

Giving to Israel Righteously

Rabbi Moses Maimonides was among the greatest Jewish scholars of all time. His teachings and global perspective of 1,000 years ago are still studied and widely embraced. He balanced parallel worlds of Jewish law and (then) modern thinking. Maimonides gave us the concept of giving metaphorically as a ladder, enunciating the eight highest rungs of giving. He taught that giving was an obligation, one about which we need to be particularly scrupulous.

Using the Hebrew terms, Maimonides wrote of charitable giving (tzedakah) that, “We must be especially careful to observe the mitzvah (commandment) of tzedakah, more so than any other positive mitzvah.” Why is it that that one of the foremost Jewish scholars of all time says that you need to be more careful about giving than, say, honoring parents or observing the Sabbath?

As Giving Tuesday approaches and December’s charitable giving typically exceeding all other months, it’s important to take a critical look at giving in general and to Israel in particular. There are many things to consider.

First, the biblical obligation to give is about far more than charity. The Hebrew word tzedakah means righteousness. One should not give from pity or empathy but with joy and the awareness that the money is not his/hers to begin with, but funds with which they are entrusted. Because, as Maimonides wrote, one needs to be especially scrupulous about giving, one really needs to know who you’re giving to.

Especially with Christians giving to bless Israel, and who may not know the intricacies of Israeli society, admittedly that can be a challenge. Sometimes even the most honest-appearing person may not be all that honest, can hide information or might just mismanage charitable funds. Just because someone is

a rabbi or pastor and just because the cause may indeed sound important doesn't mean they are totally kosher. You need to know who you're giving to.

Especially when faced with appeals that are emotional, making claims that sound too good to be true or an urgency due to perceived threats, one needs to be careful.

- Are claims to support Holocaust survivors exaggerated to raise money for other programs (even if they are good)?
- Are you being asked to give to organization X because of the alarming threat from Iran?
- “Combating antisemitism” is great but what is really being done?

For years I have decried the proclivity by some to objectify Christians as “a faith-based ATM” just to get money out with no relationship. Sadly, there are far too many good Christians who have a heart of gold for Israel but are being taken advantage of. The intent is great and it does mean so much for Israel. But to give most impactfully, one really needs to know the need and understand Israeli society as much as possible.

Do give, generously and frequently, with love and joy about being able to help others and bless Israel as God expects. But do it responsibly, with eyes as wide open as your heart is big. {eo}

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