



"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Romans 10:1)

## HEY, BUDDY, CAN YOU SPARE A SHEKEL?

The practice of charitable giving is very important in the Jewish community. The Hebrew word usually translated by the English word, "charity," is *tzedakah* (pronounced tseh-duh-káh), the root of which is translated elsewhere as "righteousness" or "justice." Thus, charity is not considered optional or voluntary for the Jewish person, but is that which is demanded by justice.

THE RESPONSIBILITY to give to those in need is based on:

-Biblical teaching such as Deuteronomy 15:11:

"For the poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore, I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land."

-Rabbinical teaching such as:

Rabbi Assi: "Tzedakah is as important as all other mitzvot (good works) combined." (*Babba Batra 9a*)

Rabbi Elazar: "Someone who performs tzedakah in secret is greater than Moses." (*Babba Batra 9b*)

Moses Maimonides, considered to be one of Judaism's greatest teachers, who identified eight levels of charity, the highest being that of

helping the recipient find a job or start a business so that he/she will not need charity again and the lowest being that of giving unwillingly with resentment.

THE HABIT of giving is promoted: -In the Jewish community by the establishment of a *kuppah*, or "community chest," from which funds are drawn to help those in need.

-In the Jewish home by a *tzedakah box* (note the illustration on this page), also called a *pushke*, into which family members drop coins before the Sabbath or holidays. When the box is full, a decision is then made by the family regarding the charitable cause to which the money will be distributed.

THE BENEFIT of charitable giving—in the view of rabbinical Judaism—is evident in the conviction that:

"Charity, together with prayer and repentance during the Ten Days of Penitence, can cancel an adverse Divine decree regarding the coming year." (*The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, p. 156)

THE INADEQUACY of acts of charity (or any act at all) to produce a proper relationship with a holy God is evident in Isaiah 64:6:

"But we are all as an unclean thing,

and all our **righteousnesses** (same word as charity, *tzedakah*) are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

It is in this context that the Apostle Paul reminds his readers:

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets,

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference.” (Romans 3:21-22)

## NOTABLE QUOTE

*“... So now we live in an age when the Southern Baptists and others openly strive to convert Jews. The Jewish communal response has been lame, focusing on how offensive this challenge is in an age of enlightenment. A more courageous stand would be to accept the challenge, fight for the moral dignity of Judaism, and challenge the Southern Baptists to a series of highly publicized moral debates—let people decide for themselves which system has more value.*

*... While we run the risk of discovering in such a public debate that other systems are indeed more worthy or more attractive, there is a greater risk in continuing to send the implicit signal that Judaism is not unique or worth spreading to others. **Any system that does not believe in itself enough to share it with others will crumble from within.** (Emphasis*

*added)*

*. . . About four thousand non-Jews convert to Judaism each year, finding great meaning in (and energizing) our community. With some effort and money, at least forty thousand non-Jews would join our ranks*



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