The Value of Gemilut Chasadim vs. The Value of Tzedakah

“Our Rabbis taught, in three respects *gemilut chasadim* (acts of kindness) are superior to tzedakah (charity): Tzedakah can be done only with one’s money, but *gemilut hasadim* can be done with one’s person and one’s money. Tzedakah can be given only to the poor, while *gemilut hasadim* can be done both for the rich and the poor. Tzedakah can be given to the living only, while *gemilut hasadim* can be done both to the living and to the dead.”

Babylonian Talmud Sukkah 49b

Earlier on this page of Talmud, “R. Elazar states, *Gemilut Hasadim* assisting someone in need is greater than charity, for it is said, ‘Sow to yourselves according to your charity, but reap according to your chesed (Hosea 10:12); if a man sows, it is doubtful whether he will eat [the harvest] or not, but when a man reaps, he will certainly eat.’” (Babylonian Talmud Sukkah 49b)

“R. Elazar further stated, He who executes charity and justice is regarded as though he had filled all the world with kindness, for it is said, *He loveth charity and justice, the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord*. (Psalms 33:5) Lest you say that whoever wishes to do good succeeds without difficulty, Scripture expressly says, *How precious is Thy lovingkindness*, *O God..*.(Psalms 36:8) As one might say that this applies also to a man who fears God, Scripture expressly says, *But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him*.” (Psalms 103:17)(Babylonian Talmud Sukkah 50a)

Is it easier for us to give Tzedakah than it is to exhibit lovingkindness? Today, we are torn between spending time at work, with our families, finding leisure time for ourselves or finding time to volunteer. It can be easier just to write a check and donate to a needy person or organization. Time is our most priceless commodity. Giving our time to help someone in need turns our time into a valuable gift. Giving the gift of our time is a way we can emulate God’s lovingkindness.

Questions:

1. What differences do you see between *gemilut chasadim* and *tzedakah*?
2. How does R. Elazar view gemilut chasadim? How do you interpret his teaching?
3. Do you think it is easier to give tzedakah than exhibit lovingkindness?
4. Based on this Talmudic passage, in what ways can we bring chesed into the world?

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