



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

**Guide to a Perplexed Donor:
Comparative Narratives of Giving - Biblical, Rabbinic, Christian (charity),
and Greek (philanthropy) and Tikkun Olam**

Noam Zion

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A research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute, **Noam Zion** has a Master of Arts in philosophy from Columbia University. Noam Zion is part of the New Paths: Christians Engaging Israel team. His numerous publications include: *A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah*, "*A Different Light: The Big Book of Hanukkah*, *A Day Apart: Shabbat at Home*, *Sipurei Reshit*, a Hebrew anthology on contemporary readings of Genesis that he published together with his daughter, and *Halaila Hazeh*, and *A Night to Remember*, haggadot that he published together with his son. In 2013 Noam published a three volume work on tzedakah, philanthropy, human dignity, charity, *zakat*, and *tikkun olam*. (noam.zion@gmail.com)

From Each according to one's Ability :
Duties to Poor People from the Bible to the Welfare State and Tikkun Olam

To Each according to one's Social Needs:
The Dignity of the Needy from Talmudic Tzedakah to Human Rights

For the Love of God
Comparative Religious Motivations for Giving

Introduction: Charles Bronfman, *The Art of Giving*

"Old philanthropy is being replaced by new philanthropy. While Charles Bronfman's father, head of Seagrams, used to donate to the major umbrella organizations of the Jewish and general community out of a sense of social obligation as one gives taxes regularly and annually with fluctuations by the economic success of one's own business, his son Charles sees himself as a new kind of philanthropist. His book, *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan* (2010), is an attempt to articulate that difference and help other donors make that transition in streetwise ways. **The old philanthropy was about fulfilling a social obligation, while the new is about fulfilling my life by making a difference in the world."**

- a. **"Few donors are selfless. That is fine. The question is what self governs these philanthropic choices?"**

Therefore we must know the narrative of *who we are* to be able to identify **the self that governs our choices**. The motives may be past, present or future oriented – social obligation growing out of our communal and historical identity including guilt; ephemeral and idiosyncratic whims like hobbies; the needs and crises encroaching on our society now; or the visions of what we can do to change the world. Since giving is highly individual without a sense of social obligation deriving from membership, it must fit one's self. It requires much sorting of one's preferences and values which means **self-reflection**. Therefore choosing one's philanthropic thrust is 'doing what's right for you.'"

- b. "In the old philanthropy, donors gave largely out of **obligation**, routine, and guilt, if not to gain influence, **social** standing, or a place in heaven....[It was social as a reflection of one's communal identity, out of nostalgia for the values of old, out of a desire to meet an emergency or support those too weak to support themselves]. In the new philanthropy, the donor's giving is like their doing: it is **individual**, forward looking, leveraged for effect, and bent on changing the world...It signifies the transformation of society from **noblesse oblige** to one of **entrepreneurial problem solving**. The new philanthropist looks at her activities with a refreshing frankness and realism. She is less saint than engineer."
- c. "The new philanthropy is the business of change; it is not so much about process as it is about outcomes." "The invention of the new philanthropy is credited to the successful young entrepreneurs of the dot-com world of 1990s. Thus they are called social entrepreneurs or strategic donors who have a founder's attitude to their projects, a sense that this is mine and I will succeed. Therefore they give their 'energy, enthusiasm, creativity, passion, and connections.'"¹
- d. "In the new philanthropy donors have sought to make a difference. They are ready for their second act [after making a name for themselves in business]. And they are ready to make use of sophisticated management instruments they have developed in their business life to achieve greater performance in this new, more challenging arena, and with potentially more impact. They give purposefully, think strategically, rely on measurements and regular monitoring. In short, they are relying on the focus and rigor of for-profits to enhance the effectiveness of their

¹ Bronfman, 25,35

philanthropy... **Business' best attributes of purposeful, honed intelligence and strategic-mindedness have a place in philanthropy."**

- e. "Old and new philanthropy may be contrasted as **downstream or upstream** interventions, as rescue or preventive projects. We are like the parable of two men who see a series of people drowning in a river. One responds by jumping in to save each person. The other races up stream to try to keep any more people from falling in. This is the essential dilemma in philanthropy – whether to address consequences or causes?"

What Marks a Bar Mitzvah? An Italian Celebration and a Bay Area One

a. 17th Century Italian Celebration

In one of the first ever reported Bar Mitzvah ceremonies, in Italy in the 17th century, we have an eye witness report from a Jew who later converted to Christianity. This is how he presented his former religion:

The boy aged 13 comes with his father to the synagogue where they are greeted with blessings. Then the cantor calls up the new Bar Mitzvah to read publicly from the Torah. **Then the Bar Mitzvah thanks God for making him a Bar Mitzvah and publicly announces how he will contribute his own Tzedakah.** How much to this? How much to that. How much to the *hazan* (cantor). How much to the *shamash* (synagogue caretaker).

Then he descends from the *bimah* and receives everyone's blessings and kisses the hands of his father and his teacher.

b. 21st Century Celebration

*In a Bay area Jewish day school the educators agonized over the fancy self-aggrandizing Bnai Mitzvah celebrations that suggested a lack of concern for others less fortunate. They also worried about the high cost of gifts for families who must give a significant gift for every other child in class – minimally \$30 – since the whole class was invited to each **Bar Mitzvah party**. So the school developed the following custom in consultation with parents and students:*

All the children's families contribute a lump sum of \$500 for Tzedakah and the children voted to relinquish the expectation of receiving gifts from their classmates. Twenty students means \$10,000. With that they wrote to corporations describing their project for giving meaning to their adolescent rite of passage by making a financial commitment to the good of the community. Each corporation was asked for matching funds at various levels and then the class worked on fund raisers to raise another \$10,000.

Then after studying the laws of Tzedakah and the needs of the community, selected nonprofit organizations are asked to make formal presentations and answer hard-nosed questions from the young philanthropists about overhead charges and long term results. This is how they inaugurate their entrance into the yoke of mitzvot.

Model 1: Social Solidarity in Times of Distress

1. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Yevamot 47a – 47b (200 CE – Israel)

Conditions and Interview for Accepting a *Ger* = Convert to Judaism/Jewish people

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a person desires to become a *ger* (proselyte), address the candidate as follows: "What reason have you for desiring to become a *ger* (proselyte)? Don't you know that the people of Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?"

If the candidate replies, 'I know and yet am unworthy', accept him/her immediately.

Then let him/her know some of the minor and some of the major commandments = mitzvot. Inform him/her of the sin of forgetting to leave the Gleanings (of your field), the Forgotten Sheaf, the Peah (= the corner of your field set aside for the poor to harvest) and the Poor's Tithe (minimally ten per cent of your harvest).²

2. Exodus 22: Tzedakah as Empathy with the Stranger

Do not take advantage of the stranger and oppress him, **for you were strangers in the land of Egypt**. Do not abuse any widow or orphan. Because if you should abuse them, then they will certainly **cry out to Me** and I will just as certainly hear them.

3. . Mishneh Torah, Chapter 10: 2

Maimonides (12th C. Egypt) - Brotherhood is Mutual Aid

All Jews and those attached to them are like brothers, as it is said, "You are sons to the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1), and if a brother will not show mercy to his brother, then who will have mercy on him?

And to whom can the poor of Israel look for help-to those other nations who hate and persecute them? They can look for help only to their brothers.

² Gemara: What is the reason? – R. Hiyya b. Abba replied in the name of R. Johanan: Because a Noahide would rather be killed than give so much as a *perutah* (= the smallest coin), if it not returnable

Model 2: Universal Justice – The Jewish Calling

4. Maimonides, Laws of Gifts of the Poor, Mishneh Torah, Chapter 10: 1-2

Abraham, the First Jew's Project

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah than any other positive commandment because tzedakah is the sign of the righteous = tzaddik, the seed of Abraham our Father, as it is says,

"Abraham is to become a great and populous nation, a blessing to all the nations. I have singled him out so that he may instruct his children and his household [or posterity] after him to keep the way of Adonai, doing what is just and right [**Tzedakah**] in order that God may bring about for Abraham what was promised him." (Gen. 18:19).

Israel is redeemed only through tzedakah, as it says, *"Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and they that return of her with righteousness"* (Isaiah 1:27).

5. Isaiah 58:5-9 – The Prophetic Criticism of Economic Injustice from the Yom Kippur Haftorah

Is such the fast that I desire,
A day for men to starve their bodies?
Is it bowing the head like a reed
And lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Do you call that a fast,
A day favored by Adonai?
No, this is the fast I desire:
To unlock the chains of evil,
And untie the ropes of the yoke [of injustice]
To let the oppressed go free;
To break off every yoke.
It is to share your bread with the hungry,
And to take the wretched poor into your home;
When you see the naked, to clothe him,
And not to ignore your own kin.

Model 3: Classical Christian Charity (Caritas, Agape, Alms)

6. New Testament

a. I Corinthians 13: 3-4, 14

PAUL: "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is **not self-seeking**, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

b. II Corinthians 9:7

PAUL: "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver

c. "Jesus said: It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:33-35)

d. Luke 14:12-14

Jesus preaches: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or brothers or kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the maimed, the lame, the blind, and **you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you**. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

e. Paul to Romans 5:7-8

"It is not easy to die, even for a good man - though of course for the really worthy, a man might be prepared to die - but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners"

f. Ralph Waldo Emerson on True Love:

"Rings and other jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself. **Thou must bleed for me.**" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Gifts")

g. Mark 10:17-31

Jesus meets a young man who wants to enter the world to come.

Jesus says: "one thing is lacking in you. Go sell what you have and give it all to the poor. Then you will have a treasure in heaven and come and follow me." But the man would not give up all his possessions. So Jesus said: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Model 4: Greek Civic Pride: Philanthropy or Euergia (Good Public Works)

7.The Greek Epitaph: "To live forever in the mouths of the people"³

a. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b31

"Consider man as not consider as mortal, but think about the possibility of their becoming immortalized."

b. J. B. Schneewind, "Philosophical Ideas of Charity Some Historical Reflections" in J. B. Schneewind, editor of *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy*

"The Aristotelian virtues directly associated with giving have little to do with love of humanity. **Liberality**, the virtue associated with small sums, is the disposition to "**give for the nobility of giving**," and the noble "will give to the right people, and the right amount, and at the right time, and fulfill all the other conditions of right giving" (Aristotle 1120a). Right giving, like all of Aristotle's virtues, stems directly from the character of the individual and from his desire to achieve happiness through living the most choice-worthy life and doing the most praiseworthy deeds. **The right people are his family, friends, and fellow citizens, who share his penchant for virtue and will, in their turn, give rightly.**"

"When large sums and public display come into play we graduate from liberality to **magnificence**, but the basic account of virtue does not change. Thus writes Aristotle, "**the magnificent man is an artist in expenditure**: he can discern what is suitable, and spend great sums with good taste." If the situation calls for it "he will spend gladly and lavishly, since nice calculation is shabby; and he will think how he can carry out his project most nobly and splendidly, rather than how much it will cost and how it can be done most cheaply" (Aristotle 1121a-b). In all, however, he observes the mean with regard to his resources and his position in the community, otherwise he becomes prodigal, profligate, and a fool. "

"The motive for giving has little to do with the material circumstances of the recipient, and when it does the relevant issue is whether or not he is **in position to return the benefit**. To give to an unworthy person, or in a way that does not sustain friendships that make up our social relations, is simply wasteful. From Aristotle to Seneca public giving, whether by individuals or the state, is intended to secure those goods most desirable to the givers, not necessarily the recipients."

"Poverty does not belong to the catalog of virtues proposed as goals worthy of the young Greek. ... The Greeks considered any mention of poverty to be demeaning and implying lack of culture, greed, foul speech, or evil manners in general. ... Greek or

³ "We support nonprofits so that they can help us achieve *our* personal mission."³

Roman authors spoke with disgust of the sight of beggars and petitioners crowding synagogue courtyards in various cities of the Mediterranean. Artemidorus of Ephesus, for instance, a soothsayer from the second half of the second century C.E., writes about "a synagogue and beggars and all people who ask for gifts, and such as arouse pity, and mendicants, foretell grief, anxiety and heartache to both men and women."

8. The Rabbis and the Edifice Complex

a. Hosea 8:14; Jerusalem Talmud Tractate Peah 21b

"Rabbi [Judah the Prince] showed Rav a synagogue gate that [his family] had built, and exclaimed:

'How much money my ancestors invested here!'

He replied: 'Rather, how many *lives* have your ancestors invested here! Was there no person studying Torah [whom they might have supported], or sick people lying in a dump?' He referred him to the following verse, *Israel forgot its Maker and built palaces [and Judah built cities]*." (Hosea 8:14).

b. Genesis 11:4 in Zohar Genesis 25b

"Woe to those who build massive synagogues to show off their wealth because they are glory seekers like the builders of the Tower of Babel who wanted to make a great name for themselves "

c. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Baba Batra 10b; Pesachim 8:1

One who says: 'This weight of silver is donated to tzedakah, so my children will live and so I will merit the world to come' is completely righteous!

d. The Meiri, 13th century Talmud commentator from France

"The act of tzedakah is greater than the actor, so that even though one is forced to give and it is not a voluntary gift of the heart, it is still a credit to them as tzedakah."

Model 5: *Geulah* as Redemption and Tzedakah as Empowerment

9. .Leviticus 25 - System of Self-Corrective Economic Justice among Brothers

If your brother sinks to the point of selling of his inherited land, then his nearest kin, his *goel* / redeemer will redeem what the brother sold.

If one has no redeemer, then one may still prosper and acquire enough to redeem one's own [inheritance] and if one does not acquire enough...then the inheritance still goes out on the Jubilee and the owner returns to his inheritance (Leviticus 25:25-28).

Proclaim liberty (*dror*) in the land to all the inhabitants, let it be a Jubilee. Each person will return to their inherited land and each person will return to their family (Leviticus 25:10)

10. Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat 63a

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said:

Greater is the lender than one who does tzedakah.

Yet the one who puts (money) in a kitty (*kis*) as a partnership [with someone in need] is greatest of all.

11. Maimonides – Tzedakah as Empowerment: Social Entrepreneurship? Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, Gifts to the Poor 10:7-14

The highest, supreme level of tzedakah is one who supports an Israelite who has come by hard times, by handing him a gift or a loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding work for him, in order to strengthen his hand, so that he would have no need to beg from other people. Concerning such the Torah says, "you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a resident, that he may live with you" (Lev. 25:35) – meaning: sustain him, so that he will not lapse into poverty.

12. Deuteronomy 15:8; Genesis 2:18; BT Ketubot 67a

Tzedakah and J-Date: To Each According to their Needs:

Our Rabbis taught: If an orphan applied for assistance to marry, a house must be rented for him, a bed must be prepared for him and [he must also be supplied with] all [household] objects [required for] his use, and then he is given a wife in marriage, for it is said in the Torah (Deut. 15: 8) *Sufficient for one's lack (need) in that which one [lo] lacks*:

'Sufficient for one's lack', refers to the house; *'in that which one lacks'*, refers to a bed and a table; *'one'* [lo] refers to a wife, for so it is said in the Torah, *I will make for him [lo] a help to complement him.* (Gen. 2:18)

Appendix: The Ultimate Commitment to Fundraising

Gordon Zacks and his mentor for UJA Fundraising:

“One January, as a young leader, I [Gordon Zacks] remember accompanying Bill Rosenwald - son of Sears, Roebuck founder Julius Rosenwald - and one of three co-founders of the United Jewish Appeal—on a solicitation in Miami Beach. Bill, who was about seventy five at the time, was mentoring me on this call. He flew in from Chicago, and I arrived from Columbus. Bill was a mild-mannered and humble person who shunned the spotlight. His commitment to Israel and Jewish causes was absolute and breathtakingly deep. Bill also, coincidentally, suffered from an illness that made him feel chronically cold, no matter what the climate or how warmly he was dressed. Bill and I found the prospect (whom I'll call 'X') in his swimming trunks poolside at the Fontainebleau Hotel. Bill wore a heavy overcoat, a wool scarf, and a fedora hat. It was ninety-five degrees, and the entire crowd stared at us with total bewilderment.

Bill delivered his request in a soft-spoken voice asking for a \$250,000 gift from a man who had given \$10,000 the prior year. X was unmoved. Bill explained the reasons the money was needed. Still no answer. But it was plain to see that X wanted nothing more than to disappear. Well, extracting himself from the scene is exactly what he tried to do. Slowly but resolutely, he got up and walked toward the sand. Bill followed him, never missing a beat in his appeal. I was mystified—frozen in my tracks poolside. X moved toward the shoreline. So did Bill. Then X started *walking into the water*. So did the fully dressed Bill Rosenwald! With a steady rhythm, X was now wading out into the waves one step after another. In just a couple of minutes, both he and Bill were waist high, and the waves were splashing on top of Bill's fedora. Finally X turned to Bill and shouted: 'All right, you win! I give up! I'll give the \$250,000.' That's commitment!” (Gordon Zacks, *Defining Moments: Stories of Character, Courage and Leadership*, 2009, xiii)