

Sukkot: Gimme Shelter

[fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, refugees, displaced people]

Rabbi Deborah J. Brin

"In winter 2011, being homeless in Albuquerque was not only difficult it was deadly. The city was entrenched in the freezing temperatures of a 100 year storm. In blizzard-like conditions, Mayor Richard J. Berry launched the Albuquerque Heading Home initiative with street outreach, done by hundreds of volunteers, to the City's most medically vulnerable and most likely to pass away on the streets. After incubating the initiative he handed it over to nonprofit, Heading Home to implement the program and continue the work.

Today, five years later, [2016] the Albuquerque Heading Home initiative has housed 610 individuals and their family members, saved millions of taxpayer dollars and is helping to end homelessness."

Heading Home is a 501 c³ that runs several initiatives- Albuquerque Heading Home, Vets Heading Home, Keeping Families Together and the Albuquerque Opportunity Center which includes a men's shelter, respite and Veteran transitional housing. Collectively these programs have transitioned more than 1,800 individuals and their family members into housing.

<http://www.abqheadinghome.org/news/>

"The word *tzedaka*, often translated as 'charity,' comes from the Hebrew root *tzedek*, meaning 'justice.' . . . *tzedaka* is an expression of justice rather than mercy; its purpose is to create a fairer distribution of resources." David Teutsch [A Guide to Jewish Practice](#)

"When a man says, 'Provide me with clothes,' he should be investigated (lest he be found to be a cheat); when he says, 'Feed me,' he should not be investigated [but fed immediately, lest he starve to death during the investigation]" (Babylonian Talmud Baba Bathra 9a).
Commentary: Give small amounts immediately so no one goes hungry.

"Charity is equal in importance to all the other commandments combined" (Babylonian Talmud Baba Bathra 9a).

"Rav Yermiyah said, 'The one who occupies himself with the needs of the public is as if he occupies himself with words of Torah.'" Yerushalmi Talmud Berachot 5:1; 53 A 3

"Rabbi Isaac said: One who gives a coin to a poor person is blessed with six blessings, and one who adds words of comfort is blessed with eleven blessings." (Babylonian Talmud Baba Bathra 9b).

"The merit of charity is so great that I am happy to give to one hundred beggars even if only one might actually be needy. Some people, however, act as if they are exempt from giving charity to one hundred beggars in the event that one might be a fraud". Chasidic rebbe, Chaim of Sanz (1793 to 1876, Poland).

"You shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your needy brother, but . . . lend him sufficient for his need." Deuteronomy 15:7

"If we do not help a person in trouble, it is as if we caused the trouble". Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav

Certain kinds of tzedakah are considered more meritorious than others. The Talmud describes these different levels of tzedakah, and organized them into a list. The levels of charity, from the least meritorious to the most meritorious, are:

1. Giving begrudgingly
2. Giving less than you should, but giving it cheerfully.
3. Giving after being asked
4. Giving before being asked
5. Giving when you do not know the recipient's identity, but the recipient knows your identity
6. Giving when you know the recipient's identity, but the recipient doesn't know your identity
7. Giving when neither party knows the other's identity
8. Enabling the recipient to become self-reliant

From Judaism 101 <http://www.jewfaq.org/tzedakah.htm>

“It is true that a giver could be deceived about a person’s need, but the moral violation would then be on the deceiver. And it is true that the recipient might misuse the money, but if the sum is small enough, this possible outcome is less damaging than the hardheartedness that can develop in the potential giver or the potential blow to the dignity of a needy recipient . . . Judaism has long recognized that dignity depends in part upon sufficient food, clothing and shelter, as well as upon honorable work.” David Teutsch [A Guide to Jewish Practice](#)

“Organizers who work with the homeless disagree about the best way to support beggars on the street. Many recommend providing a meal, rather than cash . . . Most beneficial would be a contribution to a local shelter and advocacy on behalf of affordable housing, in addition to a one-to-one relationship on the street”. Rabbi Barbara Penzner, quoted in David Teutsch [A Guide to Jewish Practice](#)

“Compassion fatigue has become a real problem, especially in cities where the need is so obvious and seemingly limitless. We end up making decisions about how much pocket change to carry and give out each day, or to give only to organizations that address systemic problems. What does it imply when we do not give to panhandlers? Is there a negative moral impact on the one who doesn’t give?” Rabbi Nina Mandel, quoted in David Teutsch [A Guide to Jewish Practice](#)

“A common practice for those committed to giving something to street solicitors (“panhandlers”) is to keep on hand a supply of gift certificates for fast-food restaurants or similar eateries. This reduces the possibility of well-intentioned cash donations being used for unworthy purposes.” Rabbi Richard Hirsh as quoted in David Teutsch [A Guide to Jewish Practice](#)

The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it’s indifference. And, the opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference. Because of indifference one dies before one actually dies. Elie Wiesel