

Between Maimonides and Jacob b. Asher on Charity:

Philosophical and Biographical Aspects

In the frontal lecture, we presented two different approaches by medieval scholars, Maimonides and Jacob Ben Asher (“Tur”) in encouraging their fellow Jews to be generous and charitable. Maimonides took a more philosophical approach, that the importance of the commandment, is that it contain an educational element for the giver, that is in addition to the actual assistance given to the recipient. For Maimonides charity is not only about helping the poor but also about transforming the recipient into a more generous, merciful, kind individual. On the handout we brought a number of sources from his philosophical work the Guide and from his commentary to the Mishnah (on Avot). In the class we taught the source from the commentary which makes clear just how important this element of educating the giver of charity was for Maimonides. Here he comments on a Mishna in Avot which emphasizes the repetition of acts and not their greatness “the great **number** of deeds” and not the “greatness of the deed”. He connects this to a psychological truth that **only repetitive acts have a chance to affect man’s character** (this is what he calls “a strong acquisition” which we would translate as “a lasting impact” on man’s character. Here are his words:

Rambam’s Commentary to Avot chapter 3:

And afterwards he said that the virtues do not come to a man according to the greatness of the deed, but rather according to **the great number of good deeds** - And this is that **indeed the virtues arrive by repetition of the good deeds many times**. And with this does a strong acquisition come - not when a man does one great deed from the good deeds; as from this alone, a strong acquisition will not come to him.

And the parable with this is that when a man gives a thousand gold coins at one time to one man to whom it is fitting and he does not give anything to another man; **the trait of generosity will not come into his hand with this great act, as [much as] it will come to one who donates a thousand gold pieces a thousand times and gives each one of them out of generosity**. [This is] because this one repeated the act of generosity a thousand times and a strong acquisition of it came to him [in this way]. But [the other] only aroused his soul with a great arousal towards a good act, and afterwards it ceased from him. **And so [too] with Torah**, the reward of the one who redeems one captive with a hundred dinar **or [gives] charity to a poor person with a hundred dinar which is enough for what he lacks is not like the one who redeems ten captives or fills the lack of ten poor people - each one with ten dinar. And in**

this comparison and this matter is that which he said, " in accordance to the majority of the deed" - and not in accordance to the greatness of the deed.

Please pay attention to his examples from redeeming captives and of giving charity – one can clearly see how important the impact on the donor is for Maimonides – and not just the assistance to the recipient. For Maimonides it is equally important that the donor be transformed into a more sensitive and generous personality.

In light of his approach it is not surprising that we find in his *Mishneh Torah* is an attempt to arouse the Jew's sympathy for his fellow Jew. The central passage is at the end of law 2

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor, Ch. 10 law 2.

All of Israel and all who are attached to them are like brothers as it says "Ye are the children of the LORD your God" **and if a brother will not have compassion for his brother, who will have compassion for him? And to whom will the poor of Israel lift their eyes? To the gentiles who hate them and pursue them?! Their eyes look only towards their brothers.**

It is also worth noting that this emphasis on the character traits is also found at the beginning of the law where he states "And anyone who is cruel and not merciful, is under suspicion [regarding] his lineage for cruelty is only found among the gentiles (pagans)".

In addition, see his opening of law 1 in this chapter "We are obligated to be careful about the commandment [to give] charity, more than any other positive commandment **for charity is a sign of the righteous, the seed of Avraham**, as it says"

Clearly for Maimonides it is not enough to simply give charity he wants that one should give with the proper feelings, of generosity and kindness. He seems to be using two tactics to arouse the Jews sympathy and spirit of generosity – one is to "shame" him or her by stating that whoever does not have these traits is suspected of not being a Jew, a descendant of Abraham but a pagan, an idol worshipper. The second is by painting a dramatic picture of the poor Jew who has nowhere to turn but to one of his brethren, his fellow Jew. He is here trying to arouse a spirit of sympathy and solidarity within the community. We shall return to this motif later at the end of the class.

In stark contrast to Maimonides, Jacob b. Asher seems mainly interested in getting the Jew to be generous – to do the act of charity. He knew Maimonides chapter in *Mishneh Torah* and borrowed from it liberally but the passage whose purpose is to arouse sympathy for the fellow Jew is noticeably absent from his long treatise. This approach of focusing completely upon the

bottom line seems to emerge from the Talmud where one can find various tactics being used to convince the Jew to be generous. This approach is nicely captured by a Talmudic statement:

Talmud Bava Batra 10b and other tractates: If one gives charity, saying: I give this sela for charity in order that my children may live, or: I give it in order that through it I may merit life in the World-to-Come, he is considered a full-fledged righteous person [i.e. relating to the giving of charity].

In other words, no matter the motivation – **it is the act of giving that is paramount, not the motivation behind the act!**

For Jacob one can see this approach in various arguments he presents – they are all focused upon the result - convincing the Jew of the utility of giving. Here are the main passages:

Tur, Yore Deah siman 247

[7] And man should consider in his heart that just as he always asks the Holy One, blessed be he, to bring him sustenance and as he asks the Holy One, blessed be he, to pay heed to his cries, so too, he [i.e. man] must pay heed to the cries of the poor....

In this passage – we see Jacob turning to the Jew – saying you are always asking God to give you wealth to pay heed to your cries ... so too u must listen to the cries of the poor as the poor are close to God and God listens to them

He then adds another pragmatic type of argument – it is worth your while to pay charitable due to the ever changing fortune of man – the wheel of fortune is constantly spinning

He should also consider in his heart that there is a wheel [of fortune] spinning in the world and at the end all men will get come to this fate [of poverty], and if it doesn't come to him, it will come to his son or grandson.

He then makes another argument, known as the “deposit theory” – remember your money is not actually yours its only a loan from God and if you don't follow God's will and use it also for the needs of the poor you cannot expect that you will retain your wealth:

[8.] A person should not ponder in his heart: “How can I squander my money by giving it to the poor?” He should remember that his money is not his, but rather, it is a deposit (*pikadon*) [of God] to do with it according to the will of the depositor, whose will is that he should distribute his money to the poor.

And finally, he makes his most powerful pitch – it is worth from a purely investment perspective to be generous – as one only gains wealth by giving charity and will not lose at all!

[9.] Moreover, it is a tried and tested fact that the giving charity will not lead to loss. On the contrary, it will increase his wealth and honor, as it is written (2 Chronicles 31): “From the bringing **of the offerings (*terumah*)** to the House of the Lord, he shall eat, be sated, and his plentitude shall abound, for the Lord has blessed his nation.”

It is also written (Malachi 3): “**Bring the entire tithe (*maaser*) to the warehouse** and it shall be a food store in my house. ‘**Test me regarding this’ said the Lord of Hosts, ‘if I will not open my heavenly attic and empty its boundless blessing upon you’.**” The Sages said that it is forbidden to test the Lord other than in this, as written: “Test me regarding this”.

This emphasis on the utility of charity is very different than the approach of Maimonides. What makes this even more striking is that as we noted above Jacob in his treatment completely ignores the approach of Maimonides which attempts to arouse the feelings of sympathy and generosity within the soul of the Jew.

We have seen here two very different approaches – that of the philosopher Maimonides and that of the Talmudist Jacob b. Asher. For Maimonides it was not enough to give – one had to give in a proper way, a way that would affect the character of the person, so that he would become a more generous and sensitive personality. Jacob however was quite happy if the Jew gave charity, the **end result – that was enough for him**. He therefore utilized every possible argument to convince the Jew to give.

In the second half of the class I focused upon some biographic details of these two scholars and how it may have impacted upon their treatment of charity.

It is well-known that Maimonides did not have it easy growing up. While still a youngster the Almohads invaded Spain and made life unbearable for all non-Muslims. Jews had to choose

between converting, expulsion or death. It is unclear how long the family remained in Spain but at some point they migrated to North Africa. In North Africa they did not have it easy either as the country was ruled by the same people who invaded Spain (they may have thought that things were more easy-going there) and there as well they had to hide their Judaism from the authorities. With time they packed their bags again this time towards the Land of Israel and finally to Egypt – where they found some peace and quiet. Maimonides refers to this unsettling life that he had experienced until his early 20's in two places in his writings.

In his Epilogue to Commentary to Mishneh (c. 1168) he writes:

In addition, I was **agitated by the distress of our time, the exile which God had decreed upon us, the fact that we are being driven from one end of the world to the other....** God knows there are some laws which I explained while on the road, others that I collected while on board a ship.

And in Hebrew Prologue to Epistle to Yemen (1172) he writes:

Verily, I am one of the lowliest of the scholars **from Spain whose crown (or glory) was lowered in exile.** Although I always study the ordinances [of the Lord] (literally: I am studiously on guard), I did not attain to the learning of my forbearers, **for evil days and hardships overtook us; we did not abide in tranquility, we labored and had no rest. How could we clarify the law, when we were being exiled from city to city and from country to country....**only recently I found a home

I would like to suggest that these traumatic travels and travails were at least partially behind his formulation that we saw above from the laws of charity: “and if a brother will not have compassion for his brother, who will have compassion for him? And to whom will the poor of Israel lift their eyes? **To the gentiles who hate them and pursue them?! Their eyes look only towards their brothers.**” These lines were written by a person who experienced exactly what he was writing about – gentiles pursuing him and no one to turn to besides his fellow Jews. Regarding Jacob b. Asher, he also travelled around, from Germany to Spain, but what I believe to be more pertinent was his economic well-being in his new home of Spain. It would seem from one passage in his work that if not being actually poor he was not self-sufficient and needed to be supported. We learn this from a question he asked his father regarding his obligation to eat the third-meal of Shabbat. According to the law a pauper is exempt from this

meal as the Talmud states better to make your shabbat like a weekday (i.e. eat only 2 meals and not 3) and not have to ask for assistance from your fellow man. Here is the source:

Tur Orah Hayim (way of life) siman 242

And there were a number of times that I discussed this matter with my lord my father [i.e. the famous scholar Rosh], [someone] **like myself today that I have only very little of my own, not enough to subsist, and I need [the assistance of] others – am I included within the category of those [for whom it says] “better make your Shabbat like a weekday (i.e. to eat two meals and not three) or not.** And he [i.e. the Rosh] did not give me a clear-cut response.

It would seem clear that he was not exactly financially independent. With this in mind we can argue that he understood, better than most other scholars, the mind-set of the poor. What he understood is that the poor person is willing to forgive all lack of sensitivity or common manners just as long as he/she can bring back bread to the home and feed the children. With such an attitude we can better understand his “non-ideal” approach towards convincing the Jew to give. He utilizes all possible arguments in order to motivate the Jew to give, including an emphasis on the utility of the act for the giver, the profit that he will receive in this world if he gives charity.

Summary Questions:

What did we learn from Maimonides commentary to a Mishnah in Avot?

How did we explain Maimonides overall approach to encouraging Jews to give charity in his Mishneh Torah?

What was Maimonides main goal in writing about how to encourage Jews to give?

What were Maimonides tactics in getting the Jew to be generous as found in his Mishneh Torah?

How does Maimonides try to “shame” the Jew into being a generous person?

How does Maimonides try to arouse the emotion of sympathy and solidarity in the Jew?

What was Jacob b. Asher main goal in writing about how to encourage Jews to give?

What were Jacob b. Asher tactics in getting the Jew to be generous as found in his work Tur Yore Deah?

What early source did we bring as the inspiration for Jacob b. Asher’s approach to charity?

What did we derive from Talmud Bava Batra (and other tractates) in explaining the approach of Jacob b. Asher?

What is the “deposit theory”?

What does Jacob b. Asher learn from offerings (*terumah*) and tithing (maaser)?

What did we learn from Maimonides personal biography that helps us understand his approach to charity?

What did we learn from Jacob b. Asher’s personal biography that helps us understand his approach to charity?

Why did we bring in the law of “better make your Shabbat like a weekday” and not have to ask for assistance from your fellow man?

For what purpose did we bring from Maimonides Hebrew Prologue to Epistle to Yemen?

Between Maimonides and R. Jacob ben ha-Rosh (Tur): Two Approaches to the Mitzvah of Charity

A. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor, Ch. 10

א. חִבְּיֵין אֲנוּ לְהִזְהֵר בְּמִצְוַת צְדָקָה יוֹתֵר מִכָּל מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה. שֶׁהַצְּדָקָה סִימָן לַצְּדִיק וְרַע אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר כִּי יִדְעִיתִי לִמְעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְנֶה אֶת בְּנָיו לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה. וְאִין כָּסֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתְכַּוֵּן וְדַת הָאֱמֶת עוֹמֶדֶת אֵלָּא בַּצְּדָקָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בַּצְּדָקָה תִּכּוֹנְנִי. וְאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל נִגְאָלִין אֵלָּא בַּצְּדָקָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר צִיּוֹן בְּמִשְׁפָּט תִּפְדֶּה וְשִׁבְיָהּ בַּצְּדָקָה

1. We are obligated to be careful about the commandment [to give] charity, more than any other positive commandment for charity is a sign of the righteous, the seed of Avraham, as it says "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness..." And the seat of Israel is not established nor is the True Faith preserved except through charity as it says "In righteousness shalt thou be established" nor shall Israel be redeemed except through charity as it says "Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they that return of her with righteousness."

ב. לְעוֹלָם אִין אָדָם מַעֲנִי מִן הַצְּדָקָה וְאִין דְּבָר רַע וְלֹא הִזָּק נִגְלַל בְּשִׁבְלֵי הַצְּדָקָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְהָיָה מַעֲשֵׂה הַצְּדָקָה שְׁלוֹם. כָּל הַמְּרַחֵם מְרַחֵמִין עָלָיו שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְנָתַן לָהּ רַחֲמִים וְרַחֲמָהּ וְהַרְבָּה. וְכָל מִי שֶׁהוּא אֲכֻזָּרִי וְאִינוּ מְרַחֵם יֵשׁ לְחוּשׁ לִיחֻסוֹ. שְׂאִין הָאֲכֻזָּרִיּוֹת מִצִּיּוֹנָה אֵלָּא בְּגוֹיִים (בְּעַכְפּוֹ"ם) שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אֲכֻזָּרִי הִמָּה וְלֹא יִרְחַמוּ. וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַגִּלּוֹנָה אֵלֵיהֶם פֹּאחִים הֵם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בָּנִים אַתֶּם לָהּ אֲלֵהֵיכֶם וְאִם לֹא יִרְחַם הָאִשׁ עַל הָאִשׁ מִי יִרְחַם עָלָיו. וְלִמִּי עֲנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹשָׁאִין עֵינֵיהֶן. הַלְּגוֹיִים (הַלְּעַכְפּוֹ"ם) שֶׁשׁוֹנְאִין אוֹתָן וְרוֹדְפִים אַחֲרֵיהֶן. הֵא אִין עֵינֵיהֶן תְּלוּיּוֹת אֵלָּא לְאַחֲרֵיהֶן :

2. A person is never impoverished through charity and no bad thing nor any damage is caused by charity as it says "And the work of righteousness shall be peace." Anyone who is merciful, [God is] merciful towards them as it says "and give thee mercy, and have compassion on thee and increase thee." And anyone who is cruel and not merciful, is under suspicion [regarding] his lineage for cruelty is only found among the gentiles (pagans) as it says "they are cruel, and have no compassion." All of Israel and all who are attached to them are like brothers as it says "Ye are the children of the LORD your God" and if a brother will not have compassion for his brother, who will have compassion for him? And to whom will the poor of Israel lift their eyes? To the gentiles who hate them and pursue them?! Their eyes look only towards their brothers.

ג. כָּל הַמַּעֲלִים עֵינָיו מִן הַצְּדָקָה הָרִי זֶה נִקְרָא בְּלִיעֵל כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּקְרָא עוֹבֵד עַבּוּדָה זָרָה (עַכְפּוֹ"ם) בְּלִיעֵל. וּבַעֲבֻדָה זָרָה (וּבְעַכְפּוֹ"ם) הוּא אוֹמֵר יֵצְאוּ אֲנִשִּׁים בְּנֵי בְּלִיעֵל, וּבְמַעֲלִים עֵינָיו מִן הַצְּדָקָה הוּא אוֹמֵר הַשְׁמֵר לָהּ פֶּן יִהְיֶה דְּבָר עִם לְבָבָהּ בְּלִיעֵל. וְנִקְרָא רָשָׁע שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְרַחֲמֵי רָשָׁעִים אֲכֻזָּרִי. וְנִקְרָא חוֹטֵא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְקָרָא עָלֶיהָ אֵל ה' וְהָיָה בָּהּ חֶטָּא. וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא קְרוֹב לְשׁוֹנֵעַת עֲנִיִּים שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר שׁוֹנֵעַת עֲנִיִּים אַתָּה תִּשְׁמַע. לְפִיכָּה צָרִיד לְהִזְהֵר בַּצְּעָקָתָם שֶׁהָרִי בְּרִית כְּרוּתָהּ לָהֶם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְהָיָה כִּי יִצְעַק אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי חֲנוּן אֲנִי

3. Anyone who ignores [the chance to give] charity is called a barbarian just like an idolater (pagan) is called a barbarian. Regarding idolaters (pagans), it says "Certain barbarians are gone out etc." and regarding one who ignores [the chance to give] charity it says "Beware there not be a barbaric thought in your heart etc." and is called "evil" as it says "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." And he is called a "sinner" as it says "and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin in thee." And God is close to the pleas of the poor as it says "thou hearest the pleas of the poor." Therefore one must be wary of [making them] cry out for they have a deal cut with them [and God] as it says "and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious."

ד. כָּל הַנוֹתֵן צְדָקָה לְעִנִּי בְּסִבָּר פָּנִים רַעוֹת וּפְנֵיו כְּבוֹשׁוֹת בְּקִרְקַע אֲפָלוּ נֶתַן לוֹ אֶלָּף זָהוּבִים אֲבָד זְכוּתוֹ וְהִפְסִידָהּ. אֵלָּא נוֹתֵן לוֹ בְּסִבָּר פָּנִים יְפוֹת וּבְשִׁמְחָה וּמִתְאוֹנֵן עִמּוֹ עַל צָרָתוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר אִם לֹא כִּיתִי לְקִשָּׁה יוֹם עֲגָמָה נִפְשִׁי לְאַבְדּוֹן. וּמִדְּבָר לוֹ דְּבָרֵי תַחֲנוּנִים וְנַחֲמִים שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְלֵב אֶלְמָנָה אֲרֹנָן

4. One who gives charity to a poor person with bad grace, and his face in the ground (i.e. with a bad attitude) , even if he gave a thousand gold pieces he has destroyed his merit and lost it, rather [we must] give with a cheerful expression and gladly, and commiserate with him about his troubles as

it says "If I have not wept for him that was in trouble, and if my soul grieved not for the needy" and speak gracious and comforting words to him as it says "and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy."

2. טור יורה דעה סימן רמז

[א.] מצות עשה ליתן צדקה כפי השגת ידו ומאד מאד צריך אדם לזוהר בה יותר מכל מצות עשה כי איפשר שיבא לידי שפיכות דמים שימות העני המבקש אם לא יתן לו מיד כההוא עובדא דבן זומא.

[ב.] וכמה פעמים נצטוונו בה בעשה ועוד יש לא תעשה למעלים עיניו ממנה שנא' (דברים טו) לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפוץ את ירך מאחריך האביון וכל המעלים עיניו ממנה נקרא בליעל וכאילו עובד ע"ז וכל הזהיר בה מעידה עליו כי הוא זרע ברכ' ה' דכתיב למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו לעשות צדקה ומשפט.

[ג.] ואין כסא ישראל מתכונן ודת האמת עומדת אלא בצדקה שנא' (ישעיה נד) בצדקה תכונני ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בצדקה שנאמר ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה בצדקה ואומר שמרו משפט ועשו צדקה כי קרובה ישועתי לבא וצדקתי להגלות.

[ד.] וגדולה מכל הקרבנות דאמר ר' אלעזר גדולה צדקה [יותר] מכל הקרבנות דכתיב עשה צדקה ומשפט נבחר לה' מזבח.

[ה.] ואמר ר' אלעזר כל העושה צדקה ומשפט כאילו מלאו לכל העולם חסד שנאמר אוהב צדקה ומשפט חסד ה' מלאה הארץ.

[ו.] ולעולם אין אדם מעני מן הצדקה ולא דבר רע ולא היזק מתגולל על ידה שנאמר והיה מעשה הצדקה שלום וכל המרחם על עניים הקב"ה מרחם עליו.

[6.] A person is never impoverished through charity and no bad thing nor any damage is caused through it as it says "And the work of righteousness shall be peace." Anyone who is merciful on the poor, [God is] merciful towards them

B. Tur, Yore Deah siman 247

[א.] מצות עשה ליתן צדקה כפי השגת ידו ומאד מאד צריך אדם לזוהר בה יותר מכל מצות עשה כי איפשר שיבא לידי שפיכות דמים, שימות העני המבקש אם לא יתן לו מיד כההוא עובדא דבן זומא.

1. It is a positive commandment to give charity according to one's ability, **and one must be exceedingly careful to fulfill it much more than any other positive commandment, because it [i.e. lack of its fulfillment] may lead to blood being spilled.** The pauper who asks [for assistance] may die if you do not supply him immediately [with sustenance] like the story that occurred with Ben-zoma.

[ז.] ויש לאדם ליתן אל לבו שכמו שמבקש בכל שעה מהקב"ה שיזמין לו פרנסתו וכמו שמבקש מהקב"ה שישמע שועתו כך צריך שישמע שועת העניים ואף גם זאת שהקב"ה קרוב לשמוע צעקת [ה]עניים שנא' שועת עניים אתה תשמע לפיכך יש לו לזוהר מזעקתו וגם כי ברית כרותה לה[ם] שנא' (שמות כב) והיה כי יצעק אלי ושמעתי כי חנון אני, [ו]גם יתן אל לבו כי הוא גלגל החזור בעולם וסוף האדם לבא לידי מדה זו ואם לא [בא] הוא יבא בנו או בן בנו.

[7.] And man should consider in his heart that just as he always asks the Holy One, blessed be he, to bring him sustenance and as he asks the Holy One, blessed be he, to pay heed to his cries, so too, he [i.e. man] must pay heed to the cries of the poor.... He should also consider in his heart that there is a wheel [of fortune] spinning in the world and at the end all men will get come to this fate [of poverty], and if it doesn't come to him, it will come to his son or grandson.

[ח.] ואל יעלה בלבו [טינא] לומר איך אחסר ממוני ליתנו לעניים כי יש לו לדעת שאין הממון שלו אלא פקדון לעשות בו רצון ה[נ]פקיד וזה[ו] רצונו שיחלק [ממנו]. לעניים וזהו החלק הטוב(ה) שיהיה לו ממנו כדכתיב והלך לפניך צדקך

[8.] A person should not ponder in his heart: "How can I squander my money by giving it to the poor?" He should remember that his money Is not his, but rather, it is a deposit (*pikadon*) [of God] to do with it according to the will of the depositor, whose will is that he should distribute his money to the poor. This is the best portion that he [i.e. man] can have, as it is written: "your charity goes before you [i.e. before you enter the next world]".

[ט.] ועוד כי הדבר בדוק ומנוסה כי בשביל הצדקה שנותן לא יחסר לו אלא אדרבה תוסיף לו עושר וכבוד כדכתיב (ד"ה ב' לא) מהחל התרומה לביא [ל]בית ה' אכול ושבוע והותר עד לרוב כי ה' ברך את עמו וכתוב (מלאכי ג') הביאו את כל המעשר אל בית האוצר ויהי טרף בביתי ובחנוני נא בזאת אמר ה' צבאות אם לא אפתח לכם [את] ארובות השמים והריקותי עליכם ברכה עד בלי די ואמרו חכמים בכל דבר אסור לנסות את ה' חוץ מ[ב]דבר זה כדכתיב ובחנוני נא בזאת [וגו']

[9.] Moreover, it is a tried and tested fact that the **giving charity will not lead to loss. On the contrary, it will increase his wealth and honor**, as it is written (2 Chronicles 31): "From the bringing of the offerings (*terumah*) to the House of the Lord, he shall eat, be sated, and his plentitude shall abound, **for the Lord has blessed his nation.**" It is also written (Malachi 3): "Bring the entire tithe (*maaser*) to the warehouse and it shall be a food store in my house. 'Test me regarding this' said the Lord of Hosts, 'if I will not open my heavenly attic and empty its boundless blessing upon you'."

The Sages said that it is forbidden to test the Lord other than in this, as written: "Test me regarding this".

[י.] ועוד כי הוא דוחה גזירות קשות וברעב תציל ממות כאשר אירע לצרפית (מלכים א' יז) בשביל (עוגה קטנה) [כד הקמח] שנתנה לאליהו.

[10.] Also, it [i.e. charity] staves off harsh decrees and saves from death during times of famine..

C. Maimonides, Guide III, 39

[1.] THE precepts in the fourth class include the laws which in our work are contained in the section Zera'im, excepting the laws on the mixture of species: the rules about things to be "valued" and things "devoted" (Hilkot 'erekin va-haramim), and those concerning lender and borrower (Hilkot malveh ve-loveh) and slaves (Hilkot 'abadim). **When you examine these precepts you will clearly see the use of every one of them: they teach us to have sympathy with the poor and infirm, to assist the needy in various ways; not to hurt the feelings of those who are in want, and not to vex those who are in a helpless condition [viz., the widow, the orphan, and the like].**

[2.] As to the precepts enumerated in the laws concerning the year of shemittah ve-yohel some of them are meant to [promote] **sympathy and generosity with our fellow-men**, חלקן רחמים ונדיבות כלפי (טעם) חלקן רחמים ונדיבות כלפי; for in reference to these Precepts it is stated in the Law, "That the poor of thy people may eat" (Exod. xxiii. 11); and besides, the land will also increase its produce and improve when it remains fallow for some time.

[3.] In the same manner we find that all the precepts comprised in "the laws on valuations," and on "things devoted" are based on the principle of charity: some of them prescribe what should be given to the priests; others tell us what must be devoted to the repairs of the temple. **The practice of all these things is to bring man to the trait of generosity** ובכולן ג"כ יגיע לאדם מדת הנדיבות unhesitatingly to the glory of God. For it is in the nature of man to strive to gain money and to increase it; and his great desire to add to his wealth and honour is the chief source of misery for man.

[4.] Also the precepts contained in "the laws concerning the relation between lender and borrower" (Hilkot malveh veloveh) will be found, on being carefully examined, **to be nothing but commands to be lenient, merciful and kind to the needy, not to deprive them of the use of anything indispensable in the preparation of food.** "No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge" (Deut. xxiv. 6).

[5.] The precepts contained in "the laws concerning slaves" (Hilkot 'abadim), likewise prescribe **only acts of pity, mercy and kindness to the poor.**

C1. Guide III, 35

The fourth class includes precepts relating to charity, loans, gifts, and the like, e.g., the rules respecting "valuations," (scil., of things devoted to sacred purposes, Lev. xxvii. 1-27); "things devoted" (ibid. ver. 28); laws concerning loans and servants, and all the laws enumerated in the section Zera'im, except the rules of "mixtures" and "the fruit of trees in the first three years." **The object of these precepts is clear; their benefit concerns all people by turns; for he who is rich to-day may one day be poor--either he himself or his descendants; and he who is now poor, he himself or his son may be rich to-morrow.**

כי תועלתם חוזרת על הכל חלילה כי העשיר היום או זרעו יהיה עני למחר והעני היום הוא או בנו יהיה עשיר למחר.

D. Pirkei Avot 3:15

הכל צפוי, והרשות נתונה, ובטוב העולם נדון. והכל לפי רב המעשה: Everything is foreseen, and freewill is given, and with goodness the world is judged. **And all is in accordance to the majority of the deed**

E. Rambam's Commentary to Avot:

רמב"ם פירוש המשניות - מסכת אבות פרק ג

ואחר כך אמר שהמעלות לא יגיעו לאדם לפי רוב גודל המעשה, אבל לפי רוב מספר המעשים, והוא שהמעלות אמנם יגיעו בכפול המעשים הטובים פעמים רבות ועם זה יגיע קנין חזק לא כשיעשה אדם פעל אחד גדול מפעולות הטובות כי בזה לבדו לא יגיע לו קנין חזק.

והמשל בו כשיתן האדם למי שראוי אלף זהובים בבת אחת לאיש אחד ולאיש אחד לא יתן כלום לא יעלה בידו מדת הנדיבות בזה המעשה האחד הגדול כמו שמגיע למי שהתנדב אלף זהובים באלף פעמים ונתן כל זהוב מהם על צד הנדיבות, ... וכן בתורה אין שכר מי שפדה אסור במאה דינרים או עשה צדקה לעני במאה דינרים שהוא די מחסורו כמו שפדה עשרה איסורים או השלים חסרון עשרה עניים כל אחד בעשרה דינרים ...

And afterwards he said that the virtues do not come to a man according to the greatness of the deed, but rather according to **the great number of good deeds** - And this is that **indeed the virtues arrive by repetition of the good deeds many times**. And with this does a strong acquisition come - not when a man does one great deed from the good deeds; as from this alone, a strong acquisition will not come to him.

And the parable with this is that when a man gives a thousand gold coins at one time to one man to whom it is fitting and he does not give anything to another man; **the trait of generosity will not come into his hand with this great act, as [much as] it will come to one who donates a thousand gold pieces a thousand times and gives each one of them out of generosity**. [This is] because this one repeated the act of generosity a thousand times and a strong acquisition of it came to him [in this way]. But [the other] only aroused his soul with a great arousal towards a good act, and afterwards it ceased from him. **And so [too] with Torah**, the reward of the one who redeems one captive with a hundred dinar or [gives] charity to a poor person with a hundred dinar which is enough for what he lacks is not like the one who redeems ten captives or fills the lack of ten poor people - each one with ten dinar. And in this comparison and this matter is that which he said, "**in accordance to the majority of the deed**" - and not in accordance to the greatness of the deed.

F. Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 10b, Rosh ha-Shanna 4a, Pesachim 8a

והתניא: האומר סלע זו לצדקה בשביל שיחיו בני, ובשביל שאזכה בה לחיי העולם הבא - הרי זה צדיק גמור!

Isn't it taught in a *baraita*: If one gives charity, saying: I give **this sela for charity in order that my children may live, or: I give it in order that through it I may merit life in the World-to-Come**, he is still considered a **full-fledged righteous person**?

G. Tur Orah Hayim (way of life) siman 242

וכמה פעמים נשאתי ונתתי בדבר לפני א"א ז"ל כמוני היום שיש לי מעט משלי ואינו מספיק לי וצריך אני לאחרים אם אני בכלל עשה שבתך חול אם לאו ולא השיבני דבר ברור.

And there were a number of times that I discussed this matter with my lord my father [i.e. the famous scholar Rosh], [someone] like myself today that I have only very little of my own, not enough to subsist, and I need [the assistance of] others – am I included within the category of those [for whom it says] “better make your Shabbat like a weekday (i.e. to eat two meals and not three) or not. And he [i.e. the Rosh] did not give me a clear-cut response.

H. Rambam Epilogue to Commentary to Mishneh (c. 1168)

In addition, I was **agitated by the distress of our time, the exile which God had decreed upon us, the fact that we are being driven from one end of the world to the other...** God knows there are some laws which I explained while on the road, others that I collected while on board a ship.

I. Hebrew Prologue to Epistle to Yemen (1172)

Verily, I am one of the lowliest of the scholars **from Spain whose crown (or glory) was lowered in exile**. Although I always study the ordinances [of the Lord] (literally: I am studiously on guard), I did not attain to the learning of my forbearers, **for evil days and hardships overtook us; we did not abide in tranquility, we labored and had no rest. How could we clarify the law, when we were being exiled from city to city and from country to country....only recently I found a home**