

Let Your Light Shine...

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Tzedakah is a Hebrew word that means righteousness but is commonly used to signify charity. It is based on the Hebrew word (צדק, tzadik) a person given to righteousness, fairness or justice.

In Judaism, tzedakah refers to the religious obligation to do what is right and just, considered by Rabbis (and my Grandmother!) important parts of living a spiritual life. I can hear her voice, as she smiled and exhorted me to “do the right thing” (decades before Spike Lee!). In the midst of my family’s inconsistent spirituality, the thread of tzedakah was woven as a direct line from the heart of God.

Unlike philanthropy or charity, which are completely voluntary, in Judaism, tzedakah is seen as a religious obligation, which must be performed regardless of financial standing, and must even be performed by poor people. Tzedakah is part of a larger framework of moral conduct – it is part of Tikkun Olam (“repairing the world”). This is the duty of every Jew (and all those “grafted in” to the ancient olive tree, Israel): to leave the world in better condition than we found it.

For those of us who know Messiah Yeshua, our application of these truths should be even higher...because He came to fulfill the law and He enables us to let His life and light shine through us. When we live to see Tikkun Olam and Tzedakah manifested in this world, we do so by the leading of Ruach Ha Kodesh (the Holy Spirit) and the enablement of the Son of God. Baruch Ha Shem! (Blessed be HIS NAME)

In practice, many modern Jews carry out tzedakah by donating a portion of their income to charitable institutions, or to needy people that they may encounter. Traditional Jews commonly practice "ma'aser kesafim," tithing 10% of their income to support those in need.

Special acts of tzedakah are performed on significant days:

- At weddings, Jewish brides and bridegrooms would traditionally give to charity, to symbolize the sacred character of the marriage
- At Passover and other feasts or major holidays in Jewish tradition, it is traditional to be welcoming towards hungry strangers, and feed them at the table.
- The Sukkot (Fall feast of Tabernacles) version of hospitality, “ushpizin”, is considered a great blessing; when we welcome any and all visitors to partake of God’s bounty in our sukkah.

(For a touching and clever view of this practice, see the 2004 Israeli movie “Ushpizin”).

In these unusual times, monetary generosity needs to be accompanied by spiritual generosity. Let’s express kindness and helpful acts to those who the Lord has put in our path. As believers, the greatest gift we can give to the Jewish people and all nations is our testimony of the Jewish Messiah's charity towards us, and His desire to grant that to all.

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