him and hid in an empty furnace that had recently been used and was still hot. The soles of Mar Ukva's feet began to scorch.

His wife said to him: "My feet are not getting scorched. Put your feet on top of my feet so that yours won't get scorched either."

Mar Ukva was very disheartened to find that his wife had more merit than he did. His wife reassured him: "I am in the house all the time, and when a poor man comes to the door, I can give him prepared food that he can eat immediately. You give him money with which he must first buy food and prepare it before he can enjoy your gift."

Why was it necessary for them to endanger themselves by hiding in a hot furnace?

Mar Zutra the son of Tuvia said in the name of Rav Chana the son of Bizna who said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the Pious, or according to another version, Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon the

son of Yochai: "It is better that a person jeopardize his life in a fiery furnace and not embarrass his fellow in public..."

&&The ideal way to give charity is to turn it over, in secret, to a reputable trustee of a charitable fund and to let him dispense it as he sees fit. No one will know that he has given it, he will not know who received it, and the recipient will not know who gave it. It is in reference to such giving of charity that it is written, And charity will deliver from death (Mishlei 10:2).

THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Nine

Women, because they spend more time in the home, have more opportunities for giving charity. A woman should always have food prepared in her house so that if a poor man comes by she should be able to feed him immediately.

The Talmud tells us that one of the Ten Regulations, enacted by Ezra when the Jews returned from exile after the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash, was that women should rise early on Friday and bake fresh bread. Thus, if a poor man should come by in need of food for the Shabbos she should be able to welcome him with warm, freshly-baked bread (Bava Kama 82a).

When a woman feeds a hungry poor man she should also speak consolingly to him. She should be kind and take pity on him and try to set his mind at ease.

The Talmud tells of the special merit of women who give charity in the home (Taanis 21a):

%%Aba Chilkiyah was the grandson of Choni the Circlemaker.

It happened once that there was a drought, and the rabbis sent a delegation of two of their number to Aba Chilkiyah to ask him to pray for rain.

The delegation of rabbis went to look for Aba Chilkiyah and found him plowing a field. They greeted him, but he did not respond.

Towards evening, Aba Chilkiyah collected a bundle of wood. He took off one of his sleeves, placed the bundle of wood on his bare shoulder, and started back to town.

All along the way Aba Chilkiyah carried his shoes in his hands. When he had to cross a stream he stopped to put on his shoes. Whenever he had to pass by thorny bushes he took off his shirt completely, lifted it above his head, and walked by the bushes with his chest bared.

When he entered the town, his wife came out to meet him, wearing makeup and dressed beautifully. When he came to his house, he asked his wife to go in first, he went in second, and then he invited the rabbis to enter.

He sat down to dine, but he did not invite the rabbis to join him. He divided the bread among his children, giving one portion to the older child and two portions to the younger child.

After the meal, Aba Chilkiah said to his wife: "I know that the rabbis have come because there is no rain. Let us both go up to the roof and beg for mercy. Maybe the Holy Blessed One will be placated, and the rains will come."

They went up to the roof. He stood at one corner of the roof, and his wife stood at the opposite corner. They both began to pray for rain. The rainclouds began to gather over the corner where his wife stood.

They went back down to the house, and Aba Chilkiah said to the rabbis: "Why have the rabbis come?"

They told him: "The rabbis sent us as a delegation to the master to ask him to pray for rain."

Aba Chilkiah said: "Blessed is the Omnipresent who has already sent rain so that you have no need for Aba Chilkiah."

They said; "We know very well that the rains have come because of the master's prayers. But please explain your seemingly strange behavior. Why did the master not respond to us when we greeted him?"

He said: "I was hired to work by the day, and I didn't want to interrupt my work for even a moment."

They asked: "Why did the master bare the shoulder upon which he was carrying the bundle of wood?"

He replied: "Because my shirt is borrowed. I borrowed it to wear, not to carry wood on it."

They asked: "Why did the master walk barefoot the entire way, but put on his shoes when he crossed the stream?"

He replied: "Because the entire way I was able to see where I was going and be careful; but when I crossed the stream I had no way of knowing what obstacles were under the water, and I needed the shoes for protection."

They asked: "Why did you take off your shirt and walk barechested through the thorns?"

He replied: "My flesh can heal, the shirt cannot."

They asked: "Why did your wife dress up and come out to meet you?"

He replied: "So that I should not be tempted to look at other women."

They asked: "Why did the master's wife enter the house first, the master second, and only then were we invited to enter?"

He replied: "Because I was not sure of you, and I did not trust you to be alone with her at all,"

They asked: "Why didn't the master invite us to dine with him?"

He replied: "Because you saw that there was obviously not enough for you too, and you would have refused my offer. It would have been an empty gesture, and I didn't want to falsely gain your gratitude."

They asked: "Why did you give one portion to the older child but two portions to the younger child?"

He replied: "The older child was home and had eaten during the day, while the younger child was in school and hadn't eaten all day."

They asked: "Why did the rainclouds gather first over the corner of the roof where the master's wife was standing?"

He replied: "Because a woman spends more time in the home, Thus, when a poor man comes to the door, she can give him prepared food that he can enjoy immediately, A man, however, normally gives a poor man money. He must first buy food and prepare it before he can enjoy the gift."

&&MENORAS HAMAOR

Chapter Ten

The private affairs of a person are well known to Hashem. He knows what every person can afford to give to charity; He knows how generous every person is; He also knows the motives behind every person's generosity.

During the times of the Bais Hamikdash, if a poor man brought a simple meal offering it was as welcome to Hashem as the expensive ox that the rich man brought for a sacrifice. Now that the Bais Hamikdash has been destroyed, the giving of charity has taken the place of the sacrifices. In charity too, the donation of a small amount by a poor person is as welcome to Hashem as the donation of a large sum by a rich man. The Talmud tells us that it doesn't matter whether one does much or little, as long as one is wholeheartedly trying to fulfill His Will (Menachos 110a). No one can conceal the true state of his affairs or his intentions from Hashem.

The Talmud tells us that it is possible to earn the privilege of welcoming the Divine Presence by giving even a small gift to charity (Bava Basra 10a):

%%Rabbi Dustai the son of Yanai expounded: "Come let me show how the ways of the Holy Blessed One differ from the ways of a mere mortal of flesh and blood.

"If someone brings a gift to a mortal king of flesh and blood he cannot be sure that it will be accepted. Even if it is accepted he cannot be sure that he will be allowed into the presence of the king.

"Not so with the Holy Blessed One. If a person gives even a small coin to a poor man he is privileged to welcome the Divine Presence, as it is written, Through charity shall I behold Your Face (Tehillim 17:15)."

Rabbi Elazar used to give a small coin to a poor man before he said his prayers. He said: "Through charity shall I behold Your Face (Ibid.)."

What is the meaning of the conclusion of the verse, Upon awakening I shall be satisfied by Your Image (Ibid.)?

Rav Nachman the son of Yitzchak said: "This refers to Torah scholars that drive sleep from their eyes in this world; the Holy Blessed One will provide them with the eternal satisfaction of the brilliance of the Divine Presence in the world to come."

Rabbi Yochanan said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, He who takes pity on the poor lends to God, He shall repay his kindness to him (Mishlei 19:17)?"

"If this were not written in the Scriptures it would be impossible to say it on one's own. It would seem as if the rule that the borrower is indentured to the creditor applies here."

&&Poverty is indeed a very great affliction. The Talmud considers it to be greater than any other affliction (Bava Basra 116a):

%%*Rabbi Pinchas the son of Chama expounded: "Poverty in a person's household is more difficult than even fifty afflictions, as Iyov said Pity me, O pity me, you who are my friends, for the Hand of the Lord has touched me (Iyov 19:21). This implies that he suffered from fifty afflictions, for if the ten plagues of Egypt were administered by the Finger of the Lord (Shemos 8:15), the Hand of the Lord administers fifty.*

"What did Iyov's friends reply to him?"

"They said, Take heed, do not turn to evil, for this have you chosen over poverty (Iyov 36:21)."

&&Yet, we find the affliction of poverty to be quite prevalent among the Jewish people during their long exile from their homeland. This is because Hashem has found poverty to be the most effective tool for maintaining discipline among the Jewish people in exile. Living among the nations of the world, the Jewish people are subjected to many influences that can undermine their morality and destroy their faith. Poverty keeps them apart from the decadent peoples among whom they live; it keeps them humble and makes them turn to Hashem for comfort. The Talmud tells us (Chagigah 9b):

%%Eliyahu said to Bar Haha: "What is the meaning of that which is written, Behold, I have refined you, but not through silver, I have approved you in the crucible of poverty (Yeshayahu 48:10)?

"This teaches that the Holy Blessed One examined every good condition, but found none to be beneficial to the Jews except poverty."

Shmuel said, or according to another version, Rav Yosef said: "This is what people mean when they say, 'Poverty is as becoming to the Jewish people as a red bridle to a white horse.' "

&&Elsewhere, the Talmud reveals the antidote to the affliction of poverty. The Talmud explains that by giving charity one can avoid poverty. Therefore, even a poor person who lives from charity is also required to give charity. The Talmud tells us (Gittin 7a):

%%Rav Avira expounded, upon occasion in the name of Rav Ami and upon occasion in the name of Rav Asi: "It is written, So said God, If they be exactly limited or if they have plenty, yet they shall be shorn and pass, and if I have afflicted you, I shall afflict you no longer (Nachum 1:12).

"If a person sees that he is having difficulty supporting himself he should give some of his income to charity. And it goes without saying that he should do so if he has plenty."

What is the meaning of "they shall be shorn and pass"?

In the school of Rabbi Yishmael it was taught: Whoever shears off some of his wealth and gives it to charity will be saved from the judgment of Gehinom. This can be compared to two sheep that are trying to cross a river. The shorn sheep can get across; the unshorn sheep cannot.

What is the meaning of "and if I have afflicted you"?

Mar Zutra said: "Even a poor man who is himself supported by charity should also give charity."

What is the meaning of "I shall afflict you no longer"?

Rav Yosef taught: "Whosoever gives charity shall not be subjected to poverty."

&&If someone cannot afford to give more than a small coin to charity he should not feel that it is insignificant. On the contrary, if that is all he can afford, for him this is a complete fulfillment of the mitzvah of giving charity. Furthermore, each time that he gives a small amount to charity it is added to his credit, and he too can build up a large account.

It should be noted, however, that every person, regardless of his financial state, should give no less than a third of a shekel throughout the year, The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 9a):

%%Rav Ashi said: "A person should never give less than a third of a shekel to charity each year, as it is written, And we established commandments for ourselves to assume the obligation of giving a third of a shekel each year for the service of the House of our Lord (Nechemiah 10:33)."

Rav Asi added: "This also intimates that the mitzvah of charity is equal to all of the other mitzvos combined, as it is written, And we established commandments for ourselves...(Ibid.)."

...Rava repeated what he had heard from Aila in the name of Rabbi Elazar: "What is the meaning of that which is written, And he wore charity like a suit of armor (Yeshayahu 59:17)?

"Just as many small pieces of metal combine to make a large suit of armor, so do many small amounts given to charity combine into one large account."

Rabbi Chanina said: "This concept can also be derived from that which is written, And we were all as an unclean man, and all of our charity like a soiled garment (Yeshayahu 64:5).

"The prophet is deriding the Jewish people for their ulterior motives in giving charity, Nevertheless, there is a comparison here between giving charity and a garment. Just as many threads combine to make a garment, so do many small amounts given to charity combine into one large amount."

The comparison of charity to a garment can be explained otherwise: Just as a garment protects its wearer from the sun in the summer and from

the rains in the winter, so does charity protect its giver from the judgment of Gehinom.

&&The mitzvah of charity is not restricted only to giving money. If someone speaks comfortingly to a poor man, and reassures him, he has fulfilled the mitzvah of giving charity to an even greater degree than by giving him money. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 9b):

%%Rabbi Yitzchak said: "Whoever gives even a small coin to a poor man receives six blessings, but whoever speaks reassuringly to him receives eleven blessings.

"That giving him money brings six blessings is derived from that which is written, Is it not to distribute your bread to the poor... Then your light shall burst forth like the morningstar, and your healing shall come speedily, and your charity shall go before you, the honor of God shall enfold you, then you shall call and God will answer you, you shall cry out and He will say, I am here (Yeshayahu 58:7-9).

"That speaking reassuringly to him brings eleven blessings is derived from that which is written, And if you pour out your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall shine forth in the dark, and your dusk shall be as the noon, and God will always guide you, and He will satisfy your soul during famines, and He will strengthen your bones, and you shall be as a flourishing garden, as a spring whose waters never cease, and your descendants shall rebuild the ruins of the world, you shall raise up foundations to stand for many generations, and people will call you the one that closes the breach, the one that returns the pathways to civilization (Yeshayahu 58:10-12)."

&&THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Eleven

Each person is required to give charity according to the amount he possesses. If someone has been blessed with wealth his obligation to charity is much greater than that of ordinary people. This is not merely a suggestion for commendable philanthropic activity; it is a firm halachic obligation. If a person does not give charity in proportion to his wealth he is violating the commandment of the Torah to give charity.

In fact, the courts are empowered to enforce this law and to collect the appropriate amount of charity. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 8b):

%%Rav Nachman said in the name of Raba the son of Avuha: "The courts may attach a householder's property to ensure the giving of charity. They may do so even on the day before Shabbos. li the householder protests that he intends to give after Shabbos when he will not be so busy his excuses are not accepted."

How can this be? Is it not written, And I will bring retribution upon all his oppressors (Yirmiyahu 30:20)? And did not Rabbi Yitzchak the son of Shmuel says: "This even includes trustees of charitable funds who force people to give money"?

There is no discrepancy here. They are only considered oppressors when they force poor people to give more charity than they can afford. Rav Nachman's statement, however, refers to people of means,

Indeed, we find that Rava compelled Rav Nassan the son of Ami to give four hundred zuzim to charity.

&&Elsewhere, the Talmud tells of how Rabbi Akiva compelled Rabbi Tarfon to give charity (Kallah 2):

%%It was said of Rabbi Tarfon that he was a very wealthy man, but that he did not give many gifts to the needy.

One day, Rabbi Akiva met Rabbi Tarfon and asked him: "Would you like to invest in some property of which I know?"

Rabbi Tarfon immediately brought four thousand golden dinars and gave them to Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva took the money and distributed it among the needy.

After a while, Rabbi Tarfon met Rabbi Akiva and asked him: "Akiva, where are the properties you bought for me?"

Rabbi Akiva took Rabbi Tarfon by the hand and led him into the house of study. He called over a child who was reading the Book of Tehillim, and they listened to him until he read the verse, He spread it and gave to the needy, his righteousness endures forever (Tehillim 112:9).

(The Gemara explains:) Did not Rabbi Tarfon comply with that which is written, For the needy shall not cease from amidst the land, therefore I command you, saying, Surely shall you open your hand to your brother, to your poor and your needy that are in your land (Devarim 15:11)?

Indeed, Rabbi Tarfon did give charity; why then did Rabbi Akiva have to compel him?

Rabbi Akiva was of the opinion that the size of the burden is determined by the strength of the camel.

When Rabbi Akiva took the money from Rabbi Tarfon, he divided it into three parts. One part he gave to the needy. The other two parts he divided among Torah scholars of all sorts.

When Rabbi Tarfon met him, he asked: "What have you done with my money?"

Rabbi Akiva answered: "I invested it for you."

Rabbi Tarfon asked: "What kind of a venture is it? Is it a good one?"

Rabbi Akiva replied: "It is so good that the return is limitless."

As they walked into the house of study, Rabbi Tarfon asked: "Where exactly did you invest it?"

Rabbi Akiva answered: "I invested it with David Hamelech who wrote, He spread it and gave it to the needy, his righteousness endures forever (Tehillim 112:9)."

Rabbi Tarfon understood what Rabbi Akiva had done. He asked: "Why did you do this?"

Rabbi Akiva replied: "Do you not know about Nakdimon the son of Gurion? When he used to leave his house to go to the house of study his servants would pave his way with expensive silken garments which were then left there for the needy to take. Yet, because he did not do as much as was required of him according to his wealth, he was punished."

Rabbi Tarfon said: "I was not asking you why you did it at all. I was only asking you why you did it without my knowing and did not let me have the merit of giving on my own?"

Rabbi Akiva said: "Indeed, you do have the merit, for the money was yours. I did it in this way so that I, too, could gain merit. In my opinion, one who forces another to give is greater than one who gives, as it is written, And for the work of charity there shall be peace (Yeshayahu 32:17)."

&&Elsewhere, the Talmud tells of the punishment of Nakdimon the son of Gurion for not giving charity in proportion to his wealth (Kesubos 66b):

%%It once happened that Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai was riding out of Yerushalayim on a donkey, and his disciples were walking behind him. He noticed a woman picking up grains of barley from the feeding ground of animals belonging to Arabs. When she noticed Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai she quickly covered her hair and approached him.

She said: "My master, please feed me."

He asked her: "Daughter, who are you?"

She said: "I am the daughter of Nakdimon the son of Gurion."

He asked: "Daughter, what happened to all of your father's wealth?"

She replied: "My master, is it not said in Yerushalayim that money is preserved by doing kindnesses with it?"

He asked: "How about the wealth of your father-in-law?"

She replied: "They became involved with each other, and when my father lost his money, my father-in-law lost his as well."

She continued: "My master, do you remember that you signed on my marriage contract?"

He turned to his disciples and said: "Indeed, I remember signing on her marriage contract, and it contained a settlement of millions of golden dinars from both sides."

Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai then burst into tears and exclaimed: "Praised are Yisrael that when they fulfill the Will of the Omnipresent no nation or nationality can touch them. But when they do not fulfill the Will of the Omnipresent He gives them over into the hands of lowly people. And not only to the lowly people themselves, but even to the animals of the lowly people."

&&Furthermore, if someone refuses to give charity he will ultimately lose that money anyway by having it taken away by the gentiles. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 9a):

%%And Rabbi Elazar said: "During the time when the Bais Hamikdash was standing people would contribute a shekel coin and be forgiven. Today that the Bais Hamikdash is no longer standing, it is preferable that they give charity on their own. If they do not the gentiles come and take it by force, as it is written, And you will bring the wretched poor into your house (Yeshayahu 58:7).

"Nevertheless, it is considered as if they have given charity, for if the gentiles can take from the rich they do not bother the poor. Thus, because the gentiles take money from the rich, the poor have more money. For so is it written, And I will make your overlords to peace and your oppressors to charity (Yeshayahu 60:17)."

&&Better that he give the money on his own than to have it taken away by gentiles, The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 10a):

%%Just as a person's yearly income is allotted to him every Rosh Hashanah, so too are his yearly losses determined every Rosh Hashanah. If he has merit he will give out that money according to that which is written, Is it not to distribute your bread to the poor (Yeshayahu 58:7). If he has no

merit he will lose that money according to that which is written, And you will bring the wretched poor into your house (Ibid.).

Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai dreamed that his nephews were going to lose seven hundred dinars, He compelled them to give charity, and they gave six hundred and eighty-three dinars.

On the day before Yom Kippur, the emperor's soldiers came and took seventeen dinars from them. They were very worried that the soldiers would come back and take more from them.

Rabbi Yochanan the son of Zakai reassured them: "Do not be afraid. I dreamed that you were going to lose seven hundred dinars. When you gave six hundred and eighty-three dinars to charity only seventeen dinars of that sum were left. That was the money that the soldiers took."

They asked: "Why didn't you tell us this in the first place so that we could give all of the money to charity?"

He replied: "Because I wanted you to give the money for the sake of the mitzvah of charity, not to save it from the emperor's soldiers."

&&The greatest form of charity, by far, is to give food to poor people in times of famine when people are hungry and food is expensive. The reward for such charity endures forever. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 11a):

%%Our rabbis have taught: It once happened that King Munvaz emptied his treasuries and the treasuries that his forefathers had filled to feed the people in times of famine.

The king's brothers and the other members of his family objected strongly: "Your forefathers filled treasuries, in addition to those that had been filled by their forefathers, while you squander your own treasuries and the treasuries of your forefathers as well."

King Munvaz replied: "My forefathers filled treasuries in the lower world, but I filled treasuries in the Upper World, as it is written, Truth will spring forth from the earth, and righteousness will be seen from heaven (Tehillim 85:12).

"My forefathers filled treasuries in a place where they are vulnerable, but I filled treasuries in a place where they cannot be touched, as it is written, Charity and justice are the foundation of Your Throne (Tehillim 89:15).

"My forefathers filled treasuries in a place where they do not bear fruit, but I filled treasuries in a place where they bear fruit, as it is written, Say to the righteous that they have done well, for the fruit of their deeds shall they eat (Yeshayahu 3:10).

"My forefathers filled treasuries with money, but I filled treasuries with souls, as it is written, The fruit of the righteous is as the living tree, and who gathers souls is truly wise (Mishlei 1:30).

"My forefathers filled treasuries for others, but I filled treasuries for myself, as it is written, And charity shall be for you (Devorim 24:13). And it is written, And your charity shall go before you (Yeshayahu 58:8)."

&&THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Twelve

Whoever shuts his eyes to the needs of the poor is guilty of a very great sin. The Talmud compares this sin to the worship of idols (Kesubos 68a). The greater a person is, the more careful he must be to avoid even a semblance of this sin, for the Holy Blessed One is exact with the righteous and punishes them for even a hairsbreadth of digression in order not to detract at all from the good that is in store for them in the world to come. The Talmud tells us (Taanis 21a):

It was said of Nachum Ish Gam -Zu that he was blind in both of his eyes, both of his arms and both of his legs were amputated, and his entire body was covered with sores. The legs of his bed stood in pails of water so that no insects would be able to crawl into his bed as he lay there helplessly.

Once he was lying on his bed in a dilapidated house that was on the verge of collapse. His disciples wanted to evacuate the house before it collapsed.

Nachum Ish Gam - Zu said to them: "Remove all the furnishings before you remove my bed, because as long as my bed is in the house it will not collapse."

They removed the furnishings, and then they removed his bed. As soon as they took out his bed the house collapsed.

They said to him: "Since you are obviously a thoroughly righteous man, why is your body in such condition?"

He replied: "I brought it upon myself. Once I was walking to my father-in-law's house. I had three laden donkeys with me, one loaded with food, one with drinks, and one with an assortment of delicacies,

"Along the way, I met a man who said to me: 'My master, feed me.'

"I replied: 'Wait while I unload the donkey,'

When I had unloaded the donkey I looked about behind me and saw that the man had fallen dead. I fell upon him, and I cried over him.

"I said: 'May my eyes that did not take pity on you become shut. May my arms that did not take pity on you be severed. May my legs that did not run to unload the donkey be severed.'

"Still I was not satisfied, until I said: 'May my entire body become covered with sores.'

Rabbi Akiva said to Nachum Ish GamZu: "Woe is to me that I have seen you in this condition!"

Nachum Ish Gam-Zu told him: "Praised are you that you have seen me in this condition. For if you had not seen me thus my sin would not have been atoned, and my righteousness would not have endured for me.

Why was Nachum called "Ish Gam-Zu" which means the man of also this?

Because, no matter what happened, he would always say: "This is also for the good."

Once, the Sages wanted to send a gift to the emperor. They thought: "With whom shall we send it? We should send it with Nachum Ish Gam-Zu because he is accustomed to miracles."

They sent Nachum Ish Gam-Zu with a satchel full of precious jewels to present to the emperor. When evening came he stopped for the night in an inn along the way. In the middle of the night, some ruffians who were also staying at the inn emptied the satchel of the jewels and replaced them with dust.

Nachum Ish Gam-Zu arrived at the emperor's palace with the satchel and presented it to the emperor, Caesar. The satchel was opened, and everyone saw that it was filled with dust.

Caesar was enraged and said: "The Jews are ridiculing me. Execute him!"

Nachum Ish Gam-Zu was not dismayed. He said: "This is also for the good."

Eliyahu came to Caesar's palace in the guise of a Roman noble.

He said: "Quite possibly, this dust is a priceless gift. It may be some of the dust of their forefather Avraham. For it is known that Avraham had dust that turned to swords when he threw it at his enemies and straw that turned to arrows when he threw it at his enemies, as it is written, He will render his sword as dust (Yeshayahu 41:2)."

They decided to test the dust against a country that they were having great difficulty conquering. They attacked that country using the dust that Nachum Ish Gam-Zu had brought them, and they were victorious,

They took the rest of the dust and stored it in the emperor's secret treasuries. Then they filled the satchel with precious jewels and pearls and bade Nachum Ish Gam-Zu farewell,

On the way back, Nachum Ish Gam-Zu stopped for the night at the same inn where he had stayed on his way to the emperor's palace.

Seeing his satchel full of jewels and pearls, the people at the inn asked him: "What did you bring to the emperor that you were given all of this in return?"

He replied: "I just brought him whatever I had in the satchel when I left here."

The ruffians who had stolen his jewels took some more of the dust from the place where they had originally taken dust to put in his satchel. They brought this dust to the emperor hoping that they would also be royally rewarded. This dust was also tested at the emperor's court, but it did not turn into swords or arrows. The ruffians were all executed.

&&The Talmud tells of another instance of a great man who was imperiled by the avoidance of giving charity (Bava Basra 10a):

%%Rav Pappa was once climbing up a ladder when one of the rungs gave way, and he almost fell.

He said: "Now it seems as if my enemy is as guilty as those who desecrate the Shabbos or who worship idols." ¹

¹ [Translator's note: "My enemy" was a commonly used euphemism when speaking of one's own misfortune. Rav Pappa's suspicion was based on the fact that desecration of the Shabbos

Rav Chiya the son of Rav from Difti said to Rav Pappa: "It is possible that you were presented with the opportunity of feeding a poor man but did not do so. For it has been taught: Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Karcha said: 'Whoever shuts his eyes to the needs of the poor is considered as if he has worshipped idols...' "

Especially great is the sin of those people that pledge money to charity in public but do not actually give it. The Talmud tells us (Taanis 8b):

Rabbi Yochanan said: The rains are held back only because of those people that pledge money to charity in public but do not actually give it, as it is written, As clouds and wind but no rain, so is the man that takes praise in a false gift (Mishlei 25:14)."

On the other hand, if someone makes every effort to give money to charity above and beyond his means the Holy Blessed One gives him great reward. He provides him with money to give to charity and worthy poor people to accept it. The Talmud tells us (Bava Basra 9b):

Rabbi Yitzchak said: "What is the meaning of that which is written, The pursuer of charity and kindness shall find life, charity, and honor (Mishlei 21:21)? Is it possible that because he pursued the giving of charity he shall find himself in poverty and taking charity?"

"Only, this means that if someone pursues the giving of charity the Holy Blessed One provides him with the opportunity of giving charity to worthy poor people."

This coincides with that which Rava expounded: "What is the meaning of that which is written, Let them come stumbling before You, do unto them in the time of Your anger (Yirmiyahu 18:23)?"

"Yirmiyahu said before the Holy Blessed One: 'Master of the Universe! Even when my persecutors overcome their evil inclination and give charity, let them stumble upon poor people who are unworthy.' "

and idolatry are punishable by stoning. During times when the courts are not empowered to administer capital punishment, the Hand of Heaven administers stoning in the form of falling to death from a high place (Sotah 8b).]

Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi said: "Whoever habitually gives money to charity will have sons who are wise, who are rich, and who are expert in the Agada."

The Talmud further discusses the great reward for giving charity (Bava Basra 10b):

Rabbi Abahu said: "It was asked of Shlomo Hamelech: 'How great is the power of charity?'

"He replied: 'Go and see what my father David Hamelech wrote about charity. He spread it and gave to the needy, his righteousness endures forever (Tehillim 112:9).' "

Rava said: "Shlomo Hamelech indicated to them that which is written, He shall dwell in high places, citadels of stone shall be his refuge, his bread shall be given to him, his waters assured (Yeshayahu 33:16)."

&&THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

Chapter Thirteen

The importance of giving charity is a recurring theme throughout the Scriptures and the Talmud. They speak of the divine nature of the act itself, of how charity is more precious to Hashem than the sacrifices in the Bais Hamikdash, of how charity is among the first things Mashiach will reinstitute in the world in the days to come.

They speak of the special greatness of giving charity with kindness and mercy. Those who combine even a little charity with kindness are worthy of coming before the Divine Presence. They are considered to have filled the entire universe with kindness.

They speak of the rewards for giving charity and of the consequences of refusing to give charity. They speak of how it affects the fortunes of the giver and how it affects his character, of how the greatness and the glory of the Jewish people are manifested in their giving charity.

They speak of the protection that charity provides for the giver in this world and of how the poor people's prayers on his behalf are answered by the Holy Blessed One. They speak of the protection that charity provides for the giver in the world to come. The Midrash tells us (Eliyahu Zuta 1):

%%...It is written, And your charity shall go before you, the glory of God will gather you in (Yeshavahu 58:8).

When a person passes from the world, having given charity and having done good deeds, his charity and good deeds go before him to find him a good resting place. They intercede before the Holy Blessed One on his behalf and do not let the prosecuting angels denounce him. This is the meaning of the verse, If he has with him a defending angel, one of a thousand, to tell of a person's virtue (Iyov 33:23).