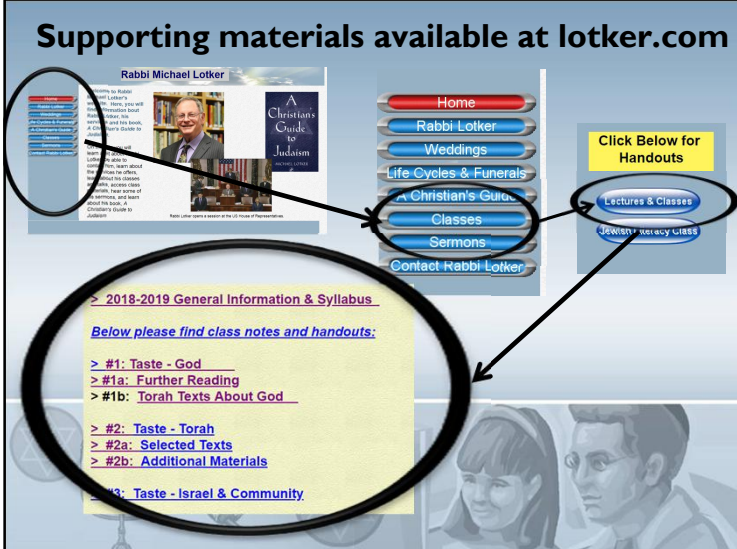


## Taste #2: Torah Jewish Literacy Class

**Rabbi Michael Lotker**  
Scholar in Residence, Temple Adat Elohim  
Community Rabbi, Jewish Federation of  
Ventura County



### Supporting materials available at lotker.com




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[> 2018-2019 General Information & Syllabus](#)  
[Below please find class notes and handouts:](#)  
[> #1: Taste - God](#)  
[> #1a: Further Reading](#)  
[> #1b: Torah Texts About God](#)  
  
[> #2: Taste - Torah](#)  
[> #2a: Selected Texts](#)  
[> #2b: Additional Materials](#)  
  
[> #3: Taste - Israel & Community](#)



## Two Key Leaps of Faith

**#1** Is there a God [Intelligence behind the creation of the universe]?

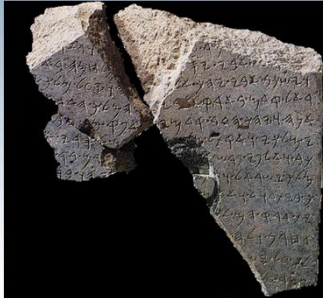
- This is the subject of a separate course

**#2** Does God care?

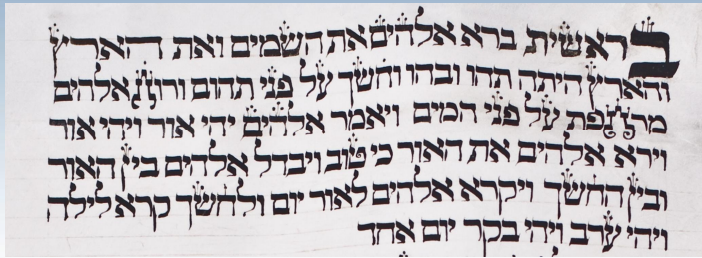
- Whether I have turkey or ham for dinner?
- Whether I care for or torture babies?
- This leads to the question of revelation and Torah

### Hebrew is Written...

- From right to left – easier for right handed chisellers
- Without vowels to force us to read in context
  - Consider the consonants H & T
  - Could be hat, hot, hit, hut, heat, hate, etc.



## Let's Begin With the Beginning



## The First Letter of the Bible

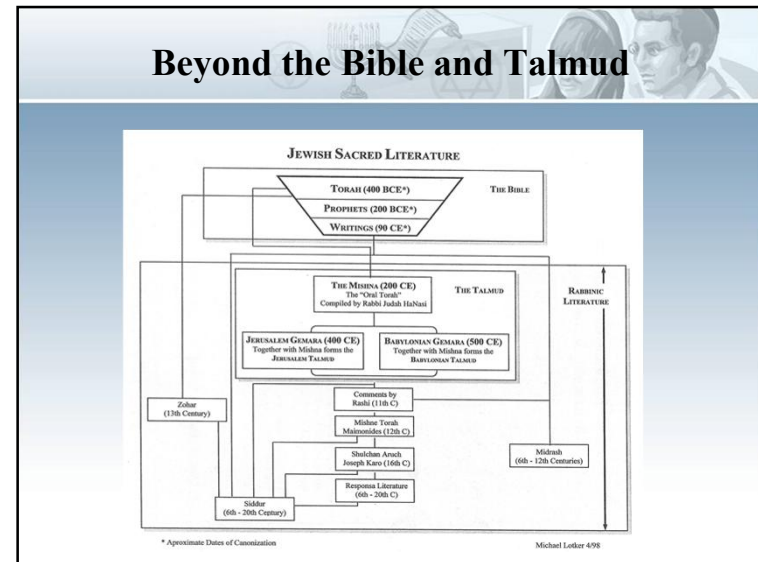
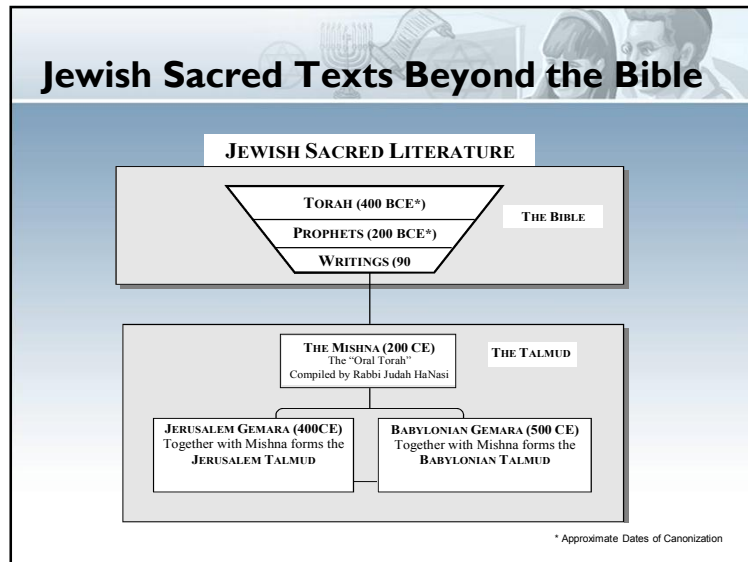
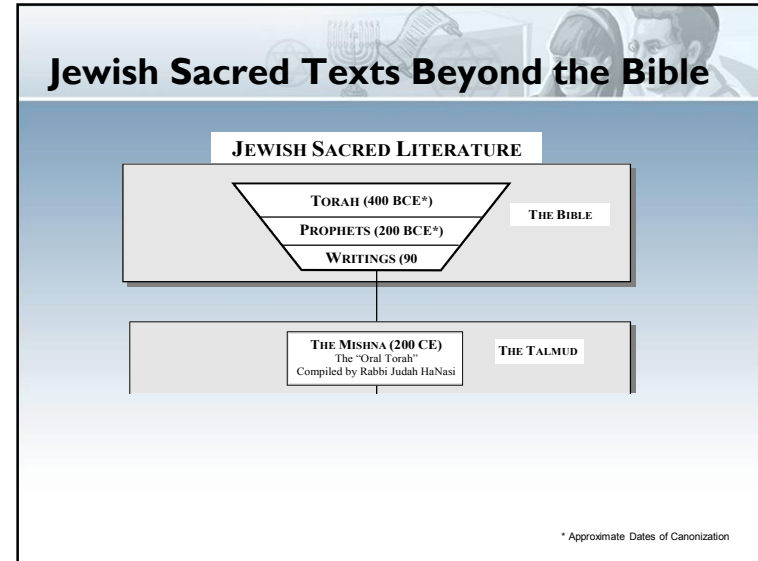
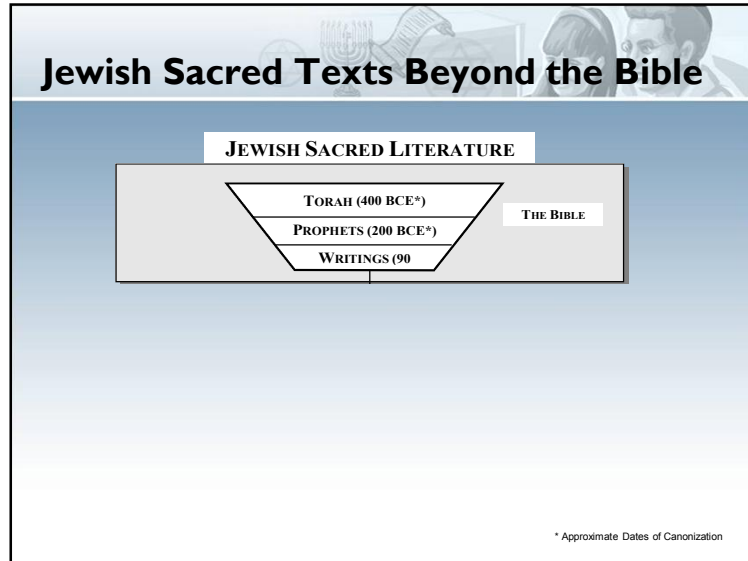
- Is the Hebrew letter “bet” ב
- Why begin the text with this letter?
  - To teach that you can't ask what happened before, above, or below the Torah.
    - Physicists now say that this is also true of the Big Bang
  - To teach that there are two Torahs:
    - Written – 1<sup>st</sup> 5 Books of the Bible
    - Oral – The Talmud

## We Cannot Simply Translate the Bible

- The first two words of the bible present a grammatical problem: בראשית ברא אלהים “B’raysheet bara Elohim” – Often translated: “In the beginning, God created...”
- But if we wanted to say “in the beginning God created,” we would write בראשונה ברא אלהים - B’reeshonah...
- B’raysheet is half of an expression – Hebrew grammar requires the next word to be a noun – but the next word is a verb.
- Rashi teaches that God was teaching us that we can't just translate – we must interpret.
- I think God put this lesson here (between word #1 & #2) so those of us with ADD wouldn't miss it.

## We Can't Simply Translate the Bible & We Shouldn't Try!

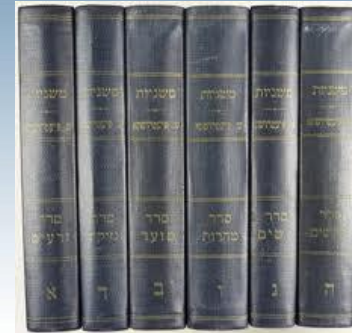
- From Rabbi Johnathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p.207-8
  - “Every text needs interpretation.
  - Every interpretation needs wisdom.
  - Every wisdom needs careful negotiation between the timeless and time.
  - Fundamentalism reads texts as if God were as simple as we are. That is unlikely to be true”
- The Talmud says “One who translates a verse literally is a liar” [BT Kiddushin 49A]



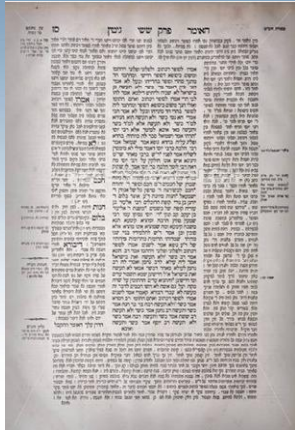
### Torah Scroll



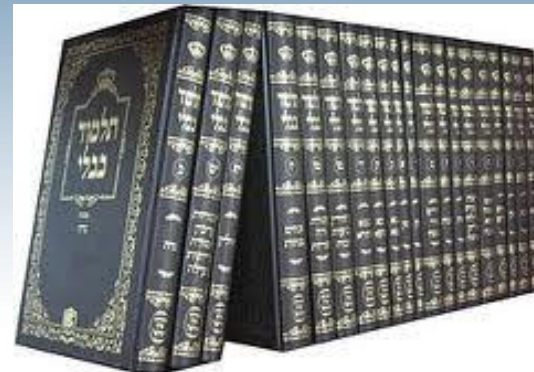
### Mishna Texts – Six Orders (Sections)



### A Page of Talmud



### A Set of Talmud – 63 Tractates



### The Sabbath in the Torah: Exodus 20

**20:8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

**20:9** Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work:

**20:10** But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates:

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**So, how do you define work?**

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**But how does God define work?**

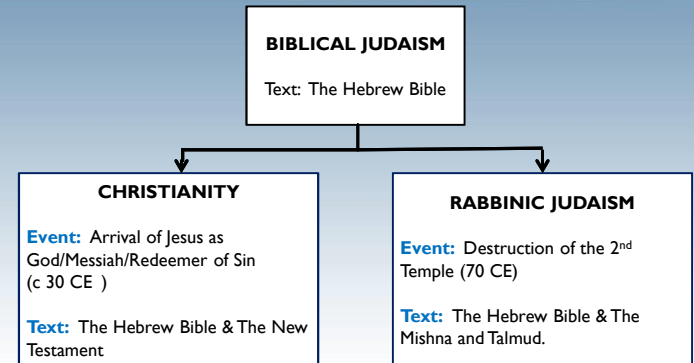
### The Sabbath in the Mishna & Talmud

- **MISHNAH (Shabbat 7:2)** The primary classes of work are forty less one, [viz.:] Sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, bleaching, hackling, dyeing, spinning, stretching the threads, the making of two meshes, weaving two threads, dividing two threads, tying [knotting] and untying, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, capturing a deer, slaughtering, or flaying, or salting it, curing its hide, scraping it [of its hair], cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters [over the erasure], building, pulling down, extinguishing a fire, kindling a fire, striking with a hammer, [and] carrying out from one domain to another: these are the forty primary labours less one.

## The Sabbath in the Mishna & Talmud

- **MISHNAH (Shabbat 2:2)** The primary labours are forty less one, [viz.:] Sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, bleaching, hackling, dyeing, spinning, stretching the threads, the making of two meshes, weaving two threads, dividing two threads, tying [knotting] and untying, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, capturing a deer, slaughtering, or flaying, or salting it, curing its hide, scraping it [of its hair], cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters [over the erasure], building, pulling down, extinguishing, kindling, striking with a hammer, [and] carrying out from one domain to another: these are the forty primary labours less one.
- **GEMARA (Shabbat 73b)** Why state the number? — Said R. Johanan: [To teach] that if one performs them all in one state of unawareness, he is liable on account of each separately.

## Relationship Between Christianity & Modern Judaism



**It's all about how we read and interpret our sacred texts.**

## A Religion of Commandments

- Hebrew for Commandment = *Mitzvah*
  - *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is someone obligated to observe commandments
- Not just the big 10
- 613 commandments in the Torah alone!
  - Love thy neighbor
  - No pork
  - Paying wages to day laborers each day

## How Many Commandments?

- 613 in the Torah [1st 5 Books of Bible]
- The Rabbis of the Talmud add 1000s more
  - Against mixing milk and meat
  - Kosher slaughtering
  - Shabbat candles
  - Bar/Bat Mitzvahs
  - Hanukkah candles
  - Detailed rules for Passover Seders
  - Daily prayers

## Jewish Movements

- **Orthodox:** All Jewish law unchanging & binding on all Jews.
  - Hasidic & Chabad are well known examples
- **Conservative:** All Jewish law binding on all Jews but laws change with the times.
  - Example: OK to drive to synagogue on Shabbat.
- **Reform:** Ethical Jewish laws binding but ritual laws (head coverings, kosher laws, Sabbath observance) should be studied and each individual decides if s/he hears God's voice.
- **Yitz Greenberg quote:** "I don't care which movement you are affiliated with so long as you're ashamed of it."

## Judaism and Jesus



### Why Don't Jews Accept Jesus as the Messiah?

## The Word "Messiah"

- English "Messiah" is a translation of the Hebrew "*Mashiach*" [משיח]
- *Mashiach* means "anointed."
    - Kings of Israel were anointed by pouring holy oil on their heads.
  - When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (about 200 BCE), the Hebrew *Mashiach* became the Greek "*Christos*" [Χριστός].
  - The Greek *Christos* gives rise to the English "Christ."

## Jewish Understanding of Messiah

- Fully Human and Only Human
- A Political and/or Military Ruler like King David
- Not God in any sense
- Not the son of God in any sense beyond the idea that we are all children of God
- Not connected with redemption of sin
  - Only we can atone for our sins
  - For sins against God, God forgives
  - For sins against others, God cannot forgive unless the person offended forgives
- Messiah not at the heart of Judaism

## Jewish Prophecies Concerning Messiah

- A time of peace on earth
  - Peace among people
  - Peace among animals
- All the world will come to know the one God
- Details unresolved
  - Mystics see the time as supernatural
  - Rationalists believe that we will do the work to make the world perfect
  - Many believe in a Messianic Age rather than an individual Messiah.

## My “Has the Messiah Come?” Test

- Read the LA Times cover to cover every day for a month.
- If there’s no story of war, or hatred or hunger or disease, the Messianic Age may be here!



## Why Don't Jews Accept Jesus As Messiah?

- No world peace, no Messiah
- The Second Coming not a Jewish idea
- But the larger issue is whether Jesus is God
  - The idea of God taking human form, suffering with us and dying for our sins is
    - Beautiful and inspiring
    - But not Jewish!
- This is why I can have great respect for Christianity but less sympathy for “Jews for Jesus” and “Messianic Jews”

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- **This issue is not “Who was Jesus” but “Who is God.”**



## Hebrew Calendar: "Lunisolar"

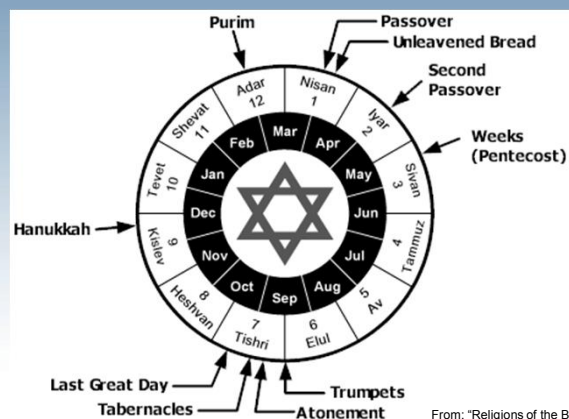
- Twelve "months/moons" (alternating 30 or 29 days)
- Total 353, 354 or 355 days (cf. 365¼ solar days)
  - or 383, 384, or 385 days in "Leap Years"
- Extra month (Adar II) added in Leap Years
  - Years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 & 19 of each 19-year cycle
- So months remain in the same solar seasons:
  - Tishri in Fall (Sept/Oct); Nissan in Spring (Mar/Apr), etc.
- *Rosh Codesh* (1<sup>st</sup> day each month)
  - Specials Psalms; Women free from work

From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just

## Major Jewish Feasts (Overview):

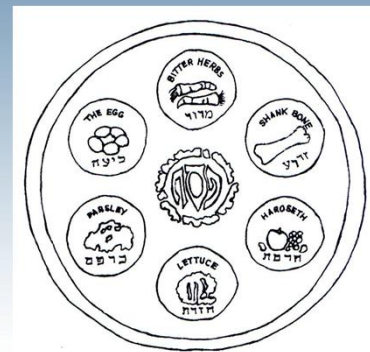
1. Rosh Hashanah / Jewish New Year
2. Yom Kippur / Day of Atonement
3. Sukkot / Tabernacles/Booths
4. Pesach / Passover
5. Shavu'ot / Weeks/Pentecost
6. Hanukkah / Feast of Lights
7. Purim / Feast of Lots
8. Simchat Torah / Rejoicing in the Torah
9. Tisha B'Av / 9<sup>th</sup> of Av: Destruction of Two Temples

## Months and Festivals/Holy Days



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just

## Pesach / Passover



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## Sukkoth / Tabernacles/Booths



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## Rosh Hashanah / New Year



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## Yom Kippur / Day of Atonement



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## Hanukkah / Holiday of Lights



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## Purim / Feast of Lots



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## Taste #2: Selected Jewish Texts

**The Shema (Deut. 6:4-9)** – This text is the source for morning and evening recitation of the Shema, custom of the mezuzah and of tefillin.

- **Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol of your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

## Taste #2: Selected Jewish Texts

**Text for Tallit – Numbers 15:37-41**

**Adonai said to Moses saying: Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments through the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner: That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of Adonai and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and be holy to your God. I am Adonai your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I, Adonai, your God.**

## Taste #2: Selected Jewish Texts

**Imitating God (Babylonian Talmud, tractate Sotah, page 14a)**

**What is the meaning of the verse, "Follow none but the Lord your God?" (Deuteronomy 10:17). Is it possible for a human being actually to follow the ways of God? What it means is that we should imitate the attributes of God.**

- **As God clothed the naked-as it is written: "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and God clothed them"-so you should clothe the naked.**
- **As God visited the sick-as It is written: "The Lord appeared to Abraham by the terebinths of Mamre" [after Abraham's circumcision) - so you should visit the sick.**
- **As God comforted the mourners- as it is written: "After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac"- so should you comfort the mourners.**
- **As God buried the dead-as it is written: "He buried him [Moses) in the valley" - so also you should bury the dead.**

## Taste #2: Selected Jewish Texts

Hillel, in Ethics of the Father , chapter 1 : 14  
 If I am not for myself, who is for me?  
 And if I am only for myself, what am I?  
 And if not now, when?

### Milk and Meat: What the Torah Says

- Ex. 23:19 – You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.
- Ex. 43:26 – You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.
- Deut. 14:21 – You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.

### Midrash (Leviticus Rabba 34:8)

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua: The poor person [standing at the door] does more for the householder than the householder does for the poor person.

## Taste #2: Selected Jewish Texts

### Hasidic Saying

A person should have two slips of paper which he carries with him at all times, one in each pocket. On one should be written “The whole world has been created only for my sake.” On the other would be written, “I am but dust and ashes.”

### Talmud

In the Next World, we will be accountable for every permitted pleasure we denied ourselves.

## Taste #2: Selected Jewish Texts

### Maimonides' (12th century Jewish Philosopher) Ladder of Giving

There are eight degrees in the giving of Tzedaka, each one higher than the next:

1. to give grudgingly, reluctantly, or with regret;
2. to give less than one should, but with grace;
3. to give what one should, but only after being asked;
4. to give before one is asked;
5. to give without knowing who will receive it, although the recipient knows the identity of the giver;
6. to give without making known one's identity;
7. to give so that neither giver nor receiver knows the identity of the other;
8. help another to become self-supporting, by means of a gift, a loan, or by finding employment for the one in need.