

If Not Now, When? Today & Tomorrow
אם לא עכשו, אימתי? היום ומחר

The second in the "Jewish Giving" study series...Print or copy this "instant lesson" and start a discussion around your Shabbat dinner table – appropriate for ALL ages!

The great scholar Maimonides wrote about the Laws of Gifts to the Poor (10.7-15) in his book the Mishnah Torah. He took Jewish ideas about charity from the Bible, the Talmud and from other rabbinical books of wisdom to create an eight step code called **Ladder of Tzedakah**. It tells us about the *eight degrees of tzedakah* in order of increasing importance. During the coming months, we will briefly examine these steps.

Read and discuss this text below...

Who fulfilled a mitzvah?

A homeless woman named Ruth walks into a deserted doctor's office at 6:00 pm on a cold winter's evening. Doctor Smith comes out to find the woman weeping in the waiting area. "Whatever is the matter?" he asks.

"It's my arm," Ruth replies, "I think its broken." Dr. Smith takes in her ragged appearance, her stench, and notices that while her arm is scraped and bloody, it is most definitely *not* broken. Dr. Smith widens his eyes in sympathy, smiles, reaches into his pocket for a dollar, and directs her toward the bus that will take her to the free clinic.

Meanwhile Dr. Jones enters the waiting room. She has her coat on and her briefcase in hand. When she catches sight of the homeless woman she shakes her head in disgust and mutters something about "darn freeloaders." Nevertheless she sits down to clean and dress Ruth's wound. She doesn't look up, not even to accept Ruth's feeble "thanks," and does not watch her walk out into the cold night.

So, who was it?

While Dr. Smith appeared sympathetic, he ultimately gave nothing. Dr. Jones gave grudgingly, but she still gave. According to Maimonides the lowest level of giving tzedakah (which means justice, not charity) is when the giver gives unwillingly.

Giving unwillingly, like Dr. Jones, is preferable to not giving at all, like Dr. Smith, and still fulfills the commandment of tzedakah.

When we are faced with the choice between giving begrudgingly and not giving at all, our tradition makes the choice easy!

Congregation Neveh Shalom's Annual Giving Campaign 2009-2010

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