

Allocation of Scarce Resources

Shulchan Arukh Yoreh Deah

1. 251:13 (On giving tzedakah) ... He must prefer his relative to every other person...And the poor of his household take precedence over the poor of his city; and the poor of his city take precedence over the poor of another city.

2. 251:7-8; 252:1, 3, 8

One must feed the hungry before one clothes the naked. If a man and a woman came to ask for food, we put the woman before the man. Similarly, if a man and a woman came to ask for clothing, and similarly, if a male orphan and a female orphan ask for funds to be married, we put the woman before the man.

Redeeming captives takes precedence over sustaining the poor and clothing them, and there is no commandment greater than redeeming captives. Therefore, the community may change the usage of funds it collected for communal needs for the sake of redeeming captives. Even if they collected the money for building a synagogue, and even if they bought the wood and stones and designated them for building the synagogue, such that it is forbidden to sell them for fulfillment of another mitzvah, it is nevertheless permitted to sell them for the purpose of redeeming captives. But if they built it already, they should not sell it...

Every moment that one delays redeeming captives where it is possible to do so quickly, one is like a person who sheds blood.

We redeem a woman before a man. If however, the captors are used to engaging in sodomy, we redeem a man before a woman.