Maimonides' Eight Levels of Charity

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Charity, 10:7-14

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

1. 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 until he need no longer be dependent upon others...

2. 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. For this is performing a *mitzvah* solely for the sake of Heaven. This is like the "'anonymous fund"' that was in the Holy Temple [in Jerusalem]. There the righteous gave in secret, and the good poor profited in secret. Giving to a charity fund is similar to this mode of charity, though one should not contribute to a charity fund unless one knows that the person appointed over the fund is trustworthy and wise and a proper administrator, like Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon.

3. A lesser level of charity than this is when one knows to whom one gives, but the recipient does not know his benefactor. The greatest sages used to walk about in secret and put coins in the doors of the poor. It is worthy and truly good to do this if those who are responsible for distributing charity are not trustworthy.

4. 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. The greatest sages used to tie coins into their robes and throw them behind their backs, and the poor would come up and pick the coins out of their robes so that they would not be ashamed.

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

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

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

8. A lesser level than this is when one gives unwillingly.

Maimonedes (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon) (1135-1204)
Jewish philosopher, physician and jurist, born in Spain.
He codified Jewish law in *Mishneh Torah* (1180).