

TZEDAQAH in the Jewish Culture of Yeshua

← ← ← *Hebrew words are read from right to left.* ← ← ←



(The following information is from the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and *Jewish Encyclopedia*.)

The Hebrew word **TZEDAQAH** has the following meanings:

1. It is the fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations by doing what is right in all relationships.
2. It is concrete acts, not abstract notions.
3. It is a constant pursuit of justice and the performance of positive deeds, not merely abstention from evil.
4. It is a learned trait resulting from the sustained performance of obligations. It is not an inherent human characteristic.
5. The prophets conceived of the ideal society in terms of **TZEDAQAH** because righteous action results in social stability and, ultimately, in **SHALOM** (totality, completeness & wholeness). Failure to perform **TZEDAQAH** leads indirectly to the upsetting of social stability and, ultimately, to the deliberate undermining of the social structure.
6. The righteous are called living even after they die, whereas the wicked are called dead even while they are still alive.
7. A person may change his or her status from that of wicked to righteous by doing **TESHUVAH** (*repentance*). "Free will" allows us them to choose which path we will follow.

The Real Yeshua Series #05 Handout

In the *Late Second Temple & Early Rabbinic Periods*, **TZEDAQAH** took on the additional meaning of "**almsgiving**, or **practical benevolence**."

1. It is an **obligation of every person** to help the poor and needy.
2. It was considered by *Jewish sages of all ages* to be one of the **cardinal commandments of Judaism**.

The importance of **TZEDAQAH** as "**almsgiving**" (helping the poor and needy) can be seen by the statement that "**TZEDAQAH is as important as all the other commandments combined**."

1. *It is greater than all sacrifices.*
2. *It hastens the redemption.*
3. *It ensures wise, wealthy, and learned sons.*
4. *It atones for sins.*
5. *It is a way to imitate God.*
6. *It saves one from death.*

The Hebrew understanding of **TZEDAQAH** as "**almsgiving**" and the meanings of the English word "**charity**" are very different:

1. **TZEDAQAH** is the foundation of **social justice**.
2. The needy have **a right to TZEDAQAH**.
3. **TZEDAQAH** is not a favor done for the poor.
4. The recipient **is not indebted or beholden to giver**.

TZEDAQAH is performed as a **matter of obligation** by those possessing the means of providing what is needed.

1. *It is their duty to give it.*
2. The **poor do more for the giver** by accepting alms **than the giver does for the poor** by giving alms. The poor give the giver the opportunity to do this commandment.
3. The **one who receives alms is also obligated to give** alms to those in need.

Three inseparable Hebrew words are **TZEDAQAH**, **TOV**, and **SHALOM**.