

Tzedakah drash

Yom kippur: sept.23, 2015

Before I start my Drash , I'd like to again welcome everyone to our CBT Yom Kippur Mincha and Neila services, and wish that everyone be inscribed in the book of life.

CBT, as a small congregation, 'thrives due to the volunteer efforts of its members. I'd like to thank those of you who during the course of the year contribute their time; their skills and their resources to help sustain our small congregation: including those who serve on the board; those who come weekly to clean the synagogue; Burleigh Cubert who power washed the building and the parking lot; those who serve on the kitchen committee; those who lead services and read the Torah; Penny Wilson and Dave Pierick who prepare the monthly CBT NU'Z; Rabbi Jaron Matlow who maintains the website; Jon Auster who serves as our financial manager; and everyone else who assists in addressing the needs of CBT.

Now, turning to the Drash; Today, I would like to share some thoughts regarding the concept of tzedakah. From a religious perspective, the Talmud states (Bava Batra 96) states that "Tzedakah is equal to all other commandments combined", and in fact along with Teshuvah and Tefillah is one of the three ways to alleviate the decree on the High Holy Days.

So what is this thing called Tzedakah?

To most secular Jews, and even many observant ones, the term Tzedakah is often solely associated with acts of charity. Those of my generation fondly recall the blue and white

Jewish national fund box (the Pushke) perched on the window sill in which spare change was deposited to help the fledgling country of Israel from a very early age Jewish children were hardwired to contribute a portion of their allowances to charity as they observed their parents doing likewise. Jews are mandated in the Torah (Deuteronomy 26:12) to tithe for the support of the leviim and the needy. In Maimonides Mishnah Torah it was specified after the temple was destroyed that Jews were to donate 10% of their annual income as Tzedakah for the support of the needy. In the Jewish religion, everyone regardless of their income is to give Tzedakah. Tzedakah need not be in the form of money or material contributions, but could also be volunteer actions to assist the needy, nonprofit entities or even in the form of governmental service.

Historically, Jews have been known for their generosity. An amazing statistic to me was is that while Jews constitute only 2.2 percent of the U.S. Population, 16 of the 50 top U.S. Philanthropists are Jewish.

As many of you are aware, Tzedakah does not mean solely acts of charity. The word literally means justice or righteousness, and is often used in the context of ethical behaviors. In Deuteronomy (16:10) we are intoned “justice, justice, you shall pursue”.

In looking at Tzedakah, we can distinguish between actions and behaviors. The action is that of almost mindlessly complying with the requirement of contributing a mandated percentage of one's income to various charitable causes. It is an act that is required, similarly to paying one's taxes or licensing a car. One does it because one has to! As an aside, it seems that at this time of the year, we Jews are literally inundated with solicitations from numerous Jewish and secular organizations, many of which we may not even be familiar with. It seems the word is out that prior to the holidays, Jews try to catch

up with their charitable contributions, and perhaps deluding themselves into believing that they can “buy their way” into being inscribed in the book of life.

On the other hand, a behavior is an action that is hard-wired into our brain, that on certain occasions, causes us to act because we feel in our heart the desire to do so. That’s to say, we voluntarily contribute out of a desire to share our bounty for the benefit of others. This to me is the higher form of Tzedakah, because we as individuals have made a conscious decision to do so and not because we are required. To me, this is true Tzedakah.

If charity were the only form of Tzedakah, i could stop now; thank you for your attention and sit down. However Tzedakah has at least two other forms.

First, there is what i call acts of loving kindness; such as voluntarily caring for the sick and needy; attending to the maintenance of the synagogue; helping the less fortunate attending to their needs; the tutoring of underachieving students; or even attending services to help make a minyan. Many, many of us at Cbt perform these services because of the commitment to the CBT community. Volunteerism recognizes that we may not be equally capable of providing financial support to charities but can find other ways of conveying tzedakah within one’s means.

The other form of Tzedakah, falls within the definition of Tikkun Olam, of making the world a better place. Examples might include: by working towards achievement of social justice; restoration of the environment; or even eradication of prejudices. As I’ve gotten older I’ve recognized that we all have *hang-ups*. I’ve periodically been reminded by Marjie of some of my more evident ones, and have tried with mixed success to address them. The

more introspective one becomes the easier it is to define and address those issues, especially when it impacts inter-personal behaviors.

In closing, from a religious perspective, Tzedakah is important and is a commandment. While it is not voluntary it is much more important that one engages in acts of Tzedakah because one wants to and not because one has to. One need not convey money. Many of us at CBT perform these services because of our dedication and skills.

Ultimately, we all want to perfect our behaviors, and engaging in acts of Tzedakah is one way to achieve that objective! We want to be noted as being a good person!