

Between Justice and Charity

Activity for years 8–9

Objectives:

- Introduction to concepts of “justice” and “charity” and the differentiation between them.
- Introduction to the customs relating to justice and charity at Passover.
- Introduction to the “eight degrees of charity” of Maimonides, and the significance of the ranking.
- Understanding of the context in which the concept of charity develops and the customs related to it, and the aspiration for social justice over and above giving to charity.
- Finding a connection between the words of Maimonides and contemporary reality.

The activity:

1. Opening: concepts and expressions relating to justice: ask the participants to raise concepts and expressions relating to justice.
2. Definition of justice: How would you define justice? They will attempt to word a definition.
3. Which customs and symbols at Passover relate to justice or charity?
(explain about charity for the needy, invitation of guests to the Seder, the customs of the Seder itself (we all participate in the meal)
4. A quiz in groups: each group receives 8 cards with parts of the text of “the eight degrees of charity” of Maimonides. The groups have to arrange the cards according





to the order in the text, which degree is above which degree. Each group presents the order according to its perception, and gives its reasons why.

- What was clear? What was identical between the groups? What were their indecisions?
- Read the full text, while examining the similarity and the difference between it and the groups' answers.
- Discussion points regarding the ranking:
 - Preference that there should not be a meeting between the giver and the recipient – why?
 - Is it preferable that the recipient should not know or the giver should not know? Why?
 - What is the importance of hospitality? Is it not more important what and how much is given?
 - Under which condition is it desirable to put a donation into the money box and which not?
 - What is the difference between the first degree to all those beneath it? What is special about giving work or in joint work?
- Which of the degrees would you attribute the customs of the charity of the festival, and acts which are not heard and seen at present? (Donations into a charity box, inviting people to the Seder, soup kitchens)
- How does the reality referred to by Maimonides differ to our reality today (the establishment of the state and government institutions).
- What is similar and what is different between the suggestions made by Maimonides and what happens today?
- What can we do to “advance on the scale of the degrees of charity?”





The 8 degrees of charity of Maimonides

There are eight levels of charity, each greater than the next.

The greatest level, above which there is no greater, is to support a fellow Jew by endowing him with a gift or loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding employment for him, in order to strengthen his hand so that he will not need to be dependent upon others..

A lesser level of charity than this is to give to the poor without knowing to whom one gives, and without the recipient knowing from who he received.

A lesser level of charity than this is when one knows to whom one gives, but the recipient does not know his benefactor

A lesser level of charity than this is when one does not know to whom one gives, but the poor person does know his benefactor.

A lesser level than this is when one gives to the poor person directly into his hand, but gives before being asked.

A lesser level than this is when one gives to the poor person after being asked.

A lesser level than this is when one gives inadequately, but gives gladly and with a smile.

A lesser level than this is when one gives unwillingly.

