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When You Give to the Needy, Do Not Do It to be Honored by Others

Matthew 6: 1-4

When you give to the needy, do not do it to be honored by others DIG: How had the Pharisees and the Torah-teachers given? How did they corrupt the discipline of giving to the needy? Why and where did the Israelites give? What were the shofars or trumpets? What did the rabbis teach about giving to the needy?

REFLECT: What spiritual disciplines do you value? In what way could they be misused to impress others? When have you given in to that temptation? Why? As you look over the seven principles of biblical giving, which one do you have the best grasp of? Which one do you need to work on the most? What does the Holy Spirit say the result of our appropriate giving to the needy with the right motives will be?

In His seventh example of true righteousness, our Lord teaches how humility in giving differed from that of the Pharisees and the Torah-teachers. Since much of Yeshua's interpretation of the Torah deals with the need for righteousness, it is fitting that He now addresses specific acts of **charity**. The Hebrew concept of **tzedakah**, or **charitable giving** (often seen as a moral obligation), is so important to Judaism that **the rabbis teach that alms obtain the world to come**, or, in other words, **they** believe that giving to **the needy** will guarantee your salvation (**Tractate Rosh Hashanah 4.1**).

During the High Holy Days, Jews seek repentance, prayer and **charity** to avert any judgment. The rabbis often discussed different options for fulfilling this commandment. In fact, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1200 AD), one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages, **compiled a list of ten levels of charitable giving, ranging from helping one's own family to making an anonymous contribution to a community fund.** The rabbis teach that every Jew is to fulfill the mitzvah of **tzedakah**, with even the poor donating to a cause (**Rambam Mishnah Torah, Gifts to the Poor**).⁵⁴⁸

Many of **the Pharisees and Torah-teachers** attracted a lot of attention to **themselves**

when **they** gave alms in the Court of the Women.



This inner area of the Temple compound was not named because only women could go there. Certainly, it was the common place for worship for all. **According to Jewish tradition, the women stood on a raised gallery along three sides of the court.** It covered a space of about 200 feet square. All around ran a simple porch 60 feet square, and within it, along the wall were positioned **thirteen offering boxes** (*shopharoth*) called **the Treasury**. **These chests were called shofars or trumpets in the Talmud because they were narrow at the top and wide at the bottom and resembled a ram's horn (Tractate Shekalim 6.1).**

Each **trumpet** was specifically marked. Eight were the receipt of what was legally due by worshipers, the other five, however, were strictly for voluntary gifts for **the needy**.

When a **Pharisee** was going to give a major donation, **he** would do it with such fanfare that everyone could see what a large amount of money **he** had put into the Temple **treasury** for **the needy**. Instead of going up reverently and dropping **his** coins in the appropriate **shofar**, **he** would parade up with much fanfare and pray long and loud (making sure everyone saw and heard **him**) before depositing **his** money. Quite a spectacle.

Charity is obviously a very positive action, yet **Jesus** urges **His** listeners to look deeply into their motive for giving. **Be careful not to parade your acts of tzedakah in front of people in order to be seen by them (Matthew 6:1a)!** One winter night composer Johann Sebastian Bach was scheduled to debut a new composition. He arrived at the church expecting it to be full. Instead, he learned that no one had come. No one. However, without missing a beat, Bach told his musicians that they would still perform as planned. They took

their seats, Bach raised his baton, and soon the church was filled with magnificent music.

It made me think. Would I write if **God** were my only audience? Would I have the same energy and devotion? How would my writing be any different?

New writers are often advised to visualize one person they are writing to as a means of staying focused. I do this when I write my commentaries. I visualize a person sitting in front of their computer in the middle of nowhere with no Bible. I answer the questions I think they would ask me and try to help them find **the Lord** or help in their walk with **Him**.

I doubt that David, son of Jesse, whose psalms we turn to for comfort and encouragement, had “readers” in mind. The only audience he had in mind was **ADONAI**.

Whatever our **tzedakah** are, we should keep in mind that they’re really between **God** and us. Whether or not anyone else sees does not matter. We serve an audience of One.⁵⁴⁹

Christ said that if you **parade your acts of tzedakah in front of people in order to be seen by them . . . you will have no reward from your Father in heaven (Matthew 6:1b)**. Those **people’s** only reward will be the recognition and applause from the **hypocrites** and the ignorant. **The LORD** does not reward those who only seek to please **hypocrites**, because **they** rob **Him** of **His** glory. It is important to point out that **Messiah’s** use of **Father** here, has the same meaning as in **Matthew 5:16** as **Israel’s Father (Isaiah 63:16)**, not in the New Covenant sense of personal relationship by salvation (**Mattityahu 6:9**). The reference to **ADONAI’s** living **in heaven** separates the eternal character of divine **reward** from the temporary, shallow praise that **hypocrites** receive from others.

Yeshua warns against flaunting our giving in public. **So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets**. Our **Lord** does not introduce this teaching with *if* but **when**, indicating it is something that **He** expects us to do. To **give to the needy** refers to actual giving, not good intentions or warm feelings of pity that never flesh itself out to something substantive. Good intentions don’t fill a child’s empty stomach. When done in the right spirit it’s not only advisable but also obligatory for believers.

But, pharisaic Judaism had carried giving **to the needy** to ridiculous extremes. In the Jewish apocryphal books we read: **It is better to give to charity than to lay up gold. For charity will save a man from death; it will expiate (compensate for) any sin (Tobit 12:8)**. And in addition: **As water will quench a flaming fire, so charity will atone (pay for) for sin (The Wisdom of Sirach 3:30)**. As a result, many Israelites felt that salvation was much easier for the rich, because they could buy their way into heaven by giving **to the**

needy. The same unbiblical approach can be seen in traditional Roman Catholic dogma. Pope Leo the Great declared, "By prayer we seek to appease God, by fasting we extinguish the lust of the flesh, and by giving **to the needy** we pay for our sins."

Again **the Lord** uses hyperbole in **His** description. Some have mistakenly portrayed this scene as **the Pharisees** using literal "trumpets" to announce **their** charitable giving. On the contrary, there is no evidence from history or archaeology that a literal trumpet or other instrument was used by Jews to announce their giving in the Court of the Women. This is merely a figure of speech used by **Yeshua** to describe the attention **in the synagogues and in the streets** that many wealthy **hypocrites**, not just **Pharisees** and **Torah-teachers**, purposely attracted to **themselves** when **they** presented **their alms**.

As the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. When **He** said: **Don't announce it with trumpets**, **He** meant, "Don't make a big deal about it." **Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full (Matthew 6:2).** This reward in full is a technical expression used at the completion of a commercial transaction, and carried the idea of something being paid in full. Nothing more was owed and would be paid. Those who give for the purpose of impressing others with **their** generosity and spirituality will receive no other reward from **God**. **He** owes **them** nothing.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. This was possibly a proverbial expression that simply meant doing a normal activity with no special effort. **The right hand** was considered the primary **hand** of action, and in a regular day's work **the right hand** would do many things that would not involve **the left hand**. The point here is that **giving to the needy** should be a normal activity for believers, done with no special effort and done as discreetly as possible **so that your giving may be in secret (Mt 6:3-4a)**. There was a special chamber within **the Treasury** in the Court of the Women that was called "the chamber of the silent." There, devout **people** could give **their** money **in secret**, afterwards used for educating children and assistance for **the needy**. But "the chamber of the silent" was also for those **needy** who were embarrassed that **they** needed assistance and **they** could also go there to get help **in secret**.⁵⁵⁰

This has often been interpreted to mean that all **acts of tzedakah** are to be done in absolute **secrecy**. Believers, however, are not supposed to **put their light under a bowl**. **Instead** we **put it on its stand, and it will give light to everyone in the house (Matthew 5:15)**. The TaNaKh describes giving as part of **the LORD's** cycle of blessing. A

generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed (Proverbs 11:25). As we give, Ha'Shem blesses, and when He blesses us we **give** again out of what He has **given**. You are to observe the festival of Shavu'ot for ADONAI your God with a voluntary offering, which you are to give in accordance with the degree to which ADONAI your God has prospered you (Deuteronomy 16:10 CJB). We are to give freely out of what **the LORD** has given freely. The cycle applies not only to material giving but also to every form of giving that is done sincerely to honor YHVH and to meet a need. The way of **God's** people has always been the way of **giving**. **To guide us, the Bible teaches seven principles of scriptural giving.**

First, giving from the heart is investing with God. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use it, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38). Paul reiterated **Christ's** words when he wrote to the believers at Corinth, saying: **Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously (Second Corinthians 9:6).**

Second, genuine giving is to be sacrificial. David refused to give to ADONAI that which cost him **nothing**. He insisted **on paying for the threshing floor** on which to **build an altar to the LORD (Second Samuel 24:18-24)**. Generosity is not measured by the size of **the gift** itself, but, by its size in comparison to what is possessed. **The widow** who put **two very small copper coins into the treasury gave more than all the others** who **gave** large sums because **they all gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything she had to live on (Mark 12:42-44; Luke 21:2-4).**

Third, responsibility for giving has no relationship to how much the person has. People who are not generous when they are poor will not be generous when they are rich. They might give a larger amount, but they will not give a larger proportion. **Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much (Luke 16:10).** It is especially important to teach younger children to give generously to ADONAI with whatever small amounts of money they receive, because the attitudes and patterns they set as children are likely to carry over into adulthood. **God** doesn't need your money, but, **He** wants your heart.

Fourth, material giving correlates to spiritual blessing. To those who are not faithful with mundane things such as money and other possessions, **Messiah** will not entrust things that are of far greater value. **So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy**

with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own (Lk 16:11-12).

Fifth, giving is to be personally determined. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (Second Corinthians 9:7). Righteous **giving** is done from a righteous and generous heart, not from legalistic percentages of quotas. The Macedonian believers **gave** abundantly out of **their** deep financial poverty because **spiritually they** were rich in love (Second Corinthians 8:1-2). **The Philippian** believers gave out of the spontaneous generosity of **their** hearts, not because **they** felt compelled to do so (Philippians 4:15-18).

Sixth, we are to give in response to need. The early Messianic community in Jerusalem **gave their** resources without hesitation. Many of **their** fellow believers had become destitute when **they** trusted in **Meshiach** and were ostracized from **their** families and lost employment because of **their** faith. Years later Paul collected money from the Galatian churches to help meet the great needs that continued to exist among the righteous of the TaNaKh in Yerushalayim and that had been intensified by famine.

There have always been charlatans who manufacture needs and play on the sympathy of others. And there have always been professional beggars, who are able to work but would rather not. A believer in **Yeshua** has no responsibility to support such people and should take reasonable care to determine if and when real need exists before giving money. Believers with the gift of discernment are especially helpful in this regard. **The one who is unwilling to work, Rabbi Sha'ul said: shall not eat (Second Thessalonians 3:10).** Encouraging laziness weakens the character of the one who is lazy and also wastes **God's** money.

Seventh, giving demonstrates love, not man made commandments. The New Covenant contains no commands for specified amounts or percentages of giving. We need to support those who feed us spiritually (Mt 10:5-11; Luke 9:1-5; 1 Tim 5:17-18), but, after that the percentage we give will be determined by the love of our own hearts and the needs of others. Under grace, believers are free from the demands of the Torah.

All of these **seven principles in scriptural giving** point to the obligation to **give** generously because we are investing in **the Lord's** work, because we are willing to sacrifice for **Him** who sacrificed **Himself** for us, because it has no bearing on how much we have, because we want spiritual riches more than financial riches, because we have personally determined to **give**, because we want to meet as much need as we can, and because our love compels us to **give**. As in every area of our righteousness, the key is the heart, the inner attitude that should motivate what we say and do.

Ha'Shem does not need our gifts, because **He** is entirely self-sufficient. The need is on our part. Rabbi Sha'ul to the messianic congregation at Philippi: **I am not seeking the gift; rather, I am looking for what will increase the credit of balance in your spiritual account (Phil 4:17 CJB).** **When we give to the needy . . . then our Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward us (Mt 6:4b).** The principle is this: if we remember, **God** will forget; but we forget, **God** will remember. Our purpose should be to meet every need we are able to meet and leave the bookkeeping to **ADONAI**, realizing that **we have only done what was our duty (Lk 17:10).**

The urge to misbehave and the desire to be anonymous always visit me together. Like partners making a sales call, they do their best to convince me that I can afford to do something wrong because I won't have to pay.

Human nature tells us to use the cover of anonymity to avoid taking the blame for the bad things we do. **God**, however, tells us something else. **He** wants us to use anonymity to avoid taking the blame for the **good** that we do. Why is that the urge to remain anonymous seldom accompanies my desire to do **good**?

Yeshua says **do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.** In other words, within the body of **Christ** our **deeds** of charity should be done without calling attention to ourselves. This does not mean, however, that **ADONAI** wants **good deeds** to remain hidden; it just means that they should be done in a way that makes a **good** name for **God**, not ourselves.

When we volunteer our services, use our spiritual gifts, tithe, or make donations to churches, messianic synagogues and organizations that do **good deeds** in the name of **the Master**, we receive something much greater than honor from our peers. We receive rewards from **the LORD**, and **He** receives **glory** from others. So, we should **live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us (First Peter 2:12).**⁵⁵¹