

Tzedakah – Ancient Teachings and Modern Results
By Rabbi Michael Lotker

Judaism has its own twist on the concept of charity. We call it *tzedakah*, a word which comes from the Hebrew word *tzedek*, meaning “justice.” The idea is a simple yet unique one; in Jewish thought the money that you give for *tzedakah* wasn’t really yours in the first place. It was a portion of the resources that God has provided to you knowing that you would do God’s work in the world in ensuring that the funds reached their rightful ends. The classical ideal is that we give 10% of our wealth and income to *tzedakah*. In practice, much of these funds find their ways to good causes through taxes and other gifts – only a portion flows through the Temple. Withholding funds from *tzedakah* is then not an act of selfishness but an act of injustice.

Some time ago, your President Lew Stone and I sent out an emergency appeal for funds. I am proud and honored and humbled to report that as of this moment, we have received almost \$31,000 in response – about a third of which came from non-members who are friends and supporters of your Temple. This should safely see us through the current fiscal year. A list of contributors is provided in this Megillah.

You may be interested to know that the 13th century sage, Maimonides, wrote about the different degrees of *tzedakah*. Here are his words (as cited on page 45 of our prayerbooks):

“There are eight degrees in the giving of *tzedakah*, each one higher than the one before:

1. to give grudgingly, reluctantly, or with regret;
2. to give less than one should, but with grace;
3. to give what one should, but only after being asked;
4. to give before one is asked;
5. to give without knowing who will receive it, although the recipient knows the identity of the giver;
6. to give without making known one’s identity;
7. to give so that neither giver nor receiver knows the identity of the other;
8. to help another to become self-supporting, by means of a gift, a loan, or by finding employment for the one in need.”

So, on behalf of our entire Temple community, I want to thank you for your *tzedakah*. In giving this gift, you will be helping many people in our community – you don’t know precisely whom (#5) and the recipients won’t know from whom their specific help comes (#7). Furthermore, your *tzedakah* means that the entire Temple staff (Katie and I) and our teachers and others will continue to be gainfully employed (#8).

Thanks again for all you do!