



Righteous Giving to the Poor: Tzedakah ("charity") in Classical Rabbinic Judaism; Including a Brief Introduction to Rabbinic Literature

Rivka Ulmer, Moshe Ulmer

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The concept of Tzedakah (Charity) as set forth in rabbinic literature is one of the greatest moral insights in the history of the Jewish people. Since the dawn of humanity there has always been poverty and its concomitant suffering. The Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Prophets, recognized that we have a responsibility to ameliorate the plight of the poor.

The Rabbis refined this moral insight into an extensive system of Tzedakah. Their fundamental premise is that every human being is made in the image of God and thus the dignity of every individual must be respected. Each one of us has the obligation to enhance the lives of others so that they may live in dignity. Poverty has the potential of undermining an individual's sense of dignity and self-worth. The system of Tzedakah as developed by the Rabbis is an instrumentality that sensitizes us to the needs of the poor and our obligation on their behalf.

Moral insights and comments about Tzedakah are found throughout the vast body of rabbinic literature. This book attempts to present a survey of the rabbinic sources concerning Tzedakah. The objective of this book is to present the reader with an analysis of the system of Tzedakah as created and understood by the Rabbis. The system of analysis was to divide Tzedakah into different categories and to comment upon the rabbinic texts utilized. It is hoped the reader will comprehend and appreciate the moral insights that are inherent in the rabbinic concept of Tzedakah.

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