

Mishneh Torah¹
Sefer Zeraim — Matnot Aniyim
Chapter 10
By Maimonides

Halacha 7 There are eight levels in charity, each level surpassing the other. The highest level beyond which there is none is a person who supports a Jew who has fallen into poverty [by] giving him a present or a loan, entering into partnership with him,¹ or finding him work so that his hand will be fortified so that he will not have to ask others [for alms].² Concerning this [Leviticus 25:35] states: “You shall support him, the stranger, the resident, and he shall live among you.” Implied is that you should support him before he falls and becomes needy.

Halacha 8 A lower [level] than this is one who gives charity to the poor without knowing to whom he gave and without the poor person knowing from whom he received. For this is an observance of the mitzvah for its sake alone.³ This [type of giving was] exemplified by the secret chamber that existed in the Temple. The righteous would make donations there in secret and poor people of distinguished lineage would derive their livelihood from it in secret.

A level close to this is giving to a charity fund.⁴ A person should not give to a charity fund unless he knows that the person managing it is faithful, wise, and capable of administering it in a proper manner as Rebbe Chananya ben Tradyon was.⁵

Halacha 9 A lower level than that is an instance when the giver knows to whom he is giving, but the poor person does not know from whom he received. An example of this were the great Sages who would go in secret and throw money into the doorways of the poor.⁶ This

¹The *Siftei Cohen* 249:7 states that this is the most preferable way of helping a person.

²Before the person has fallen into poverty, his financial position is still viable. Hopefully, with a little bit of assistance, he can rectify his situation and return to prosperity. In that vein, the *Sifra* (*Behar*, sec. v) compares it to a person supporting a colleague who is stumbling. Before he falls, one person can hold him up. Once he falls, even five people cannot raise him. Moreover, if a person is given gifts in this way, his self-esteem is not impaired and he does not develop a negative self-image.

³I.e., since neither the donor nor the recipient knows the other’s identity, there can be no ulterior motive involved.

⁴For in this instance, as well, the person does not know to whom his donation is being given and the recipient does not know who made the donation.

⁵*Avodah Zarah* 17b gives an example of Rabbi Chananya’s faithfulness. He was collecting both for the ordinary charity fund and for the special charity fund for Purim and the money from the two collections became mixed together. To make sure that the poor were not short-changed, he compensated for any possible discrepancy from his own funds. *Tosafot, Bava Batra* 10b, states that we do not expect every charity collector to be as righteous as Rabbi Chananya ben Tradyon, but we do expect that he approximate his faithfulness.

⁶*Ketubot* 67b relates that Mar Ukva would throw a certain amount of money under a poor neighbor’s doorstep every day. One day, the poor man desired to see who his benefactor was and when he saw the money, he ran out to the street. Mar Ukva saw him coming and fled, to avoid detection, he entered an oven which though still hot, no longer had fire. When asked to explain his behavior, he said: “It is preferable for a person to cast himself into an oven than to embarrass a colleague in public.”

is a worthy way of giving charity and it is a good quality [to express] if the trustees of the charitable fund are not conducting themselves appropriately.⁷

Halacha 10 A lower level than that is an instance when the poor person knows from whom he took, but the donor does not know to whom he gave. An example of this were the great Sages who would bundle coins in a sheet and hang them over their shoulders and the poor would come and take them so that they would not be embarrassed.⁸

Halacha 11 A lower level than that is giving [the poor person] in his hand before he asks.⁹

Halacha 12 A lower level than that is giving him after he asks.

Halacha 13 A lower level than this is giving him less than what is appropriate, but with a pleasant countenance.

Halacha 14 A lower level than that is giving him with sadness.

Notes

¹http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/986711/jewish/Chapter-10.htm

⁷In such an instance, it would not be desirable for a person to distribute his charity himself rather than give it to the charitable fund.

⁸*Ketubot, loc. cit.*, relates that Rabbi Abba would conduct himself in this manner.

⁹In this way, at least the poor person is not humbled by having to ask for the alms.