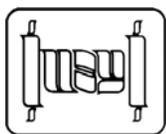


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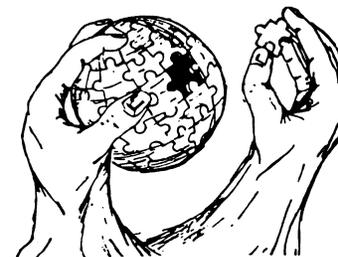
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Tzedakah—צדקה Jewish Giving, A Privilege

by

Danny Siegel



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Programming Ideas

- 1) Contact your local Jewish Free Loan Society, and invite a speaker to your chapter. (A partial listing of such societies can be found in the *Second Jewish Catalogue* in the yellow pages section.)
- 2) Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Minnetonka, Minnesota has an excellent film about their Chevra Kadisha. You can obtain more information about the film by writing to Adath Jeshurun, 10500 Hillside Avenue, Minnetonka, MN 55305.
- 3) Try to obtain a copy of your local Jewish Federation budget. See how funds are distributed. Ask to sit in on a synagogue budget meeting.
- 4) Design and make an attractive Tzedakah box (pushka) for your chapter and home (and fill it regularly!).
- 5) Set up a USY shiva minyan (Offer to be available for minyanim while people are sitting shiva).
- 6) Plan an evening with friends and exchange stories of Tzedakah acts and Tzaddikim you know of. Examine your family tree to see if you have any such ancestors.
- 7) Visit your local funeral home and see how the process of Jewish burial is carried out.
- 8) Organize a clothing drive in your chapter. One possibility is the Rabbanit Bracha Kapach, 12 Lod Street, Jerusalem. If you can't send to Rabbanit—duty costs, etc., give to your local Jewish Family Service shelter.
- 9) Investigate places that provide weddings for people who can't afford them.

Introduction:

For a period of nearly five hundred years, the wise teachers of our people gathered in houses of Torah study to discuss Life, how to live our lives fully as creatures made in the image of God—**בצלם אלוהים**. They realized that being a Mensch, living each day with an awareness of the Holiness of Life, required a conscious effort to actualize ourselves through specific Mitzvah-acts. Many of these Mitzvot were developed during that period—the Talmudic Period—both through study of ancient texts such as the Bible and also by an examination of the way people acted in their daily lives. Their discussions, and sketches of their personal biographies, are recorded in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds and in various books of legal and non-legal texts known as Midrash, and it is primarily from these sources that this pamphlet is drawn. Whether we look at their specific acts, their lyrical insights, or their careful collection of details, we cannot but be struck by the grandeur of their wisdom—a wisdom very much relevant to our own lives. As Jews, we are obligated to examine their words, to attempt to understand their insights into Tzedakah—**צדקה**, and to apply them to today's immediate situations.¹

Let us begin with a brief analysis of some essential vocabulary: the secular words charity and philanthropy, and the specifically Jewish terms Tzedakah—**צדקה** and Tzedek—**צדק**.

“Charity” is derived from the Latin root *caritas*, meaning love, dearness, fondness.

“Philanthropy” comes from a combination of two Greek roots, *philia*, meaning love, and *anthropos*, meaning man.

“Tzedakah—**צדקה**” is derived from the Hebrew root **צ.ד.ק.** meaning justice, that which is right, and is related to the word Tzaddik—**צדיק**, a person who lives according to Tzedakah—**צדקה** and Tzedek—**צדק**; an upright, giving life.

¹Yerushalmi Shekalim 5:4.

Let us compare the implications of these terms. Charity and philanthropy, though they have been stripped to a bare meaning of the giving of money, originally indicated acts of love, actions motivated by an inner caring for others. Tzedakah—צדקה includes this feeling, or course, but it goes further, superseding the immediate moods of the individual and demanding that—even if we are not in a particularly loving mood—the obligation, the Mitzvah, still requires us to give.

A good example would be the Falafel Syndrome. Occasionally, a person enjoys the exotic foods of Eretz Yisrael too freely and, as a consequence of his or her overindulgence in the delicacy of falafel, suffers gastrointestinal complications. Imagine a USY Israel Pilgrim stretched out on the bed, in the heat of a Jerusalem summer day, weak and miserable. Someone comes to the door and says, “There is to be a bris, and they need wine and cake for refreshments,” or “We are going to visit Reuven in the hospital, and we are collecting money to bring flowers and gifts to cheer him up...” According to the narrowest connotations of the concept of charity and philanthropy, the ailing Pilgrim need not give, since he does not feel in a particularly loving mood. By contrast, *Tzedakah*—צדקה clearly demands a positive response, an overriding of the immediate blah-feelings and a rising to the occasion to give freely for the benefit of those in need.

Tzedakah—צדקה does not leave us to our individual moods. The pattern of giving suggested by this Mitzvah means *we must* respond—no matter how we feel at a particular moment. Furthermore, we are instructed to take the initiative in giving—not waiting for imminent disaster, such as the Yom Kippur War, to give. Were the Jews to wait for threats and emergencies, Israel and vital institutions, as well as individuals in great need of Tzedakah—צדקה would not survive. Being a Mensch and integrating Tzedakah—צדקה into our lives means aggressively seeking out situations and people and times and places where we may best apply our powers to provide a degree of תיקון עולם—Fixing-Up the World. We must be on the look-out at all times.

There are two final terms that we must keep in mind when studying Tzedakah—Kavod—כבוד and Bushah—בושה.

כבוד—Kavod is honor, dignity, respect. The Talmud says: גדול

Talmudic Material-Part IV, Gemilut Chassadim, Specific Acts of Sympathetic Lovingkindness

- 1) Recalling the story of Rabbi Akiva’s student who fell ill, how can we apply this in our local communities?
- 2) Of what practical assistance can we be to sick people to help them recover more quickly?

Conclusion

- 1) What do you think the Zohar means when it call Tzedakah, “Ilan Dechaya,” a Tree of Life?
- 2) Do you know any righteous people? How do they live? What do they do that expresses their righteousness?
- 3) Is it important to find these Tzadikkim, even if you have to go out of your way? How does one go about locating them?

Questions For Discussion And Further Thought

Introduction

- 1) What are examples of “taking the initiative” in giving? How do we encourage people to be aggressive in their giving?

Talmudic Material, Part I, Statements About Tzedakah

- 1) Do you know any poor people? If so, are any of them Jewish?
- 2) Are all Jewish poor people old? If not, who are the others?
- 3) How do you feel about the general welfare system, and how would you compare it with some of the halachic principles of Tzedakah?
- 4) How do **צדקה** and **גמילות חסדים** play a role in our general welfare system?
- 5) Have you ever borrowed money from someone? What were your feelings about it, hesitations, an uncomfortable feeling? Have you ever loaned money to anyone?

Talmudic Material—Part II, Tales From The Lives of The Rabbis

- 1) Do you feel there is sufficient scholarship money available in your synagogue for worthwhile projects and students? If not, why not, and where do you think the funds could come from?
- 2) What is meant by the principle “when nothing can be done, something can still be done”? Give some examples.
- 3) Rabbi Tanhum developed a Tzedakah habit for his life. What are other Tzedakah habits you can think of? How can you pattern them into your own life?

Talmudic (and post-Talmud) Material-Part III, Legal Texts

- 1) Why do people feel uncomfortable about asking others to give? How do you ask others to give while still preserving their sense of Kavod?
- 2) Give examples of where \$5, or \$3, or \$2 can be earth shaking in someone’s life. Do you believe that small amounts of money are also important in Tzedakah? If so, how?
- 3) What does Maimonides mean by the statement at the top of Page7? How do we determine proper management?

כבוד הבריות—The kavod due to God’s creatures is extremely great.² We are to treat every person with the sense of dignity he or she deserves.

בושה—Bushah is shame, humiliation, embarrassment, the opposite of Kavod—**כבוד**. We are similarly excepted to avoid causing Bushah in another person.

Many stories we read in the Talmud, and many tales passed on to us by others—as well as real-life encounters we may see—will be understood better with these two terms in mind.

Talmudic Material—Part I, Statements About Tzedakah:

The following are some selected statements the Talmud has made concerning Tzedakah, with a brief commentary.

“One who gives even a perutah—the smallest coin—to the poor, is privileged to sense God’s Presence”.³ There is something unique about the act of giving Tzedakah. Even the most insignificant sum of money, given properly, at the right time and place, allows a person to feel the deeper and higher meanings of Life.

“Even a poor person who receives Tzedakah must give from what he or she receives.”⁴ The Talmud is telling us that an individual’s sense of Kavod—his or her self-dignity—is expressed through his or her giving. Freeing him or her from the responsibility of giving is really taking away a privilege. The Halachah—Jewish Law—allows two poor people to exchange with each other the same food for Purim.⁵ Both remain with the same things that they began with, but both have shared the Mitzvah of Tzedakah, thereby retaining their self-respect.

“The three most prominent characteristics of the Jews are that they are **הרחמנים והביישנים וגומלי חסדים**—filled with Rachmanut, non-arrogant, and

²Berachot 19a, Shabbat 81b, et al.

³Bava Batra 10a.

⁴Gittin 7b.

⁵Mishna Berura to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 694:1.

doing acts of extreme lovingkindness.⁶ Rachmanut is one of the many traditional Jewish terms for compassion. It is a kind of love that gives freely, openly, fully, and it is intimately connected with Tzedakah.

“Anyone who runs to do Tzedakah will find the necessary funds...and the proper recipients for this Tzedakah work.”⁷ As long as there is a strong desire to do Tzedakah, we are assured of success in our endeavors, both in financial and in human terms. Our Talmudic teachers felt certain that giving money away would not lead the giver to personal poverty. Here are two other thoughts on this matter:

“If a person sees that his or her resources are limited, let him or her use them for Tzedakah—and so much the more so if he has extensive resources.”⁸

“Give away a tenth, so that you may become wealthy.”⁹ Returning to the idea of Kavod—one’s sense of dignity and self-respect, we can readily understand that the enrichment of a person’s life is expressed Jewishly in terms other than merely dollars and cents. Giving away a percentage of our income is the most certain sign of our being concerned for living as a Mensch...an upright, giving person. Maimonides states this very clearly and succinctly in his Law Code, the Mishnah Torah:

“A person never becomes poor from giving Tzedakah, nor does any harm come from it, as the verse states, ‘And the result of Tzedakah will be Shalom—Peace.’”¹⁰

Finally, mention should be made of one institution, השאים לשכת—The Secret Chamber. It will help give us a sense of how the Rabbis’ statements became a part of their society:

“There was a Secret Chamber in the Temple where pious people would leave money in secret, and those who had become poor would come and take in

We should examine how Jewish communities of the past provided—and how our communities today provide—for poor people, sick people, our Elders, mentally and emotionally disabled individuals, the deceased, learning about Free Loan Societies, Bikkur Cholim Societies, Societies for Poor Brides, Chevra Kadishas (Burial Societies). We should spend time with people who are involved in this work, learning from their experience. Some of these people are Tzaddikim, truly Righteous Ones, and it is of supreme importance that we seek them out.³⁸ Some do their work so quietly and secretly, they are difficult to find. Nevertheless, it should be our priority to search for them and to watch them at their holy work. Whether it is money-turned-Mitzvot they speak of or time-and-energy-made-Mitzvot, their insights will be invaluable to our own work and our individual search for Menschlich living.

Through these various means, now and again making mistakes as we grope for our sense of what is wisest in Tzedakah, we will learn priorities—where and when and how to give best of our time, our money, our selves. We will more and more assume the decision-making processes of our communities, and we will have to, with the help of our fellow Jews, choose how to apportion our financial and personal resources for the sake of Tikun Olam—Repairing the World.

It is best to close with the words of one of the Righteous Ones of Jerusalem, the Rabbanit Bracha Kapach: “נזכה למצוות”—**Nizkeh LeMitzvot**, may we be privileged to do these Mitzvot together, building a chevra based on the actualization of our potential-to-Menschlichkeit. That is, perhaps, the ultimate privilege of being a Jew.

DANNY SIEGEL

March 14, 1977/Revised March 20, 1996

⁶Yevamot 79a.

⁷Bava Batra 9a.

⁸Gittin 7a.

⁹Shabbat 119a.

¹⁰Mishna Torah, Hilchot Matanot Ani'im, 10:2.

³⁸cf. Moment Magazine, July/August, 1975, “Gym Shoes and Irises.”

of Jewish history, it was a custom in Jerusalem that at meal time, a cloth would be hung on the door, indicating that as long as the cloth was out, whoever was hungry could come in and eat.³⁴ Many members of our parents' and grandparents' generations remember strangers being brought to their table, people found in the synagogue who had no provisions for a Shabbat or Yomtov meal. Hospitality committees have now become a part of many synagogue organizations, and it would be most worthwhile to extend this to other communities.

Other examples:

We know from the Talmud that Rabbi Akiva was not only concerned for poor people, but that he set a prominent example for visiting those who were ill. Once, a student of his fell sick, and no one went to visit him. When Rabbi Akiva went to visit, people cleaned and swept the house in his honor, and because the man no longer needed to worry about his day-to-day cares, he recovered more quickly.³⁵ And Rabbi Yochanan, leader of the Jews in Israel in the 3rd Century did wonders for his sick student-and-friend, Rabbi Elazar. The recovery was brought about as much by his affection and friendship for the sick man as by any medicines he might have carried with him.³⁶

Stories such as these should be studied carefully, and stories from life around us should be exchanged, so that we may gain more insight into the powers of these particular mitzvot to provide not only the bare necessities for fellow Jews, but also comfort, sympathy, and a greater Will to Live.

Conclusion—Thoughts, Suggestions

The Zohar, a classic text of Jewish mysticism, refers to Tzedakah as **עץ חיים**—a Tree of Life.³⁷ What is now necessary is a further study of Living Through Tzedakah and Gemilut Chassadim. More important, perhaps, than the study, is the necessity of gathering experience through the actual giving away of money and doing the all-important Mitzvot of visiting sick people, comforting mourners, providing hospitality, and the other Mitzvot in this category.

³⁴Bava Batra 93b.

³⁵Nedarim 40a.

³⁶Berachot 5b.

³⁷Zohar, Leviticus 111.

secret.”¹¹ Another text adds that there were similar Secret Chambers in all major settlements in Israel—wherever there was a Sanhedrin.¹²

This is just one example of how our Teachers rooted Tzedakah into the life-patterns of the Jewish People. They wished to avoid all chance of Bushah for the poor, so they provided this storehouse for Tzedakah funds, thereby allowing absolute anonymity for those in need of assistance.

Talmudic Material—Part II, Tales From The Lives Of The Rabbis

As important as studying the statements of the Talmudic Masters is an examination of the way they themselves put into practice their ideas and insights. Their biographies reflect a profound concern for Tzedakah, and there are many examples of individuals whose actions, retold centuries later, serve as sources of inspiration for us. The following are just a few selections:

“Rabbi Chana bar Chanila’i had sixty bakers in his house day and night, baking for anyone who needed bread. He would leave his hand in his pocket so that (by the immediacy and naturalness of handing money to him or her) a poor person who came to ask would not feel humiliated. His doors were open to all four directions, and whoever came in hungry would leave satisfied. Furthermore, in times when food was scarce, he would leave wheat and barley outside the door, so that anyone who was too embarrassed to come and take in the daytime could come unnoticed and take a night.”¹³ We are reminded of the stories of Abraham and Job, both of whom had their tents open to the four directions. Both took the initiative to be on the look-out to make Tzedakah part of their lives, and Rabbi Chana bar Chanila’i did the same—as well as adding many insights into the prevention of Bushah. A split-second act—taking a hand and putting it into the pocket to take money out—might have caused shame to the person in need—and this Rabbi wished to avoid that at all costs.

“Rabbi Yannai once saw a man give Tzedakah to a poor man in public. He said to him, ‘It would have been better not to give than giving as you did,

¹¹Mishna Shekalim 5:6.

¹²Tosefta Shekalim 2:16.

¹³Berachot 58b.

causing him shame.”¹⁴ Apparently the contributor had given too openly, and the financial benefit for the poor man was not worth the humiliation he suffered as a result of the public nature of the act.

“Rabbi Tanhum, though he needed only one portion of meat for himself, would buy two; one bunch of vegetables, he would buy two—one for the poor and one for himself.”¹⁵ Rabbi Tanhum was establishing a regulating pattern in his life, a Tzedakah-habit.

“Rabbi Zecharia, the son-in-law of Rabbi Levi, used to take Tzedakah money. His colleagues would deride him, thinking he did not need it. When he died, they discovered that he had been giving it out to others.”¹⁶ Rabbi Zecharia’s forgivable deception allowed him to do more Tzedakah work. The fact that he was giving it to others allowed him to overcome the harsh feelings of his friends. There are many people like this in the world: people who take ostensibly for themselves, and who in a private, sometimes secret, fashion give it to those who are in need.

“Rabbi Chana bar Chanina and Rabbi Hoshaya were touring the synagogues of Lod. Rabbi Chana bar Chanina said to Rabbi Hoshaya, ‘See how much money my fathers have invested here!’ He replied, ‘How many souls your ancestors have sunk here! Was there no one here who wanted to study Torah (and who would need the money for support)?’¹⁷ There is a subtle play on the Hebrew words here, but the meaning is clear—Rabbi Hoshaya is saying that his friend’s ancestors should have had a better sense of priorities, providing scholarship money and living expenses for students, rather than building big fancy buildings.

“Abba bar Ba gave money to his son Shmuel to distribute to the poor. He went out and found a poor person eating meat and drinking wine. When he told his father what he had seen, his father said, ‘Give him more, for his soul is bitter.’¹⁸ This story indicates an important Tzedakah-principle: a person who was once well-to-do and who is now poor must be allowed to adjust gradually to

¹⁴Chagiga 5a.

¹⁵Kohelet Rabba 7:30

¹⁶Yerushalmi Shekalim 5:4.

¹⁷ibid.

¹⁸Yerushalmi Peah 8:8; a similar story is told of Mar Ukbah and his son in Ketubot 67b.

These Eight Degrees, as well as other laws mentioned in Maimonides’ Laws Code and the Shulchan Aruch would make excellent source material for a more extensive study of Tzedakah—either as a course, or for individual study.

Talmudic Material—Part IV, Gemilut Chassadim, Specific Acts Of Sympathetic Lovingkindness:

גְּמִילוֹת חַסְדִּים—Gemilut Chassadim is a special category of Mitzvot related to Tzedakah. In its most restricted sense, Tzedakah is concerned with money (and goods provided with money) for poor people, while Gemilut Chassadim goes beyond this in three ways: it applies to rich people as well as poor people, to a person’s time and energy as well as money, and it extends to the deceased as well as to the living.³⁰ Sometimes the definitions intermingle, but it is important to mention the specific nature of Gemilut Chassadim, Acts of Sympathetic Lovingkindness in order to broaden our awareness of Menschlich living. Some define a wide variety of acts within this category,³¹ though usually here are six specific Mitzvot mentioned in the texts:

1. **הַלְבַּשַׁת עְרוּמִים** (Halbashat Arumim)—providing clothes for those who need them.
2. **בִּיקוּר חוֹלִים** (Bikkur Cholim)—visiting the sick.
3. **נִיחוּם אֲבָלִים** (Nichum Avaylim)—comforting mourners.
4. **לְוִיַּת הַמֵּת** (Levayat HaMayt)—accompanying the dead to their final rest.
5. **הַכְּנַסַּת כַּלָּה** (Hachnassat Kallah)—providing for brides.
6. **הַכְּנַסַּת אוֹרְחִים** (Hachnassat Orchim)—hospitality.³²

We are told that God clothed naked people (Adam and Eve), visited sick people (Abraham), comforted mourners (Isaac), and buried the dead (Moses),³³ so that in Gemilut Chassadim-living, we are imitating God, living out our image of the Divine. There are many examples of the Talmudic Rabbis doing admirable acts of Gemilut Chassadim, as in the case of Rabbi Chana bar Chaila’s providing bread for the poor. We are even told that in a certain period

³⁰Sukkah 49b.

³¹Entziklopedia Talmudit 6:149-153.

³²Sotah 14a, Eruvin 18a, Shabbat 127 a-b.

³³Sotah 14a.

others for anything.”²⁹ Maimonides’ eight categories of Tzedakah are a classic study-text, critical points for anyone wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the sensitivities involved in Jewish giving. The one just stated is the highest. The following is a list, in descending order, of the other seven:

One who gives Tzedakah to the poor and is unaware of the recipient, who in turn is unaware of the giver. This is indeed a religious act achieved for its own sake. Of a similar character is one who contributes to a Tzedakah fund. *One should not contribute to a Tzedakah fund unless he or she knows that the person in charge of the collections is trustworthy and intelligent and knows how to manage the money properly....*[my italics]

The third, lesser, degree is when the giver knows the recipient, but the recipient does not know the giver. The great sages used to go secretly and cast the money into the doorway of poor people. Something like this should be done, it being a noble virtue, if the Tzedakah administrators are behaving improperly.

The fourth, still lower degree is when the recipient knows the giver, but the giver does not know the recipient. The great sages used to tie money in sheets which they threw behind their backs, and poor people would come and get it without being embarrassed.

The fifth degree is when the giver puts the Tzedakah money into the hands of poor people without being solicited.

The sixth degree is when he or she puts the money into the hands of a poor person after being solicited.

The seventh degree is when he or she gives the poor person less than he or she should, but does so cheerfully.

The eighth degree is when he or she gives the poor person grudgingly.

²⁹Mishna Torah, Hilchot Matnot Ani'im 10:7-14, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, 249:6-13.

his or her diminished economic status. The poor man Shmuel found was evidently used to finer foods and wine, and Abba bar Ba is telling his son that he is suffering the trauma of poverty and must be allowed to re-orient himself psychologically and physically at his own pace. The Rabbis always take into account the Bitterness-of-Soul factor; it was of critical importance, particularly for recently-impooverished people, to preserve their sense of Kavod. A story about Hillel further illustrates this principal:

“(A person must be provided) even a horse to ride upon and a servant to run in front of him or her...They said of Hillel that he once personally ran before the horse of a man who had become recently impoverished, because they could not find another person to do it.”¹⁹ We know from the Megillat Esther that riding through the streets on a horse led by a servant was a sign of great honor in ancient times. Hillel, realizing the danger of Bushah for this poor man, took it upon himself to fulfill this part of the Mitzvah.

Two final tales:

“When Tzedakah collectors would see Elazar of Birata, they would hide from him, because he would give away all that he had on his person. One day he was on the way to the market to purchase something for his daughter’s wedding when the Tzedakah-collectors saw him. They hid from him, but he went running after them...”²⁰ Elazar of Birata was an overly-generous person, and the Talmud and Codes of Law carefully warn Tzedakah collectors not to go to such an individual too frequently, as there are limits to how much a person should give away of his or her own possessions. Here, the person (and others like him or her), must have his or her particular kavod protected by those involved in collecting tzedakah money.

“A story is told of Binyamin HaTzaddik, who was the supervisor of the community’s Tzedakah-funds. Once, when food was scarce, a woman came to him and said ‘Rabbi, feed me!’ He replied, ‘I swear that there is nothing in the Tzedakah-fund.’ She said, ‘If you do not feed me, a woman and her seven children will die.’ So he fed her from his own money.”²¹ This story simply states the principal: When nothing can be done, something can still be done. Even though his official responsibilities ended when the communal funds were

¹⁹Ketubot 67b.

²⁰Ta’anit 24a.

²¹Bava Batra 11a.

exhausted, Binyamin's obligations as a Jew demanded some deliberate action. Something had to be done and Binyamin rose to the occasion.

Talmudic (and Post-Talmudic) Material—Part III, Legal Texts:

The Talmud establishes extensive rules for the giving of Tzedakah, laws which are codified in Maimonides' Mishna Torah, in the Shulchan Aruch, and in later legal collections such as the Aruch HaShulchan and modern Responsa literature—the questions addressed to rabbis of our day, and their decisions based on the development of the Halachah through the centuries. The most important law for our study is the statement that “One should give up to a fifth of one's possessions—that is the Mitzvah to an extraordinary degree. One tenth is an average percentage, and less is considered miserly.”²² There are some exceptions to the 20% maximum limit, e.g., for redeeming captives and provisions made in a last will-and-testament, but the Jewish mode of giving definitely prohibits the giving away of greater amounts—and certainly a person should not give everything away. Maimonides clearly states that giving everything away is not **הסידות**—saintliness, but rather **שטות**—foolishness.²³ This pamphlet, therefore, assumes that we are speaking of the 10-20% range of giving.

A later Law Code, the Aruch HaShulchan (late 19th-early 20th Century), explains that these Tzedakah funds are to be calculated before taxes, but after business expenses are deducted.²⁴ The details of what kind of taxes and what are considered valid business expenses should be studied at greater length, though this same Code, and other sources, indicates that money received as gifts should also have Tzedakah deducted from it.²⁵ Since a person becomes obligated to do Mitzvot from the time of Bar or Bat Mitzvah, we should educate our youth to begin their Life of Tzedakah by giving away a portion of what they receive on the occasion of their coming-of-Jewish-age. In many homes, Jewish children are trained in the ways of Tzedakah by putting money in a pushka (any Tzedakah box), by planting trees in Eretz Yisrael, and by other practices. The

²²Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De`ah, 249:1.

²³Mishna Torah, Hilchot Arachin V'Charamin 8:13.

²⁴Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh De`ah, 249:7.

²⁵Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh De`ah, 249:6, and conversation with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin.

privilege of giving is taught to them at an early age, and certainly by Bar and Bat Mitzvah, it should become a regular pattern in every Jew's life. It is one of the many ways of assuming one's full responsibility of being a part of the Jewish People.

Some other specific laws:

“A person should give pleasantly, joyously, with a good heart, showing sympathy for the poor, sharing in his or her sense of pain and sorrow.”²⁶ Jewish tradition tells us that, besides the giving itself, we will form attitudes about people and human nature through the giving. As a result of Menschlich acts, we will become more aware of the nature of being a Mensch. That is a basic Jewish idea—the *doing forms the theory*, and not the other way around. *Doing molds our emotions*.

“One should not be arrogant when giving.”²⁷ If Tzedakah is understood as a **זכות**—a Zechut, a privilege, and an act to be done with Simcha—joy, then the dangers of overwhelming egotism will be avoided. Jewish Tradition does not advocate the position that the giver is the All Good Helper dispensing pennies here and there to the poor, unfortunate souls of the world. Recalling our root-word **צדק**, we understood that it is right and just to give, and this is a part of the meaning of being created in God's image.

“If a person convinces others to give, his or her reward is even greater than when simply giving himself or herself.”²⁸ The Shulchan Aruch is saying that encouraging others to give is a primary obligation for Jews. The dividing line between “convincing,” “encouraging,” “arm-twisting,” “nudging,” “pressuring” and “forcing” is often blurred today, but it is perfectly proper for us to make this a part of our conversation with others. There is nothing inherently sleazy or greasy about encouraging others to give money away and raising funds for appropriate people and places. Everything depends on the Menschlich tone we use when we raise the subject.

“There are eight degrees of giving Tzedakah. The highest degree is to aid a Jew...to become self-supporting, so that he or she will not have to ask

²⁶Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De`ah, 249:3

²⁷ibid, 249:13, note by Isserles.

²⁸ibid, 249:5.