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THE RABBINIC VIEW OF WEALTH AND POVERTY

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Joel E. Soffin

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## INTRODUCTION

The 1970's have seen the status and reputation of economists reach an all-time low. They seem to be unable to understand the complex, modern economy within which we live well enough to permit our political leaders to control it. In the present state of quandary, it is only natural that some researchers will turn to the past to seek values and principles which might be applied today as well. It is through such a process that the idea for this thesis was first generated.

One area of economic research that is as yet quite undeveloped is that dealing with the distribution of income and wealth. It is difficult to justify our present, highly skewed distribution on moral grounds, but economists, priding themselves on their value-free science, have left such discussions to the politicians. Yet, they are poorly suited to fulfill this responsibility and too often avoid facing up to the problem. It was hoped, therefore, that out of this study of the rabbinic understanding of the proper relationship between the rich and the poor some guidelines and principles might be discovered. With these in hand, one might then argue in favor of a rabbinically inspired redistribution of income and wealth.

However, it soon became apparent that the rabbis did not share this concern over the proper distribution of

income. Rather, they accepted the existing allocation as being a just one, since they saw it as an integral part of G-d's overall plan. Although they urged the rich to be generous to the poor and to fulfill the spirit of the mitzvot of tzedakah, there were few formal legal institutions through which wealth and income were to be allocated more equally. The system of tithes and taxes was one such mechanism as was the theoretical construct of the Jubilee Year, but the rabbis' primary concern lay elsewhere. What was the purpose of the existing distribution within G-d's plan? Why did people have to suffer the great hardships of being poor? The rabbis' problem was one of theodicy: How could G-d make people poor?

Once the focus of the rabbinic material had been determined, the midrashim which had been collected began to fit into a clear, discernible pattern. The chapters of this thesis are arranged in such a way as to make that pattern apparent to the reader. First, the biblical understanding of the issue at hand is presented to give an overview of the setting out of which the rabbis developed their own ideas. The next two chapters deal with the nature of wealth and poverty, respectively. Here economic status is placed within the spectrum of other religious and social values. Their understanding of the burdens of poverty led the rabbis to prefer a state of at least moderate wealth and to be very concerned with the ways in which such a

state might be achieved and maintained. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with G-d's role in the distribution of income and with the purpose of poverty within His plan. G-d determines the allocation of economic resources; the rich are but the custodians of His wealth. Poverty may have instrumental value, leading as it sometimes does to more righteous behavior, but the poor are to be consoled primarily with the knowledge that G-d is very close to them in their suffering. The following chapter deals with the tests which both the rich and the poor must undergo in the context of their economic status. The two economic groupings are tested differently and the results of these tests will determine, in part, how long they will remain in their present condition of wealth or poverty. Finally, the conclusion will consider the role that the principles and values which underlie this area of rabbinic thought can play in our modern world and will suggest directions for additional research.

The data upon which this study is based are taken primarily from midrash aggadah. The modern researcher who seeks to discover the rabbinic understanding of any concept or issue is faced with a nearly insurmountable data problem. He cannot possibly go through all of the midrashic material to find that portion which deals with his subject of interest so he is forced to adopt a more



series of studies which seek to discover the values and principles underlying rabbinic thought in an effort to improve our understanding of Jewish tradition and to help us begin to handle some of the ethical problems of our modern society.

## CHAPTER I

## THE BIBLICAL VIEW

The various books of the Bible cover many centuries of life in ancient Israel. They reflect in part the nomadic ethic, the early municipal society, the monarchy and the post-exilic state. Over this long period, the socio-economic characteristics of Israel changed dramatically and there were concomitant changes in the views held about wealth and poverty. To achieve some level of understanding of the overall biblical view, we must first depict the stages of this development.

During the nomadic period there were no sharp distinctions between the rich and the poor.<sup>1</sup> The bonds of brotherhood and the ties within the extended families averted extreme poverty and it was the rare tribe that achieved great wealth (cf. Gen. 13:2; 14:23). There were slaves, but very few free-born poor.<sup>2</sup> Settlement on the land led to the formulation of the municipal law which is found in Deuteronomy. Yet, even now there was general economic equality as can be seen in the data from the tenth century excavations at Tirsah which show houses of very similar size and arrangement. This may be due to the use of lots in partitioning the land among the families and clans (Num. 26:55-56; 27:7; 33:54; 36:2).<sup>3</sup> By the eighth century, however, this picture changes and we find great differences between the houses of the rich

and those of the poor. Between these two periods there was a social revolution and prosperity was the order of the day.<sup>4</sup> The earlier tribal equality had been destroyed by the alienation or loss of family property and by the practice of lending at interest. This resulted in pauperism and enslavement.<sup>5</sup> Now there were large landowners on whose property most of the people toiled in serf-like conditions.<sup>6</sup> The monarchy also led to the creation of a new group: the king's officials. They were often quite rich. Yet, despite the growing differences between the rich and the poor, the different groups had no awareness of themselves as socio-economic classes.<sup>7</sup> Then as a result of the exile, all wealth was lost. It is possible that the understanding of the term "poor" as a sectarian designation arose during the period of exile. When the people returned to Israel, the concentration of wealth became even more extreme as a priestly aristocracy developed.<sup>8</sup>

While there was never a feudal system in operation in Israel, the concept behind such a system did play a role in the people's thinking, albeit in a transmuted form. For the Israelites, G-d was the king; He owned all of the land (Ps. 24:1). He gave Israel to His people (Num. 34-36; Joshua 13-19) and blessed individuals with wealth (IK 3:13).<sup>9</sup> This religious understanding was the basis for much of the legislation in the Bible which sought to alter the distribution of wealth. Thus, the Sabbatical year (Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:2-7) served as a reminder to the landholder that he

had only a limited right to his possessions and the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25; 27:16-25; Num. 36:4) was based on the concept that land could not be sold absolutely for it belonged to G-d.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the annual tithe to G-d, the third year tithe for the poor (Deu. 14:28-29; 26:12-15), the laws concerning gleanings (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deu. 24:19-21) and the rights of passers-by to satisfy their immediate hunger (Deu. 23:25-6) were all grounded in this theological concept.<sup>11</sup>

Leaving our chronological analysis, let us now turn to a literary consideration of the most relevant books of the Bible. By combining both of these approaches perhaps we can get some idea of the overall biblical view as it came down to the rabbis. Once again, it is important to note that the various books of the Bible were written in different historical periods by several writers and editors. Thus, we will find that the attitudes change as we go from the books of the prophets to Psalms and then to Proverbs. This may be due in part to the different economic conditions under which the authors lived and in part to the socio-economic grouping from which they came or with which they sympathized.

The primary thrust of the prophets seems to be an opposition to the extravagances of the rich and to the unethical ways in which the Israelites increased their wealth. They urged the rich to be concerned about the welfare of

the poor and to treat them well (Isa. 58:7,10; Ezek. 18:7,16). Amos is particularly vehement in his denunciation of ruthlessness in the accumulation of wealth and of ostentatious self-indulgence (Amos 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:11; 6:4-6; 8:4,6; 3:12,15). He opposes the latter even when no one is harmed in the process because it reveals the callousness of the rich in the face of the needs of the poor (Amos 6:6).<sup>12</sup> Isaiah foresees the coming of a day of judgment when the rich will lose their wealth since it has caused them to become arrogant (Isa. 2). He opposes those in power who oppress the poor and who overindulge in personal luxuries (Isa. 3:14-26; 10:1-3). Furthermore, in the Book of Isaiah we find warnings to those who foreclose on insolvent properties that woeful times are ahead (Isa. 5:8) and even statements which go so far as to equate the wicked with the rich (Isa. 53:9).<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah continues in this vein by noting the deceit, wickedness and greed of the rich (Jer. 5:27-28; 6:13; 22:13) as well as the temptation to rely on and boast about one's wealth (Jer. 9:22). He sounds a familiar theme when he protests against ill-gotten wealth using the poignant metaphor of "eggs hatched by a bird that has not laid them" (Jer. 17:11).<sup>14</sup> Unlike the authors of the Wisdom Literature, the prophets never condemn the poor for having brought poverty upon themselves through laziness or irresponsibility (cf. Prov. 6:6-7; 10:4; 13:8; 23:21), nor did they idealize the poor (Isa. 9:12-16;

Jer. 5:3-5; 6:13) whom they saw not as a separate class but as defenseless individuals. <sup>15,16</sup>

In the book of Psalms we generally find that a different approach is taken. Here wealth is often regarded as something inherently evil and ungodly (Ps. 49:6-7,11,17f; 52:9; 62:11).<sup>17</sup> The Psalms are in general the voice of the lower economic grouping, of the needy and the poor, who have nothing but their piety and their faith. Thus, although there are a few cases in which the prophets associate the rich with the oppressor (Isa. 53:9; Amos 2:6f; Zeph. 2:3; 3:12-13), this becomes a major thrust in Psalms (Pss. 10, 12, 14, 37, 40, 41, 49, 52, 70, 72, 73, 74).<sup>18,19</sup> This characterization of the rich is combined with the identification of the poor as the meek, which can be seen in the link between the Hebrew words **יָרֵא** and **יָדָע**, in the parallelism of Zeph. 2:3 and 3:12-13, and as the oppressed which is derived from the similar roots. In some psalms the poor are the holy remnant, a particular religious affiliation in ancient Israel, and the hope is expressed that G-d will vindicate Himself and that the righteous poor will be rewarded.<sup>20</sup>

It is only when we turn to Proverbs that we find the poor being blamed for their poverty. Now the work ethic is stressed (Prov. 10:4,5,26; 11:16; 12:11,24; 13:4; 14:23; 15:19; 18:9; 28:19). Man should learn from the ant that he must work (Prov. 6:6-11). Wealth is now the reward for piety, righteousness and wisdom (Prov. 3:16; 8:18,21). The

proverbs reflect the ideals of the prosperous groups. The teachers of the rich tried to give wealth a spiritual meaning, either by dismissing the differences between the rich and the poor (Prov. 22:2; 29:13) or by pointing out the perils of both wealth and poverty (Prov. 30:8f).<sup>21</sup> However, there seems to be a peculiar mixing of common proverbs, i.e. the conventional wisdom, and "accepted" religious proverbs. This may explain the apparent contradiction between many pairs of proverbs. While it is stressed that wealth is the reward of hard work (Prov. 10:4f), this is later corrected (Prov. 10:22) and righteousness becomes the source of wealth. Again, while wealth is described as a "strong city to its possessor" (Prov. 18:11), this is then modified to read "the name of the Lord is a strong tower" for the righteous (Prov. 18:10). Thus, although in the Book of Proverbs the overall feeling about wealth is a very positive one, the authors of the proverbs do attempt to spiritualize that feeling and, as we shall see below, appeal to the rich to act in a beneficent manner toward the poor (Prov. 14:21,31; 17:5; 19:17; 21:13; 22; 28; 29:7,14; 30:14; 31:9).<sup>22</sup> This ameliorative strategy is designed to counteract some of the bad effects of private property.

Keeping in mind the different outlooks of the parts of the Bible described above, let us try nevertheless to achieve some understanding of the overall view of wealth and poverty which its authors and editors possessed. Wealth,

the abundance of property, is expressed by the Hebrew words  $\text{קִיָּץ}$ ,  $\text{כֹּחַ}$ , and  $\text{רֵעַ$ , which mean literally ability, power, abundance.<sup>23</sup> The source of wealth is two-fold, part human and part Divine. One cannot become rich without working; yet, it is G-d who must bless the fruit of our labors if we are to be successful (Ps. 127:1; Prov. 10:22; Koh. 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 3:17). From the human side, wealth can be achieved through labor guided by understanding (Prov. 24:3f) and wisdom (Prov. 3:16; 8:18,21); from the side of the Divine, it is the reward of righteousness and piety (Prov. 11:28).<sup>24</sup>

Wealth is clearly a blessing in the eyes of the biblical authors, but it is neither the highest blessing nor is it an unmixed one. Of all the good things in life, wealth is one of the most precious.<sup>25</sup> It gives one security from the vicissitudes of life (Prov. 10:15; 18:11), protects one's life by enabling him to pay off his legal suits (Prov. 13:8) and brings one many friends and much influence (Prov. 14:20; 19:4,6; 22:7).<sup>26</sup> Yet, more precious than wealth are a good name (Prov. 22:1), peace (Prov. 17:1), the fear of G-d (Prov. 15:16), love (Prov. 15:17), righteousness (Ps. 37:16; Prov. 16:8), truthfulness (Prov. 19:22) and integrity (Prov. 19:1; 28:6). Kohelet warns the rich against becoming misers who have no family and no friends but spend their time chasing after useless riches (Koh. 4:7-12).

Moreover, wealth brings with it many trials and tribulations. The rich cannot be fully secure in their wealth. Worrying about it keeps them up at night (Job 27:19; Prov. 23:4-5; 27:24; Koh. 5:11).<sup>27</sup> Riches are never enough to satisfy the craving for more, making men greedy and encouraging them to use all means of trickery and deceit to increase their holdings (Prov. 28:22; Isa. 5:8; Koh. 4:8; Amos 2:6; II Sam. 12; Hosea 6:6; 12:8; Micah 2:2; 3:3; 6:12; Jer. 5:27-28; 6:13; 22:13).<sup>28</sup> They lead their possessors into the trap of overconfidence and arrogance and eventually cause them to trust only in themselves and to forget their G-d (Deu. 8:17; 32:15; Hosea 13:6; Ezek. 28; Job 31:24f; Isa. 3:16-17). The purpose of much of this exhortation was to keep the rich from making wealth their single goal in life. Although the biblical authors were aware that many of the rich were not righteous and that many of the poor were, they felt that there was some connection between the retention of one's wealth and the style of life which one adopted. Thus, the rich were warned against laziness, dealing with harlots, drunkenness, serving as surety for debtors and ostentatiousness (Prov. 6:6-11; 24:30-34; 26:13-15; Hosea 8:14; Amos 3:5; 5:11).<sup>29</sup>

Appeals to help the poor are found throughout the Bible, but especially, as we have seen, in the Book of Proverbs. Here it is the duty and special obligation of the rich to help them (Deu. 15:11) and concern for them is

most meritorious (Prov. 29:7). Such consideration brought one increased blessing, for he who honors the poor, honors G-d (Ps. 41:2; Prov. 14:21,31). The rich are reminded of the common history of all Jews, and especially of the bondage in Egypt (Deu. 10:18-19; 16:2; 5:15), and of the one G-d who created us all (Job 31:15; Mal. 2:10). They are told that the almsgiver will never become poor because G-d will bless him (Prov. 11:24).<sup>30</sup>

Poverty is expressed in the Bible by many terms.<sup>31</sup> The major ones are  $\text{עָנִי}$ ,  $\text{עָבֵר}$  and  $\text{אֶבְיָר}$ , while  $\text{רָחוֹק}$ ,  $\text{עָרִיב}$ ,  $\text{אֶבְיָר}$ , and  $\text{עָבֵר}$  appear less frequently. In many of them the absence of food is the critical concern although  $\text{עָנִי}$  also includes the idea of the oppression of the poor by the rich and  $\text{עָבֵר}$  most often refers to those who were once rich but who have lost their wealth. In all of these cases, poverty is seen as an evil caused by man's own actions, e.g. sumptuous living (Prov. 21:17; 23:21), sloth and laziness (Prov. 6:6-11; 19:15; 24:30-34), foolish exploits and stubbornness (Prov. 12:11; 13:18; 28:19) or oppression, greed and deceit (II Sam. 12:1-2; Jer. 22:13; Prov. 20:21; 28:22). Yet, if we look more closely, we find that none of these cases refers to those who have always been poor. Rather, they refer to those who were once rich and have become poor. The causes of normal continuing poverty can only be found in the broadest possible sense and include calamity, plague, war, disease,

and crop failures (Ex. 10:4-5; Num. 11:4-5; Judges 10:8; Ps. 105:34).<sup>32</sup> There are very few references which attribute the distribution of income directly to G-d (I Sam. 2:7; Job 1:21); in most cases poverty is not seen as being foreordained by G-d.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this is due to the fact that poverty was accepted as being a part of the natural condition of life, especially since so many were poor.

Poverty is regarded as one of the greatest evils (Prov. 10:15; 15:15). Life is hardly worth living in such a state of wretchedness (Job 24:4-13; Koh. 4:1-3). Unlike their more fortunate co-religionists, the poor are subject to every stroke of fate, they have no friends and receive no support from their relatives (Prov. 13:8; 14:20; 19:4,7). Indeed, the worst curse which one Israelite might wish upon another is that he become poor (II Sam. 3:29; Ps. 109:9-10). Even slavery was to be preferred to economic insecurity and we find the poor selling themselves and their children (Ex. 21:7ff; Lev. 25:39ff; Neh. 5:5).

Yet, once again we find that one's economic status is not the ultimate factor in the quality of one's life. Poverty may be an evil, but it is not the greatest evil. As we have seen above, ill-gotten wealth is not to be preferred to poverty and inner peace in the midst of poverty can be a most satisfactory situation (Prov. 28:6; Koh. 4:13-14; Prov. 15:15-17; 17:1). In addition, poverty

is also a test of the poor. The Bible warns them of the temptation to steal and counsels them to remain faithful to the statutes and covenant of G-d (Prov. 30:9). They must accept their condition in humility, not because it was ordained by G-d, but because G-d could bring it to good.<sup>34</sup>

Realizing that it may be very difficult for the poor, in their misery, to follow this advice, the biblical authors offer encouragement by stressing the special relationship between G-d and the poor (Deu. 10:18; Prov. 22:22-23).<sup>35</sup> The poor are frequently referred to as being G-d's people (Ps. 72:2; 10:14,17-18; 68:6; 69:34; Prov. 22:22-23; Job 5:15; Isa. 3:15), for He will not forget but will comfort, pity and deliver them from their troubles (Ps. 9:13,18-19; 10:12; 12:6; 34:6; 69:34; 86:1; 107:41; 132:15; Job 5:15; Isa. 11:4; 25:4; 29:19; 41:17; Jer. 20:13). Whoever oppresses the poor insults G-d, while he who is merciful to them or who lends them support honors G-d and will be repaid by Him (Prov. 14:31; 19:17). Those who do not heed the cry of the poor, will not be heard when they cry out to G-d (Prov. 21:13). This special relationship, unlike that between G-d and the rich, is almost a legal claim which the poor have on G-d and one might define the "poor" as those who can justifiably expect Divine protection (Ps. 9:10; 14:5-6; 18:28; 35:10; 116:6; 132:15; 140:12; 146:7; 149:4).<sup>36</sup> It is as if this

is the reward which the poor receive for serving as G-d's instrument.

Through the deuteronomic legislation and the exhortations of the prophets, the Bible seeks social justice for the poor (Deu. 10:17-18; II Sam. 22:28; Isa. 25:4; Amos 2:6; 4:1-2). We have noted above the theological basis of many of the biblical "poor laws" and this legislation extended to full protection before the law (Ex. 22:3; Deu. 16:19; Ps. 82:3), the prohibition against usury (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Deu. 23:30), the special regulations concerning a poor man's offering at the Temple (Deu. 23:25) and the inclusion of the poor in all holiday celebrations (Deu. 16:11-12).

Yet, the legislation which would have had the greatest impact on the distribution of income and wealth was the Sabbatical year, the Jubilee year and the institution of the  $\delta\epsilon\iota\lambda\epsilon$  (Ruth 4:9; Jer. 32:6-9). All of these were efforts to limit the exploitation of the land and its concentration in the hands of a small part of the population. The ideal situation was that expressed in Deu. 15:4, "there shall be no needy among you." Every man was to sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree (Micah 4:4; Zech. 3:10; I K 5:5). Yet, the biblical authors recognized that this was not a practical goal and that in fact "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Deu. 15:11). Therefore, they tried to establish laws

which would limit the extent of the poverty and would maintain some degree of equality. It is unclear whether the Sabbatical and Jubilee years were merely expressions of the Utopian ideal or whether they were statutes to be enforced. Most scholars are of the opinion that these laws expressed an ideal of social justice and equality and that they were regarded as Utopian in nature and were not put into effect.<sup>37</sup> Poverty could not be eradicated nor could it be eased to any great extent.

In conclusion, the Israelite was taught that though it was important, one's economic status had only a relative value, that poverty was not the greatest evil nor wealth the greatest blessing. To the extent that G-d has determined the distribution of income (I Sam. 2:7), He has done so in His good providence and there will be blessings and challenges for both the rich and the poor.<sup>38</sup> While the messianic vision involves the flow of all riches to the faithful of Israel (Isa. 45:14; 60:15-16; 60:11; Micah 4:13), the optimal economic position in the present is neither great poverty nor great wealth. It is expressed most succinctly in Prov. 30:8b-9:

Give me neither poverty nor riches:  
Feed me with mine allotted bread.

Lest I be full, and deny, and say:  
'Who is the Lord?'  
Or lest I be poor, and steal,  
And profane the name of my G-d.

## CHAPTER II

## THE RABBINIC VIEW OF WEALTH

In this chapter we will turn to an investigation of the rabbinic understanding of the nature of wealth. First, the various definitions of "a rich man" will be presented, together with the usages of the words *ṭelḥ* and *ṭelḥ*. Then, we will put the quality of wealth in perspective by comparing it with other qualities which the rabbis considered more desirable. In the third section, the proper amount of wealth will be discussed and the chapter will conclude with a presentation of the rabbinic guide to becoming rich.

A question which the rabbis asked quite often is: Who is rich? The most comprehensive and characteristic set of answers is found in T.B. Shabbat 25b:

Who is rich?

R. Meir says: Whoever is at peace with his wealth.

R. Tarfon says: Whoever has 100 vineyards, 100 fields and 100 slaves to work them.

R. Akiba says: Whoever has a wife whose deeds are pleasing.

R. Jose says: Whoever has a toilet near his table.<sup>39</sup>

These answers can be divided into two groups: those which focus on a strict materialistic interpretation of wealth and those which take a broader view. R. Tarfon and R. Jose fit into the first category of strict interpretation while R. Meir and R. Akiba fit into the second one. Since, R.

Tarfron is noted in the midrash for his great wealth, one might expect him to concentrate on material wealth. (T.B. Nedarim 62a) However, the emphasis in rabbinic thought seems to have been along the lines of the loose or weak definitions. This does not mean that material wealth played no role but that a reasonable amount of wealth was assumed. Such an understanding can be seen in the definition given elsewhere of the rich man or **אִיל תִּכְכִּי'ס** as:

**זֶה שֶׁלֵּבָלָן עוֹשֶׂה כְּפָעוּלָה**  
 He who makes a fair living.  
 (Vayikra Rabbah 34:4)

We find R. Meir's answer expressed in three other places as well: T.B. Tamid 32a; Bamidbar Rabbah 22:8; M. Avot 4:1. In those places, the Hebrew terminology is changed from R. Meir's **נְחִית רֵוַח** to **נֶחֱם**, possibly showing that the true interpretation of both phrases is something more positive than "at peace". He is rich who gets something positive from what he has, whether it be satisfaction, pleasure or even happiness, and who does not continue to strive after greater wealth. (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:8)<sup>40</sup>

R. Akiba's statement can now be seen in a different light as well. As Rava told the people of Machuza: Honor your wives, for in this way you shall become rich (or, be enriched). (T.B. Baba Metzia 59a)<sup>41</sup> So, too, is a man enriched when the deeds of his wife are pleasing to him, although this may be related to the fact that one's wife was seen as his most important possession. Hence, a good

wife is riches.

Elsewhere in the midrash, we find additional insights into the nature of the rich man. He is truly independent. In Num. 16:15 Moses proclaims that he has not accepted as much as an ass despite the prerogatives of his high position which would have enabled him to accumulate great wealth. (see, e.g., T.B. Yoma 22b) He was so rich that he could be completely free of such temptations. Amos is described as being even richer and more independent. (T.B. Nedarim 38a) With this great freedom to act as they wish, the wealthy are accepted by some midrashim as being truly rich only if they are honored by the members of their city as a result of their wealth, i.e., as a result of the way in which they have used it. (T.B. Kiddushin 49b) Thus, we find that R. Judah HaNasi and R. Akiba honored the rich whenever they acted with mercy and truth. (T.B. Eruvin 86a)<sup>42</sup> In this vein, the word **ר'ע** is interpreted as meaning not **ר'ע**, **ג'כס'ם**, rich in property, but rather as **ר'ע ג'עז**, generous.<sup>43</sup> (T.B. Ketubot 68a)

Community leaders were often rich men. Indeed, R. Elazar b. Azariah was chosen to replace Rabban Gamliel as the head of the academy in part because he was rich. This was seen as a distinct advantage since R. Elazar would be able to finance personally the costs of any trips to appear before the caesar and could pay taxes to him and bring him the gifts involved in such negotiations. (T.B. Berachot 27b, 57b) All of the prophets were rich

men, having material wealth and being independent. Amos did not have to support himself out of his activity as a prophet; he was not a professional. Jonah could hire an entire ship in an effort to use his free will to flee. (T.B. Nedarim 38a) The rabbis went even further. The shechinah would rest only on those who were among other things rich. (T.B. Shabbat 92a)<sup>44</sup> While it is clear that this midrash is hyperbolic in nature, it is significant that wealth is included in the list of necessary qualities and that it is not sufficient by itself. Perhaps, for those upon whom the shechinah rested, wealth was a consequence rather than a prerequisite.

In all of these cases and throughout all of the various interpretations, wealth is regarded as a blessing, as something good. The midrash calls it *תִּפְאֶרֶת*, precious (Shoher Tov, Shmuel 8), and goes on to state that it is pleasant or fitting for the righteous and for the world. Wealth can be good for society and it can literally be a crown for the wise person. It is appropriate for the righteous who both deserve it and know how to use it for good. (M. Avot 6:8) The world needs such rich people and the poor are forbidden to curse them. Indeed, as Montefiore puts it, a certain amount of wealth is requisite for the man who is to be regarded as being in complete harmony, both inwardly and outwardly, and most fully endowed.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, in the scale of values, wealth was not considered the most significant although the temptation to make it

so was very great. One might even come to the point where he valued his wealth more than his life or than the pleasures and comforts of his body. The *תתן* prayer is seen as encompassing this possibility and as commanding such people to love G-d with all of their wealth. The true purpose of this midrash might be to encourage them to look past their possessions and to love G-d not money. (T.B. Berachot 61b; Sotah 12a) An interesting generalization about the relativity of wealth is found in Kohelet Rabbati 12:9 where the rabbis note that both the rich and the poor want what they do not have. As the rich buy more, they come to despise what they had previously acquired, striving endlessly to increase their holdings. What is despised by the rich is greatly desired by the poor whose eyes are always higher than their station. Once again we must conclude that those who possess a modicum of wealth may be the only ones who can withstand this temptation and concentrate on the non-financial aspects of their lives.

Despite their great concern with the need for the individual to become economically self-sufficient, the rabbis repeatedly stressed that the study of Torah took precedence. There could be no excuse for not studying, neither the anxieties of the poor nor the worries of the rich were acceptable reasons. The very poor R. Akiba and the rich R. Elazar b. Harsom would bear witness against those who claimed that their economic position prevented them from studying Torah. (T.B. Yoma 35b) In fact, one should forget his livelihood

and dedicate himself to Torah, the highest value. When R. Ilfa and R. Yochanan chose different ways to spend their lives, the former left the academy and became rich while the latter returned to the academy and became its head. Of the two, only R. Yochanan had achieved something truly significant. (T.B. Ta'anit 21a)<sup>46</sup> Business was considered a **שלא נאכל**, an idle thing, almost a waste of time. (Midrash T'hilim 5:2) R. Yochanan was praised for having sold all of his many holdings, leaving himself nothing for his old age, and dedicating himself completely to study. (Pesikta de Rav Kahana 178b) On the other hand, the tribes of Gad and Reuven are described as wicked because they put the primary value (Torah) after the secondary one (money). (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:8)<sup>47</sup>

Torah study is in a category by itself. Part of its reward is vouchsafed for the righteous in the world-to-come. Thus, while the rich and the poor are equal before the grave, having to leave all of their possessions behind them, Torah and good deeds escort one into the next world. (M. Avot 6:9) The satisfactions of wealth, on the other hand, are at most temporary. (Kohelet Rabbati 12:9) We enter the world with clenched fists, expecting to inherit great wealth, but we leave it with open hands, knowing that wealth is not for us. (Kohelet Rabbati 5:14)<sup>48</sup> During our lives, we will often imitate the fox who sought entry into a fenced off vineyard. To fit through the hole in the fence he had to diet. Once he had done so and had eaten heartily from the vine-

yard he found that he could not leave until he had dined again. Our net gain from such striving after wealth is of little lasting value. (Kohelet Rabbati 5:14) Elsewhere, this is stated more strongly: Gold and silver drive a person out of this world and out of the world to come while Torah brings one the full rewards of the world-to-come. (Sifrei 39b-40a) In fact, the study of Torah can keep away the angel of death. As long as R. Hiyya was busy with his studies he would continue to live eventhough his appointed time to die had come. (T.B. Mo'ed Katan 28a)<sup>49</sup>

Torah study is not only a reward in itself, but it leads to wealth, long life and status within the community. He who studies in poverty will someday do so in wealth. (M. Avot 4:9)<sup>50</sup> For wealth to be lasting it must come from G-d on the strength of Torah. (Tanhuma, Mattot 8; Numbers Rabbah Mattot 22:7) Most literally, the midrash tells us that Moses became rich from the chippings which came from the second set of tablets in which the Ten Commandments were carved. He made his money from what had to be done to get the Torah. (Sh'mot Rabbah 46:2) Yet, the Torah is not to be treated as a means to an end. One must not study in order to achieve wealth or long life, but rather as an expression of love for G-d. (Sifrei Dvarim 41) One must not appear to be using Torah for his personal gain even if it means great expense. Thus, we find that R. Tarfon was saddened by his violation of this principle.

When suspected, on the basis of circumstantial evidence, of stealing grapes, he should have explained the laws of hefker to the owner of the field and then volunteered to pay for all of the stolen fruit. (T.B. Nedarim 62a)

Moreover, there is a relationship between the reward of Torah study in the world-to-come and our economic situation in this world. In times of great poverty rabbis have been known to pray for financial assistance so they could celebrate Shabbat or Pesach in the traditional manner.

When R. Shimon b. Halafta did so, a hand-like thing appeared and gave him a valuable jewel. With this jewel he was able to buy everything necessary, but when he told his wife what had happened, she refused to accept what he had bought until he agreed to redeem the jewel and to return it. She explained that this was part of his reward in the world-to-come and that that reward would be diminished were he to keep it. (Sh'mot Rabbah 52:3; Midrash T'hilim 92:8)

Similarly, we find that the students of R. Shimon b. Yochai were jealous of one of their colleagues who had left the academy, gone to India and returned a rich man. R. Shimon went to the valley with them and commanded it to be filled with gold coins. Then he offered the coins to his students, warning them that they would be taking part of their share in the world-to-come. (Midrash T'hilim 92:8) Better is the study of Torah and its special rewards than those of earthly riches.

It should now be quite apparent that there is a basic

tension underlying the preceding midrashim. On the one hand, people need and want material wealth; on the other, they should be concentrating on Torah and ignoring their material desires. There is a rough balance here between these two sets of demands, although it is clear that the latter predominate. Torah study, though the greatest single value, is not the only one.

In addition to the study of Torah, there were other qualities which were also considered more important than wealth. A good name is to be valued more highly than precious oil. While the oil is available to the rich alone and is perhaps the symbol of wealth, a good name can be had by both the rich and the poor. (Yalkut Sh'moni, Kohelet 973)<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, a rich person who does not have a good name does not wear his wealth well. It is not fitting for him to be rich. Similarly, a poor man who has a good name does not deserve his low economic status. (Shoher Tov, T'hilim 24) One's good name seems to be a higher criterion than his economic status in the estimation of a person, and may itself be one of the determinants of that status. Long life is also to be preferred to great wealth. The midrash tells us that if two scholars study Torah to receive a reward, they receive only wealth and honor. Yet, if they study Torah for its own sake, they receive not only wealth and honor but length of days as well. This is an even higher reward. (T.B. Shabbat 63a)

Moreover, tzedakah is seen as a more valuable quality,

too. With wealth one can "buy" this world; with tzedakah one can "buy" the world-to-come. It is as a result of one's acts of tzedakah that he deserves to receive and to keep wealth. (Derech Eretz Zuta 4) In fact, tzedakah is only a little lower than the study of Torah. In the midrash about R. Hiyya and the angel of death to which we made reference above, R. Hiyya is praised highly for his great deeds of tzedakah, for his personal attention to the needs of the poor. Not knowing that his time was near, he decided that personal tzedakah was a worthy reason for interrupting his studies. While tzedakah cannot postpone the time of a person's death as the study of Torah can, it is very close to it in the rabbinic scale of values. (T.B. Mo'ed Katan 28a)

Finally, wisdom is also superior to wealth. Indeed, the two qualities may be mutually exclusive at times. Riches are not for those of understanding. If you are a person of insight, it is likely that you will not become rich, at least not in this world. (Yalkut Sh'moni, Kohelet 989) One should never bemoan his economic status and say: 'so-and-so is rich and I am not.' Not every person deserves *חכמה וְעוֹשֶׁה*, wisdom and wealth. If one has wisdom, he should be more than satisfied. (Derech Eretz Zuta 4) In fact, given the choice between praying for wealth (to the north) and praying for wisdom (to the south), R. Yehoshua b. Levi always chose to pray for wisdom, explaining that in the process of attaining wisdom, he would also achieve wealth. (T.B. Baba Bathra 25b) The priority of wisdom to

wealth seems clear, even if there is a feeling that he who is wise will in the end become rich as well. (T.B. Sanhedrin 92a) Once again we see the tension of the covenantal dialectic at work. Torah study, tzedakah and wisdom are not to be treated as instrumental values leading to the goal of wealth but neither is that possibility to be ignored.

Seeing wealth in the perspective of this scale of values, one should not be surprised to hear the rabbis say that man should neither put his trust in nor boast about his wealth or his power or even his wisdom. (Pirkei R. Eliezer 6; Tanhuma, Mattot 7; Numbers Rabbah, Mattot 22:7) One who like Korach puts his faith in his wealth may find that it serves as poor protection against sin and gehinnom. Indeed, a foundation made of wealth may drag one down to gehinnom even faster! (Shoher Tov, Mishlei 11; T.B. Pesachim 119a)

This is not to say that wealth does not have an important role to play in one's life. It is still a blessing, a positive part of life and the rabbis have much to say about the proper amount of wealth for a person and about the most effective ways in which one can achieve it. Wealth is one of eight things too much of which is bad, but a little of which is good. (T.B. Gittin 70a) Obadiah, Ahab's wealthy administrator, is described as being rich 'אֲנִי רֵיכִי', as having too much wealth. Yet, he spent it all on tzedakah and even borrowed money during a famine to continue his charitable activities. Perhaps the intent here is that

Obadiah, although he devoted himself to great deeds of charity, had to spend too much of his time and of his life dealing with matters relating to his wealth. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:3) On the other hand, R. Elazar refers to the minimum amount of capital which is necessary to put someone on his feet, to establish his life on a firm foundation. (T.B. Pesachim 119a)

How is one to achieve this reasonable amount of wealth? One way is through prayer. We have seen above that if one prayed to the north, in the direction of the Temple shulchan, the symbol of plenty, which was to the north of the altar, he might receive wealth. (T.B. Baba Bathra 25b) Furthermore, we are instructed to pray that we do not become poor, so poverty will come neither to us nor to our children or our children's children. (T.B. Shabbat 151b) The most explicit expression of this understanding is found in T.B. Kiddushin 82b where R. Meir gives advice to fathers. He tells them to prepare their sons for jobs in clean trades since one's success or failure in business is not related to the particular trade which he pursues but is rather the result of G-d's mercy. Therefore, they should choose good trades for their sons and pray to G-d that they will be successful at them.<sup>52</sup> These prayers for wealth entered the High Priest's petitions as well. We find him praying that the people of Israel may never be in need of supporting one another or of assistance from another people. (T.B. Ta'anit 24b) The traditional priestly benediction is inter-

preted as an appeal to G-d to bless us with wealth and to protect that wealth for us. (Bamidbar Rabbah 11:13)

There are several other paths to wealth as well.<sup>53</sup> Honoring the Torah and Shabbat and paying one's tithes enable the Jew to merit the blessing of wealth. (T.B. Shabbat 119a) Rabbi Akiba became rich from six different incidents, few of which were the direct result of any action which he had taken in order to become rich. He received money from Kalba Savu'a, his father-in-law who was a wealthy citizen of Jerusalem, from a forgotten ship's masthead which he found to be full of money, from a hollowed-out trunk which also contained dinars, and from Ismaelite traders. In addition, a princess in her delirium threw jewels into the sea which washed onto the shore and were found by Rabbi Akiba whose efforts to return it were refused. Instead, he was showered with gifts. Finally, he married the converted wife of Tineius Rufus and received all of her wealth. (T.B. Nedarim 50a) Although this midrash makes it seem as if Rabbi Akiba became very wealthy without having to do anything himself, as if the money had come to him as the result of a dream, it is important to realize that behind these tales lies the conviction that those who study Torah will be amply rewarded.

The proper marriage may lead to lasting wealth, although it is at times difficult to determine which matches are so designated. If a priest's daughter marries an ordinary Israelite, the couple will not do well. One

partner will die an early death or the husband will be dragged into poverty. On the other hand, if a talmid chacham marries a priest's daughter things will work out and he shall become rich. Thus, Rav Papa's marriage was most successful and he became a rich brewer. Yet, the result is not automatic since R. Yehoshua also followed this advice and rather than becoming rich he found himself weak and sickly. Finally, we have the marriage of Rav Idi bar Avin which produced two rabbis. (T.B. Pesachim 49a) Their knowledge of Torah and their devotion to its study may be greater than wealth as we have seen above or it may be the guarantor that they will become wealthy. The study of Torah, even for the lowest of reasons, still earns one the rewards of wealth and honor. (M. Avot 4:9; T.B. Shabbat 63a) Yet, one is left with the feeling that the real problem here is that no rule always works.

The rabbis also offer helpful hints for business transactions which will help one to become rich. When making a deal one should take possession and close the sale even if he has to rent space in the seller's stall to store the purchase. This guarantees that the seller will not retract the sale to the buyer's loss. (T.B. Ketubot 103a) So too the businessman is encouraged to build up his capital a little at a time, by saving something each day and not consuming all that he earns. (Sifrei Dvarim Piska 48) Finally, we are urged to work hard in honest trading and to seek G-d's mercy. (T.B. Niddah 70b)

In conclusion, we have seen that the rabbis viewed wealth as a blessing from G-d, as a positive attribute of life. They expanded the strict understanding of wealth in material terms to include several other aspects. Wealth was not regarded, however, as the primary value in life for several others were to be preferred to it. The proper or necessary amount of wealth seems to have been quite reasonable in amount and the rabbis provide us with several hints as to how such wealth can be obtained. Yet, their basic understanding of wealth was bi-focal, with the two foci in a constant state of tension. Wealth was necessary for man's survival as a full person, but it could not be allowed to become his primary goal. Other values were more important and were to be stressed by the rich.

## CHAPTER III

## THE RABBINIC VIEW OF POVERTY

In this chapter we will analyze the rabbinic attitude toward poverty as well as the rabbi's estimation of the life of the poor. The various terms used to designate the poor will be presented and defined. Thereafter, the nature of poverty will be studied, and this will be followed by an examination of the limits placed on the harshness of poverty and on the emptiness of the life of the poor. The responsibility of all Jews not to become poor or to let those close to them do so will then be discussed. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the special status of the poor under ritual and civil law.

There are seven basic terms which are used by the rabbis to refer to the poor. These are explicated briefly in Vayikra Rabbah 34:6,

a general term for the poor	צ' - כחשע
one in need of everything	אביון - שמתאב פכ
one despised by all	סכין - שהלא גו' לכ
one dispossessed of his property	ג - מן פנכס'ם
one detached from his property	ג - מדועד מן פנכס'ם
one who is crushed; who sees something but cannot eat.... and can neither taste nor drink it	צב - מדוכבך, חלף צבך ואינו אוכל... ואינו טועם ואינו שותה
one who is lowly before all, who is like the lowest threshold	מך - שהלא מך לפני כל עשוי כמין סקולפה פתחתו

The poor are lacking material possessions and are despised, crushed and stepped on as a result of their economic position. They are the lowliest of all people. One group of special concern to the rabbis were those who had been rich but had lost their wealth and become poor. This status is captured by the word **עני**, reduced in wealth. Careful attention must be paid when dealing with a **בן עשירים**

**עני**, the son of a great family who has become poor and who is likely to be quite sensitive about his newly reduced circumstances. (Vayikra Rabbah 34:1) In a parallel passage **עני** is identified not with a **בן עשירים** but rather as a **בן טובים**, a good person or the member of a highly regarded family who has lost his property. (T.J. Pe'ah 8:9) Similarly, **עני** or **עניים** refer to Israel when the people err either through the misuse of food within their homes (Yalkut Sh'moni Shoftim 60)<sup>54</sup> or through the neglect of the mitzvot (**ענין מן המצוות**) and consequently lose their former possessions. (Vayikra Rabbah 34:6) The poverty which comes to these Jews is so great that not a single one of them can afford even the poor offering. (Vayikra Rabbah 34:6)<sup>55,56</sup> Thus, a **עני** is one reduced to a very real state of poverty, although it is also possible that **עני** may merely refer post facto to one's reduced state. In addition, the extreme poverty which is described here may be a hyperbolic way of cautioning the Jews against non-observance of the mitzvot. Just as we have seen in the preceding chapter that the term rich can have a wide scope, so the term poor does

not always refer to those who live in abject poverty. A second listing of terms denoting the poor (Tanhuma Behar 3) contains the word תככי' , which is defined elsewhere as ענין ענין (Vayikra Rabbah 34:4), a person of reasonable income.

The halachic definition of עני' is anyone who has less than two hundred zuzim. Only such a person is entitled to the agricultural produce left for the needy, such as ענין , ענין , ענין and ענין . (T.B. Sotah 21b) In addition, within the halachah there appear to be other distinctions as well. Thus, the use of the adjective ענין , meaning "in need" or even "starving" (Sifrei R'ei 116), can be used to strengthen any of the preceding terms. An ענין ענין is poorer than an עני' and is one the same level as, if not synonymous with, an ענין .<sup>57</sup> We therefore find that it is not enough to state that one must not side with a עני' in his legal arguments. The Torah must also state that this applies to an ענין as well. The latter is poorer than a עני' , who may retain some status as a result of his former wealth and position. (Mechilta Mishpatim 23) Elsewhere we find an עני' functioning as a wage-earner and earning enough money to afford to be too proud to demand his wages when they are not paid on time. An ענין could not afford such pride and therefore special legal consideration must be given to the עני' over both the עני' and the ענין . (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 111b)<sup>58</sup>

Although there may be levels of poverty, the poor are seen as generally leading very hard and undesirable lives.

Poverty is one of the harshest conditions in the world:

שכל מי שכלו מדבק בקצות, כאילו דבק  
בו כל יסורים שהעולם וכליו באו עליו כל  
הקלות שהמשנה תורה.

For it is as if all the suffering in the world clings to him who is poor and as if all the curses in the book of Deuteronomy have come upon him. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:14) It cannot be removed easily nor overcome quickly. If all of the other forms of suffering are placed in one scale and poverty in the other, poverty would outweigh them all. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:14)<sup>59</sup> Thus, we find that when Job is given the choice between receiving the worst form of suffering or poverty, he chooses the former. Poverty was too hard for him to bear:

צרות בתוך ביתו, poverty within one's household, is worse than **ח'ף**, than fifty plagues. (T.B. Baba Bathra 116a; Sh'mot Rabbah 31:11)<sup>60</sup> Any other affliction would be easier than poverty. Yet, the suffering which was brought down on Job was very severe indeed. So much so that Job cried out to his friends for comfort, but they told him not to complain saying, **כי עז נבחרת מעוני** (Job 36:21), for you have chosen this (suffering) rather than poverty. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:11; T.B. Baba Bathra 116a) In fact, poverty is so hard that from it alone does one never recover. After being poor, one will never be the same. His eyes will be weakened; his whole outlook on the world will be changed.

(Yalkut Sh'moni Ruth 601) Even his physical appearance will be different. The eyes of the poor protrude, either from their inadequate diet which is excessively rich in fats that settle below the eyes, or from their endless tears. (Shoher Tov T'hillim 73) The light of the world will not reach them easily. Furthermore, the poor cannot pamper themselves or cater to bodily comforts. Thus, when a poor girl reaches puberty at an especially early age ( *ליל פ'ת'ה' ליל'ה'*  ), she must use lime to remove the public hairs. The fine flour of the rich and the oil of myrrh used by princesses are not available to her. She must use the rougher lime and bear the additional pain to fulfill the same ritual act. (T.B. Shabbat 80b) While these midrashim and many of those described below are typical of aggadic exaggeration, the rabbis did feel very strongly about the difficult life of the poor, using hyperbole to express their great concern.

Poverty also leaves the poor unprotected from the elements. R. Yehoshua b. Levi visited Rome and saw how even the buildings were protected from extreme heat and cold with drapes while the poor had but two reed mats! He concluded that when G-d punishes someone with poverty, He hits him very hard, smashing him (or his life) into splinters. (Pesikta de Rav Kahana 9:1)<sup>61</sup> The life of the poor is so splintered that they have lost their senses. Not only are their eyes dimmed but they seem to have lost control over their lives. The agonies of poverty ( *ב'ק'ב'ק' ע'נ'י'ת'*  ) are one of only three things which *מ'צ'ר'ן א'ת' ה'א'ק'*

זל בעת וזה בעת קונו, which cause a person to lose his mind and his knowledge of G-d, (T.B. Eruvin 41b) One can be so overcome by the hardness of poverty that as we shall see below he can be held only partially accountable for his actions. (T.B. Eruvin 41b) In this context, we find that R. Kahana is forced to sell baskets among the women in the market place to support himself. When a certain matron makes immoral overtures to him (תבזתיך רביא מלרונתא), he leaves the marketplace on the pretense of adorning himself and jumps off the roof, trying to commit suicide. After saving him, Elijah complains at being put to such trouble. Yet, when R. Kahana reminds him that it was out of his great poverty that he was forced to put himself into such temptation-filled work, Elijah gives him money. (T.B. Kiddushin 40a) The poor are often placed in such situations of great temptation and the rabbis recognized how difficult they are to withstand, and the rabbis, though not expecting them to commit suicide, did recognize how difficult it is to be poor and righteous.

R. Kahana is seen as preferring death to a life filled with such temptations and indeed poverty itself is often referred to as being like death:

ותנא: ארבעה חסידין כמות-  
עני וחבורה וכלא ומ' אין לו בנים.

Four are thought of like the dead:  
the poor, the leper, the blind and  
the sonless. (T.B. Nedarim 64b)<sup>62</sup>

We have seen earlier that poverty darkens the eye, making

the poor like the blind. Being dependent upon others for food ( **המזכר על שולחן אחר'ס** ), they live in a world of darkness. (T.B. Betzah 32b) There are also midrashic parallels between the poor and the sick. If someone gives a poor person enough money to buy food, at a time of great stress so that his soul becomes peaceful within him and he is revived ( **ורח"ת אלת** ), G-d will repay the kindness by saving someone in his family when he is sick or dying. (Tanhuma Mishpatim 15; Vayikra Rabbah 34:2) Thus, the poor seem to share common traits with the blind and the diseased. None of them can have full lives.

Death is also equated with poverty in another context:

**אמר רבן שמעון בן זמא'אל : כל  
מקל שנתנו חכמים צינרם או מיתה או עוני.**

Rabban Shimon b. Gamliel said:

Whenever the sages set their eye (against one),  
the result is death or poverty.

(T.B. Mo'ed Katan 17b)

The two punishments seem to be nearly equivalent and this correspondence is made more explicit in a parallel reference where Rav Chanin says in the name of Rav:

**שכל מקום שהזכרת השם מצו"ה לש,  
עניות מצו"ה ועניות כמיתה.**

Wherever the name of G-d is taken in vain,  
there poverty will be found, and poverty is  
like death.

(T.B. Nedarim 7b)

Poverty is a living death; it is a life which is not life.

Thus, the same terms which are used for the poor, i.e. **עני** ,

**גד** , and **אביון** , are used as literary parallels for a

dead body about to be buried. Those who accompany the body to the cemetery are being gracious to the **דף** and to the **אביון** and are not mocking the **עני**.<sup>63</sup> Even a man's wife will not go with him into poverty. Adam called his wife Eve because she was **אם כל חי**, the mother of all life. Yet, R. Shimon b. Elazar said Eve was **אם כל חי**, with Adam in all life. Should he become rich (**חי**), she would rise up in status with him, but should he become poor, she would not descend with him. (Bereshit Rabbah 20:28) Poverty is not life; it is death.

The life of the poor is a hard one for three reasons: they must constantly seek and be worried about their daily bread, they are not independent and they are subject to frequent and easy embarrassment. The fear of starvation seems to have been a very real one to the rabbis. When given the aforementioned choice between poverty and other suffering Job chose other forms of suffering for he dreaded the thought of being in the marketplace without enough money to buy bread: **כשאזא לשוק ואין בידי פרואה לקנות, מה אאכל**

When I go to the marketplace and don't have a peruta to buy bread, what will I eat?

(Sh'mot Rabbah 31:11)

The same fear is expressed elsewhere, as R. Pinhas said in the name of R. Reuven:

**היתה כבר בי פרואה וצנ' אחת בשוק ואין בידי אלא תשעה ובה אחת ונתן לו פרואה ונטל כבר מאכזה ושבת נפשו עלי'...**

If a piece of bread costs ten perutot but a poor person standing in the marketplace has but nine and someone comes and gives him a peruta so that he takes a piece of bread and eats it and his soul is restored within him...

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:2)

As we have seen above, in such cases G-d attributes to the rich man the merit of having saved the poor man's life, for bread is literally and symbolically his staff of life. This concept is also found in the description of the **מנחה** sacrifice, the meal-offering which the poor bring as their sin-offering also. How does G-d receive this offering?

מעבד אני עמלן כאילו הקריב נפשו.

I account it to him as if he had sacrificed his life.

(T.B. Menachot 104b)

Meal or flour is the last barricade between the poor and death. In fact, one can understand the difference between the rich and the poor strictly in terms of the ease with which they find food to eat. The midrash expresses this idea in the form of an allegory:

אמר רב פבא :  
עית דעניא מכללא.  
ועית דעתיך מחזיקא.

Rav Papa said:

None are poorer than a dog.

None are richer than a swine.

(T.B. Shabbat 155b)

The meaning here is that the dog, about whose feeding no one pays any attention, is the very symbol of poverty, while the swine, who will eat anything and who is fed a

lot, is the symbol of wealth. The availability of one's daily meals and the absence of worry about food distinguish the two economic groupings.

The poor also suffer from embarrassment before their fellow Jews. Two times during the year, on the holidays of the Fifteenth of Av and on Yom Kippur, special consideration is paid to this aspect of their hardship. The midrash tells us that these two days are unlike any other holidays of the calendar for only then do the maidens of Jerusalem wear borrowed white clothing ( *יְצִיאַת הַכֶּסֶּף לְבָנִים וְלַאֲמָלוֹת* ) so as not to embarrass the poor who have no white clothing of their own. (T.B. Baba Bathra 121a)<sup>64</sup> The equal participation of the whole community made these two holidays the most joyous of the year, despite the fact that Yom Kippur is by its nature not a very happy time. The rich are referred to as *פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ*, the face of the earth, since they have happy faces ( *פְּנֵי שְׂמֵחִים* ) when they see their friends. The poor, on the other hand, *אֵין לוֹ פָּנִים*, have no face since they are embarrassed before their few friends. (Bere-shit Rabbah 91:5; Tanhuma Mikketz 7) In fact, the world of the rich is completely separate from that of the poor:

*אֵין עֲנִיּוֹת בְּמַקְלָם עֲשִׂירֹת.*

There is no poverty in a place of wealth.  
(T.B. Tamid 31b)<sup>65</sup>

In places of wealth, such as the Temple, no signs of poverty are to be found. No inferences are to be drawn about places of wealth and about the wealthy from examples

of places of poverty. Wealth and poverty seem to be distinct categories, and signs of poverty would be inappropriate in places of wealth. It is no wonder that the poor are embarrassed about their circumstances.

Not only do the poor have no happy face to show in public, their face changes colors like a כרלם, like a bird which changes color in the sun. Whenever they are in public, their faces reveal their discomfort. As Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi said:

כאילו נדון גני דניס : אלס ואיס.  
גנא : פדכבת אנוש לראטנו באנו  
באש ובאיש.

It is as if two judgments (were brought against the poor): fire and water. As it is said (Ps. 66:12): You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and water.

(T.B. Berachot 6b)

The poor suffer two levels of embarrassment: fire, their red blushing, and water, their becoming white and pale. They must bear with the fire of public shame and the water of poor health and constant worry.

Another significant characteristic of these poor people is their dependence on others . גנצארק אדס עבריות .

(T.B. Berachot 6b) As our sages have taught:

ג' חייבן אינדי חייס . ואילו פן :  
המצבה לשלחן חכירן , ומי גאטני מושלת  
עציו , ומי טיסרין מושעין גזאבן .

Three people live lives that are no lives:  
He who is dependent on another's table;  
He whose wife rules him; and  
He whose suffering controls his body.

(T.B. Betzah 32b)

The common thread here is the lack of control over one's life. One's life is "no life" if he cannot determine his behavior to any reasonable degree, if his whole life is focused on satisfying a single all-consuming need. This dependence is by its nature difficult to overcome. This can be seen in the concluding section of the preceding midrash:

אף מ' שאין לו אלא חליק אחד.

Also, he who has but one shirt.

This addition is rejected by the Tanna who set up the original list because the shirt could easily be cleaned while the three other cases could be not be reversed very quickly. The difficulty which a poor person has in overcoming his low economic status finds expression in an halachic corollary as well.<sup>66</sup> If a person lends money to a poor man and the poor man dies, the court is empowered to repay the loan out of the poor tithes. However, if the poor man should become rich and the collateral of his share of the poor tithes no longer be valid, there is no safeguard by the court. The rabbis asked why there were safeguards against default by death and not in the case of enrichment. They answered as follows:

מיתת שכיחא, עשרות לא שכיחא.  
אמר רב פפא: הינו דאמר אינשי  
חברק מת, אשר; איתער, לא תאשר.

Dying is a frequent occurrence, becoming rich is not.  
Rav Papa said:

If people say your friend has died, believe it. (If they say that) he has become rich, don't believe it.  
(T.B. Gittin 30a)

Once a person becomes poor, the chances are that he will remain so.<sup>67</sup> Yet, this does not apply to their children after them, for we are warned:

הזהרו בבני צני'ם שמען תצא תורה

Be careful with the children of the poor for Torah will come from them.  
(T.B. Nedarim 81a)<sup>68</sup>

Poverty is not passed on from generation to generation, for one's children can become rich, both in Torah as well as in material possessions.

In addition, there are other limitations on the severity of poverty. Although it is a most oppressive form of suffering, there is one which is even worse: barrenness. A connection is made between the צני' and the עקרה in a midrash about Rabbi's son. After marrying, he spent twelve years finishing his studies. During this time his wife became barren and the question arose as to whether there should be a divorce. Yet, if it were to be so decreed, people would say of his wife:

צני'ה זו לשאלא שמרה.

This poor woman waited in vain.  
(T.B. Ketubot 62b)

The woman was "poor" because she had become barren. In another context the severity of barrenness is made quite clear:

כי שמים אלה אביונים ה' ואת אסיריו לא בצרה. אמר ר' בנימין בן עזי: לא ראשו של פסוק הנה סבא, ולא סבא ראשו.

לֹא הִי צְרִיךְ קִרָּא עֲמִימָר אֵלֶּא כִּי שׂוֹמֵעַ  
 אֵל אֲבִיּוֹנִים הִי נֹתֵת אֲסִירִים לֹא בְּצַד. אִם כִּי  
 שׂוֹמֵעַ אֵל אֲבִיּוֹנִים הִי וְנֹתֵת אֲסִירִים וְאֵל אֵלֶּא כִּי  
 שׂוֹמֵעַ אֵל אֲבִיּוֹנִים הִי, אֵלֶּא יִשְׂרָאֵל... וְנֹתֵת אֲסִירִים  
 לֹא בְּצַד, אֵלֶּא פְּעֻקּוֹת שֶׁבֶן אֲסוּרוֹת בְּתוֹךְ  
 בְּתִיבָן וְעֹלָבוֹת.

For G-d hearkens to the needy and despises not His prisoners. (Ps. 68:34) R. Benjamin b. Levi said: the beginning and end of this verse do not match. The verse should read either "for G-d hearkens to the needy and despises not the prisoners" or "for G-d hearkens to His needy and His prisoners". However, "for G-d hearkens to the needy" refers to Israel; and "despises not His prisoners" refers to the barren women who are captive in their homes, and unfortunate. (Bereshit Rabbah 71:1)

Although, as we shall see below, G-d has a special, close relationship to the poor, His relationship to those who are barren is even closer. They are His prisoners and He acts to release them by granting them children. Since barrenness is harder to bear than poverty, G-d's role becomes more direct and His relationship closer.

Despite the burdens under which they live, the poor are considered full members of the community. Thus, they too are forbidden to eat on Passover without reclining:

וַיֹּסֶף אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָעָם. מִכָּאן אֲמָרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ:  
 אֲפִילוֹ עֲנֵי שְׁבִיטָא לֹא יֵאכְל עֲצָה שִׁסְבָּ  
 שֶׁכֶּן עֲשֵׂה עֲרֵם הִקְבִּי'ה שֶׁנֶּא': וַיֹּסֶף אֱלֹקִים.

And G-d led the people about (or, caused them to lean. (Ex. 13:18) From here our rabbis concluded: Even a poor Jew cannot eat until he leans. For so G-d did to them: And G-d caused (them) to lean. (T.B. Pesachim 99b; Sh'mot Rabbah 20:16)

All of the Israelites experienced the exodus from Egypt and were given freedom. The poor are still free and must act like free men on Passover. They must forget, for the moment at least, their usual state of dependence and concentrate on their ability to rise above such enslavement. Furthermore, just as a rich man's time is valuable so too is that of the poor man. According to the halachah, the land-owner cannot leave an arbitrary part of his field for Pe'ah. Rather, he must leave **סוף שדהו**, the end of his field. Among the many reasons given for this regulation is included **ביטול עניים**, wasting the poor man's time:

**שלא יהיו עניים יושבין ומשמרין כל היום ואומרין: עכשיו הוא נותן פאה, עכשיו הוא נותן פאה, אלמא יאמרו וילקאו בשדה אחרת ויבאון בשעה הכיזו.**

So that the poor will not sit and watch all day long and say: now he's giving Pe'ah, now he's giving Pe'ah. Rather they should go and reap in another field and come back at the time of the finishing (of the harvest).

(T.J. Pe'ah 4:3)

A poor man's time has value and is not to be abused. He is not to be kept waiting but must be able to do his work and to live his life in an orderly fashion.<sup>69</sup>

Poverty is not an excuse for improper behavior. Thus, we find that the poor man who delays marrying off his daughter is called a **רשע ערום**, a subtly wicked person, which

is a particularly strong condemnation. No financial consideration can be used to justify not betrothing one's daughter once she has become a **בוגרת**, an adolescent.

The father cannot deny her her independence. (T.B. Sanhedrin 76a) In addition, the poor must study and fulfill the Torah. R. Pinchas' ass refused to eat the barley which was put before him, even after it had been sifted and carefully picked, because it had not been tithed. As the midrash concludes:

עניו כי הולכת לעשות רצון קונו,  
ואת מאכילין אותו טבלים.

This poor one is doing the will of its creator, and you are feeding it untithed produce.

(T.B. Hullin 7b)

If even the poor beasts must obey G-d's will, then surely poor people must do so too! They cannot claim that the strictures of their poverty prevented them from doing so since Hillel will testify against them. No one was poorer than he. He earned but a single tropaik each day. Yet, out of that he gave half to the shomer of the Bet Hamidrash. Once he did not have even that much so he spent the winter night by the window of the Bet Hamidrash where he was soon covered with snow. The next morning Sh'maiah and Avtalyon discovered him and said:

ראוי זה לחלל ערסו את השבת.

For this one it is appropriate to desecrate Shabbat.

(T.B. Yoma 35b)

Hillel had behaved in an admirable way. His desire to study

Torah was stronger than any personal concerns he might have had about his personal welfare. The poor are to follow his example. Thus, we see in this hyperbolic story that here too the rabbis put the study of Torah above all economic considerations.

Tzedakah is also incumbent upon the poor.

וְשֶׁתְּתַתֵּן מִתְּצַדָּקָה לְאִישׁ עָנִי.

A poor person who is supported by charity must give charity.

(T.B. Gittin 7b)

Since the poor are free and complete people, they too must help to support those less fortunate than they. All Israelites are required to pay the annual one-third shekel tax. (T.B. Baba Bathra 9a) This tax was used for the repair and maintenance of the Temple and became one of the bases of the later rabbinic understanding of the responsibility of the poor for charity.

In concluding this section it is important to note that in an effort to balance off or to tone down the terrible things said about poverty, the rabbis also claimed that poverty is at times considered one of the *מִצְוֹת טוֹבוֹת*, of the good qualities. This is true at least for Israel as we will see below. G-d selected poverty from among all of the good qualities to be the one for His people! (T.B. Chagigah 9b) Some encouragement had to be given the poor.

The terms used for the poor are also found in reference to non-economic poverty, though they all derive from

the primary economic meaning. In justifying its conclusion that the poor are like the dead, the midrash cites Ex. 4:19: **כִּי מָתוּ כָּל הָאָדָמָה**, for all the men had died. This is seen as referring to Dathan and Abiram who were alive at the time of Korach's revolt. They had lost their influence and were poor in terms of personal power (and also in terms of economic power, no doubt). (T.B. Nedarim 64b) Similarly, the tribe of Levi is called **עָד** as a result of the fact that it was few in numbers, poor in terms of population. It was also **עָד** because the Levites were not given any land as an inheritance in Israel. (Bamidbar Rabbah 5:2)

A more common understanding of the poor is that of people who are ignorant about the Torah and its laws. Thus, we find:

**עֲנִיָּה. עֲנִיָּה מִן הַצְדִּיקִים  
עֲנִיָּה מִדְּבַר תּוֹרָה  
עֲנִיָּה מִמִּצְוֹת וּמִמַּעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים.**

Poor: Poor with respect to the righteous;  
poor in Torah, in mitzvot and in good deeds.  
(Pesikta de Rav Kahana 18:2)

The study and fulfillment of Torah was considered a higher value than economic status. Real poverty to the rabbis is the absence of Torah from one's life. In a statement of obvious hyperbole the midrash tells us that the Jews of Babylonia suffered from poverty in Torah (**עֲנִיּוּת דְּתוֹרָה**) because they were too conceited to learn from one another and to share their knowledge. (T.B. Kiddushin 49b) In



Even the sages at times suffered from intellectual poverty. Finally, in an effort to explain an odd ruling through legal reasoning, *ח'י קבצת* is used to refer to someone who is cheap just as *ר'ר קבצת* was used to denote generosity. (T.B. Ketubot 68a)

With this understanding of the nature of poverty and the life of the poor, one can easily see why the rabbis would be concerned about those people who were not poor but who acted in such a way as to risk becoming so. The minimal responsibility placed upon the Jew was to avoid becoming a burden to the community. When a poor man who had once been rich came before Rava, he asked the man why he had eaten such fancy foods and consumed all of his wealth. The man replied that he had not eaten anything belonging to others, that he had not become a burden to the community during his days of wealth. (T.B. Ketubot 67b) He had satisfied the minimum condition. This finds its halachic corollary in two legal rulings. The first sets a twenty per cent limit on the amount of one's capital which can be given to charity in a single year. In the first year twenty per cent of one's capital may be given but afterwards the upper limit is twenty per cent of one's income. This ruling was set down to prevent a person, in this case R. Gamliel bar Ininya, from losing all of his holdings and becoming dependent on others. (T.B. Pe'ah 15b) The rule can be broken only on one's deathbed. Thus, we find that Mar Ukba gave away half of his holdings when he was about to die. This was permitted only be-

cause there was no chance that he would become dependent on communal support. (T.B. Ketubot 67b) Yet, even here limits are imposed. A dying man cannot specify in his will that no money from his estate shall be used to pay for the costs of burying him. He cannot enrich his heirs at the expense of the community. (T.B. Ketubot 48a) The other case deals with someone who finds a lost animal. Must he return it to its owner? He need not do so if in taking time to return it he would lose more than the value of the animal. In such cases the finder is permitted to "hide". He is not obligated to return the lost property at great personal expense. (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 30)

Beyond his responsibility not to become poor himself, the Jew must try to establish a situation in which others will not be impoverished wither.<sup>72</sup> This can be done in two ways: by changing elements of the economic structure or by lending money to the needy. Every Friday R. Huna would buy up all of the vegetables that were left over with the gardeners and would throw them into the river. If he did not give them to the poor, why did he buy them at all? He wanted to prevent the gardeners from sinning in the future by cutting back in their output. He changed the conditions of supply and demand so produce would be plentiful and the plight of the poor would be eased. (T.B. Ta'anit 20b) On a smaller scale, R. Yehoshua's advice to Rabban Gamliel is another case in point. Rabban Gamliel had two students who were especially learned, both in science and in Torah,

but who were so poor as to lack bread to eat and clothing to wear. R. Yehoshua urged his friend to give them positions in the community. They should not have been poor, at least not so poor. (T.B. Horayot 10a)

The second way in which one can prevent others from becoming poor is through lending. Here a rather detailed list of priorities is given which emphasizes that one's greatest responsibility is the economic well-being of those closest to him. If there is a choice between supporting yourself and giving to others, you come first.<sup>73</sup> (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 30) Thereafter, the order of priority is: the poor in your family, in your city, in another city, elsewhere in Israel and finally the non-Jewish poor. (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 71a; Tanhuma Mishpatim 15) Yet, within this list there are additional criteria. If the choice is between an אביון and a תלם, within any of the preceding groups, the תלם takes precedence. Within one's family a paternal half-brother has priority over a maternal half-brother, presumably because he shares more directly in the line of inheritance and in the perpetuation of the donor's family name. (Sifrei R'ei 116) Nevertheless, there do seem to be some exceptions. Eliezer of Barthotha used to run after the charity collectors. One day he was going to buy a nedunya, a wedding outfit, for his daughter when he saw some people collecting money to buy one for an orphan. He decided that an orphan took precedence over his own daughter and gave them his money. For this act of charity he was greatly re-

warded. (T.B. Ta'anit 24a)<sup>74</sup>

Another special case is that of a traveller who is assessed for a charity donation while in a foreign town. If he is there as an individual, he is to pay the assessment which is used to support the local poor. However, if **בני העיר**, the representatives of one city, go to another and are assessed, they must pay but the money will be returned to them upon their departure so it may be used to help the poor in their home city. This ruling applies only if there is no **חכם צדיק**, no talmid chacham, in charge of charity. (T.B. Megillah 27) The concern here involves the distribution of charity funds. It is preferable to have the official representatives handle the assessment if there is no talmid chacham present than to entrust it to a local collector who might be less reliable and less accountable.

If the choice is between giving money to a Jew or to a non-Jew at interest, one must still lend to the Jew:

**אמר מר: צמי ונכרי; צמי קודם פשיטא!**

A master said:

A choice between a member of my people and a non-Jew - my people come first obviously!

(T.B. Baba Metzi'a 71a)

In fact, it is a sign of merit if one is able to lend his money to Jews:

**ותפק לרעה-אם זכיתם לרעהו של  
יעקב; ואם לאו, לרעהו של עשו.**

If you deal your bread to the hungry. (Isa. 58:7)  
If you're worthy, you'll give to the hungry  
of Jacob; if not, to satiate Esau.

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:13)

Non-Jews have a unique relationship to poverty and wealth. There are ten shares of wealth in the world. Nine of them went to Rome and one to the rest of the world. Of the ten parts of poverty, nine went to Lod (Israel) and one to the rest of the world. The non-Jews seem to have done rather well, according to this formulaic understanding.<sup>75</sup> Yet, if non-Jews live among Jews and become rich, their success is attributed to the Jews. Similarly, if a Jew lives among non-Jews and becomes poor, his failure is due to the company he has been keeping. (Sifra Behar 25) The message is clear: do not seek out rich non-Jews with whom to live, for their company is likely to impoverish you. If the non-Jews try to exploit the Jews among them, if they use them for slave labor in the building of storehouses, they will become poor and their lives will be endangered. (T.B. Sotah 11a)<sup>76</sup>


Although as we have seen the rabbis encouraged the poor to take a full share in the community, they did realize that their difficult situation required some special consideration with respect to the ritual and civil law. In the area of ritual law the rabbis were particularly sensitive to the plight of the poor. A popular saying claimed **כֶּתֶר עֲנִי**

**כֶּתֶר עֲנִי**, poverty follows the poor. The rabbis saw the truth of this statement in the way in which the poor brought the first fruits to the priests. While the rich used gold and silver baskets which they took home with them, the poor used wicker baskets which the priests kept.

Thus, the poor went home empty-handed among the lepers, who had to show their state publicly (Lev. 13:45) for all to hear. (T.B. Baba Kamma 92a) When they discussed the poor man's sacrifice, the rabbis stressed how significant and important it was. We have already seen that the meal-offering was attributed to the poor as if they had sacrificed their lives. (T.B. Menachot 104b) While the smell of burning birds' wings (the sacrifice of the poor) usually made one nauseous, wings were burned at the altar so it might be enhanced (ש"הא דמנחה מרובץ) by the only offerings which the poor could bring. Furthermore, the poor man's sacrifice often took precedence over that of the rich. Once King Agrippa wanted to offer one thousand burnt offerings. He told the priests that no one else was to offer any sacrifice until the king's offerings were completed. Yet, a poor man came with two turtle doves, half of his daily catch, and the priest offered them upon the altar before burning the king's sacrifices. He did so since otherwise he would have destroyed the man's livelihood. The poor man's sacrifice (a rather generous one) and his continued sustenance took precedence over the king's fancy desires. Agrippa himself agreed that this was the proper thing to do. (Vayikra Rabbah 3:5)

We also find the case of a man who brought an ox to be sacrificed. The ox would not move because it had a needle within it. When a poor man offered his bundle of endive, the ox sneezed and expelled the needle through its throat

without creating any invalidating perforation. The sacrifice of the poor man came first and it enable the richer person to offer his as well. (Vayikra Rabbah 3:5)

Since the poor baked their bread by putting it directly over the fire in order to save fuel, the question arose as to whether such bread was subject to the , the bread offering. It was concluded that since this was indeed the bread of the poor, the offering had to be made even though all of the dough had in effect been cast into the fire. (T.B. Pesachim 37b) The rich were sensitized symbolically to the life-style of the poor when they participated in the Passover ritual. Now they too had to bake matzah quickly over the fire so as not to waste fuel and had to eat it in small pieces as the poor did. (T.B. Pesachim 115b-116a)

In addition, it was decreed that all aspects of the funeral service were to be identical for the rich and the poor. The poor were not to be embarrassed or disheartened at the time of death within their families as they were so often in their lives. Therefore, all Jews used plain biers, covered the faces of the dead, used colored glasses and put out the same kinds of flowers in the house of mourning. Nothing was to be done which would distinguish the socio-economic groupings. (T.B. Mo'ed Katan 27)

While this was certainly the ideal to which the rabbis looked, it is unlikely that it did in fact occur. A more real situation involved the proper Shabbat attire. It was also deemed acceptable for the rich women to go out on

Shabbat wearing all of their finery, their gilded hairnets and silver head bands, while the poor wore bands of colored material. (T.B. Shabbat 57b) We must recall, however, that on the most joyous holidays it was hoped that even clothes differences were removed. (T.B. Baba Bathra 121a)

Distinctions were also made according to the economic situation of the community as a whole. Although Temple objects were not to be made like secular ones, this was permitted if the community was too poor to do otherwise. Thus, the ruling that the lampholders were not to be made of wood was set aside during the Hasmonean cleansing and rededicating of the Temple due to the people's poverty. As they got richer, the candlesticks were overlaid first with metal and later with gold and silver. (T.B. Rosh Hashanah 24b) Similarly, the discussion of the proper place for the Havdalah service related to the wealth of the community. At first, since they were poor, the members of the Keneset Hagedolah put Havdalah within the T'fillah so it would not require the drinking of an extra cup of wine. When the economic situation improved, the service was separated but whenever conditions worsened again it was reincorporated. (T.B. Berachot 33a)<sup>77</sup>

Within the area of civil law special consideration was also given to the poor. The model for and justification of this practice comes from the midrashic view of G-d's behavior. G-d exacts punishment from a person according to the extent of his possessions. The rich pay with oxen; the

poor give sheep. (T.B. Pesachim 118a) Similarly, there are six crimes whose punishment varies with the perpetrator's economic status.<sup>78</sup> Three groupings are recognized before the law with respect to these crimes: the rich, the poor, and the poorest among the poor. (T.B. Keritot 10b) There are also two seals in the Temple for the **חולא**, the drink offerings. One is labelled **חולא דא**, and the other **חולא דב**, according to the differentiation set forth in the Torah. (M. Shekalim 5:3)<sup>79</sup> The rich and the poor do have different legal status in these areas where special consideration will help the poor to participate more fully.

This can be seen in the court procedures as well. If a person injures someone, he is liable to him for five items, one of which is **בזלזול**, embarrassment. But how is this embarrassment to be measured? R. Meir, feeling that all people are primarily **בני חורין**, free and equal, claims that it is the same whether the injured party is rich or poor. R. Yehuda argues that great men suffer more embarrassment. Yet, the halachah follows R. Shimon who incorporates both of these views to some extent. There is a difference between the level of embarrassment of different socio-economic groups but R. Shimon lessens that difference. The rich are therefore treated as free men who have just lost their possessions and are at the top of this grouping. The poor are treated as the lowest members of this group. (T.B. Baba Kamma 86a)

More favorable treatment is given to the poor in other

areas. A poor man's pledge must be returned to him as soon as possible. One cannot keep his collateral overnight although in the case of a rich man's pledge one need not be so prompt in returning it. (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 114b) If one hires laborers, he must pay the **צ"פ** first, the **אביון** second and the **עליון** last. All of the poor must be paid on the day they work. (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 111b) These cases show the great concern which the rabbis had for the poor and the efforts to which they went to lighten their burdens.

Beyond the letter of the law, efforts were also made to encourage the Jew to favor the poor. For example, if there was a doubt about whether some produce had been properly tithed and the full amount left for the poor, the case was decided in favor of the land-owner. Yet, as Resh Lakhish argues:

עני ורש הדין. מאי הדין?  
דין משלך ודין לך.

Do justice to the afflicted and to the poor. (Ps. 82:3)

What is the meaning of "do justice"?...

Be liberal with what is yours.

(T.B. Chullin 134a)

Although the disputed produce legally belongs to the land-owner, he is encouraged to be generous and to give it to the poor voluntarily. Furthermore, there are limitations placed on the damages that can be assessed against a poor workman. If he breaks a wine keg, one cannot take his clothers or attach his wages. The reason given deals with the spirit

of the halachah here:

וארמון צדק'ס תשנ"ו

To keep the path of the righteous. (Prov. 2:20)  
(T.B. Baba Metzi'a 32a)

The righteous Jew will not insist on the full letter of the law.<sup>80</sup> Yet, even here there is a limit. As Bet Hillel argues, one cannot declare something to be **רפוק**, to be ownerless, only with respect to the poor. An item can be **רפוק** only if it is available equally to the rich and the poor. Preferential treatment seems to contradict the essential nature of the principle of **רפוק** and is therefore not permitted. (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 30b)

The rabbis saw the life of the poor as the harshest form of existence. They felt the depth of their affliction and strove to ease their burdens as much as possible. In an effort to convince the Jews of the terrible nature of poverty, the rabbis used extreme, hyperbolic midrashim which showed in a dramatic way the dependence, the embarrassment and the pain of being poor. They urged all Jews to help relieve the suffering of those less fortunate than they and did their best to include the poor as full participants in the life of the community. The poor were encouraged to overcome the burdens of their daily lives, to withstand the temptations of poverty and to observe the mitzvot. There can be no question that the midrashim which refer to poverty as a good, instrumental quality are rationaliza-

tions and that the rabbis did their best to avoid becoming economically dependent themselves and to keep their fellow Jews from becoming so.

## CHAPTER IV

G-D'S ROLE IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME;  
HIS SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP TO THE POOR

Having examined the rabbinic attitude toward wealth and poverty, we are now ready to turn to those questions which most concerned the rabbis: What is G-d's role in the establishment of the present distribution of wealth and poverty in the world? If poverty is so harsh, if it is almost like death, then how could G-d bring it upon anyone? Indeed, why has He not made the distribution of income an equal one? We will begin by showing that the rabbis believed that G-d was indeed responsible for the existing income distribution, that all wealth is His and that He gives it to man. Thereafter, we will discuss the nature of that distribution and the rabbinic understanding of the concept of a fixed amount of world wealth and poverty. Finally, we will turn to the special relationship which exists between G-d and the poor, leaving for the next chapter a detailed analysis of the reasons for the existence of poverty.

All wealth belongs to G-d. The rabbis based this conclusion on two verses: Malachi 2:8 and Psalms 24:1.<sup>81</sup> We often find them using expressions which convey this understanding. If one desires to get rich, he should pray for mercy to *אלוהינו*, to Him who has all wealth. (T.B. Niddah 70b) Elsewhere, the rabbis remark that *כל הון בידו*, all wealth is His. (Derech Eretz Zuta 4)<sup>82</sup>

With this wealth G-d sets the distribution of income. He opens His treasury for the rich (Tanhuma Mishpatim 12), and He sets poverty for others:

אני עשיתי אותך עשיר ואותו עני

I made you rich and him poor.<sup>83</sup>  
(Tanhuma Mishpatim 15)

Moreover, He often does so in a very strong way, as R. Yehoshua b. Levi said after witnessing the suffering of the poor in Rome:

באת ייב את העשיר  
באת נחמי את הענין

When You give, You give plentifully;  
When You diminish (smite), You afflict  
(one with) poverty.  
(Pesikta de Rav Kahana 9:1)

The rabbis' primary concerns here appear to be twofold. In the case of the rich, they worry about their becoming excessively arrogant. They fear that they will conclude that their wealth is the result of personal achievement and success, which presumably have earned them the freedom to use it as they wish. In the case of the poor their concerns lie in the aforementioned problem of theodicy. Thus, the message here is that all wealth belongs to and comes from G-d, not from the efforts of the rich; and that G-d, has indeed  $\text{נִכְרַח}$ , crushed, some of His people with poverty:  $\text{וְעָנִיתִיךָ}$ , and I have afflicted you (and I have made you poor). Furthermore, it is He who will remove this affliction:  $\text{שֶׁבְּיוֹם מִכְּאִין לֹא יִסְמְנִי עֲנִיּוֹת}$

I will no longer show him the signs of poverty. (T.B. Gittin 7b)

G-d has established the distribution of income and no one is to question it. Both poverty and wealth are part of His plan. Thus, the rich are not to scorn the poor as if poverty is a sign of disgrace,

שאני עשיתי אותו דל.  
מי שפלטו גזל או  
מלעז'ז ע'ליו, חרש' ע'ליו  
כאילו ע'ליו פלטו מלעז'ז.

For I have made him poor and whoever robs him or mocks him blasphemes His creator and it is as if he mocked Me.  
(Tanhuma Behar 2)

As we shall see below, the poor did not become so because they were in some way less talented in business or lazy. Poverty is the result of G-d's allocation of personal resources. The loss of status of the poor is not absolute. G-d, who is behind it, is alone absolute and the dignity of the poor is, thus, guaranteed. Just as the rich are not to scorn the poor, so the judges are not to side with the poor against the rich in their legal suits. One cannot rule against a rich person simply because he is rich and can afford to pay the judgment. No one is empowered to steal from the rich, for their allocation comes from G-d as well:

ואני אמרתי להעשיר  
ואתם נוטעין את שטן

For I have said that he be rich,  
and you have taken from him.  
(Shoher Tov T'hillim 82)

The rich are also part of G-d's plan and they are not to be deprived unfairly of their allocation. These midrashim show the rabbinic understanding of human nature and of two natural human prejudices: to put down the poor and to take from the rich.

One must accept the allocation he has and use it to satisfy the needs of his existence. This conclusion is illustrated most clearly in the following midrash. When a recently impoverished man came before Rava asking for support, Rava asked him about his former life style. It had been one of luxurious living, fat turkeys and old wine. Rava was troubled by this and he wondered if the man had considered the needs of the community during the time that he was wealthy. The man responded:

ny The man responded:  
אָטוּ מ'ב'רַח קאַכ'ענאָל מ'רַחמאַן  
קאַכ'ענאָל. דערנאָך: עיין כּם אַלעק י'גור  
וואָרע נאָרן ערשט אַתאַכעס בערן. בערעס  
על נאָר אַלע בערע. מ'מאָר געט אַחע  
אַחע נאָרן דערב'רע פּרענעט בערע.

Did I eat of theirs? I ate of G-d's as it is taught: "The eyes of all wait for You and You give them their food in its season" (according to his habit) (Ps. 145:15) In their season is not written rather in its season, teaching that G-d gives each person sustenance in his situation.

(T.B. Ketubot 67b)

Whatever G-d has allocated for a person should be sufficient to meet that person's needs.<sup>84</sup> Although Rava is not immediately convinced by this argument, the sudden appearance of his sister after thirteen years of separation changes his mind, for she is carrying a fat turkey and some old wine. Nevertheless, this remains a difficult and ideal pattern of behavior.

However, the rich are not free to use their wealth as they see fit. Rather, they must see themselves as the custodians of G-d's property. As R. Avin said:

הַאֲקִיּוֹן אֶתְּן מַסְכִּינָא מִיּוֹנֵק מִיְיָ.

"The needy" (Deu. 15:7) As regards the poor man, give of your wealth which is His.

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:9)

The wealth is G-d's; the rich are merely His agents. He opens His treasury and gives them money to use according to his wishes.<sup>85</sup> They are to give money to the poor and to lend it to them, for these are the only forms of redistribution which possess a legal, though imprecise, character.

The rabbis also wonder what impact a man's behavior, the amount of work he does, will have on his income.<sup>86</sup> Will hard work lead to greater income? Perhaps the best expression of their answer is found in T.B. Niddah 70b:

מִי יַעֲשֶׂה אֶדְנָא וְיִתְעַשֶּׂר? אֲמַר רַבִּי:  
'רַבָּה בְּמַחֲוֵה וְיֵשׁ וְיֵתֵן בְּאִמְנוּתָא. אֲמַרְוּ

על: הרבה עשו כן ולא הועילו. אלא יבקש  
 רחמים ממי שהעושר שלו נא: ע' הכסף  
 וע' הזהב.

What shall a man do to become rich?  
 He said to them: Let him work hard at  
 business and deal truly. They said to  
 him: Many have done so and have not  
 succeeded. Instead, let him seek mercy  
 from Him who has all wealth. As it is  
 said: "Mine is the silver and the gold."  
 (Haggai 2:8)

A man's income depends in part on his own efforts and in part on what G-d has ordained for him. Even as Job could choose between poverty and other suffering as affliction from G-d, so man has a choice between reaching the maximum income destined for him or achieving other goals. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:11; T.B. Ta'anit 21a)

Yet, despite this statement, the rabbinic emphasis seems to be placed on G-d's role in the distribution of income, e.g.

ומקנן רב היה לבני ראובן וא' עשר כ'  
 לא מחוצא וממזבח ולא ממזבח הרים כ'  
 אלקים שופט זה ישיב וזה ירים. מהו כ'  
 לא מחוצא וממזבח. לא מזה שאם יוצא  
 וזמא במחורה והואק ממזרח למזרח  
 נעשה עיר; אפילו פורט בספנות והואק  
 ממזרח למזרח וחוצר על המזבחות ועל  
 הרים אילו נעשה עיר.

"The children of Reuben had many cattle."  
 (Num. 32:1) Consider the text: "For not  
 from the east nor from the west and not  
 from the wilderness is lifting up for G-d  
 is judge:

this one He brings down and this one He raises up." (Ps. 75:7) What is the meaning of For not from the east nor the west? Not as a result of what a man goes out and does in business and goes from east to west will he become rich; even if he sails in ships and goes from east to west and returns to the deserts and mountains, he will not become rich...

(Bamidbar Rabbah 22:7)

G-d's role is the primary one here and man's heroic efforts seem futile indeed. Lasting wealth can come from

Him alone: זכה בעשר זכה בכל. אינתי?

זמן שכן מתנות שמים ובאות הבחן  
התורה אצל גבורתו ועשרו על בשר  
ועם אינו כלום.

If one merits wealth, he merits everything (wisdom, strength). When? When these are the gifts of heaven and come by the power of Torah. But man's power and his wealth are nothing.

(Bamidbar Rabbah 22:6)

Man's efforts will in the end prove to be worthless. The wealth he gathers for himself will not last. This emphasis on G-d's role also clarifies the following midrash:

רבי מאיר אומר: לעולם ילמד אדם עסקו ואומנות  
נק"ה וקלה ויבקש רחמים עליו שהעושר והתעשר  
שלו. שאין עניות מן האומנות ואין עשירות מן  
האומנות אלא עליו שהעושר שלו שוא: ע' רכסו וע' פניה.

Rabbi Meir says: A man should always teach his son an easy, clean trade and seek mercy from Him who has all wealth and property. For neither poverty nor wealth are based on one's trade but on Him who has all wealth. As it is said: "Mine is the silver and the gold." (Haggai 2:8)

(T.B. Kiddushin 82b)

The trade at which one works has no automatic relationship to the income one earns. While it seems that one cannot expect to receive money if he does not work at all, he can nevertheless become rich or poor while working at any trade. G-d determines how effective man's efforts will be. It therefore follows naturally that the proper strategy for an unskilled, unlettered poor person would be to learn a simple handicraft and pray to G-d for support. He need not humble himself before those who are wiser and richer than he or attempt business ventures about which he knows little. He need but master a craft and rely on G-d's mercy. (T.B. Ketubot Rabbah 6:8) Both man and G-d have a significant role to play, but the emphasis here is on G-d.

Yet, interestingly enough, man does have some impact on the size of G-d's treasury. G-d is often compared to a rich man since we have seen that He owns all wealth. We are warned not to curse G-d in our thoughts or in the privacy of our bedrooms. The words denoting G-d here are *מַלְכָּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם* and *מַלְכָּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם*. (Kohelet Rabbah 10:23) Elsewhere G-d is likened to a rich man with poor relatives whom He nevertheless acknowledges as His brethren and treats well. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:5) However, the actions of man, in particular the extent to which he busies himself with Torah, can change all of this. They can reduce this rich G-d to the level of a *פָּנִי*, a poor person. Thus, the midrash tells us:



rabbis gave them greater latitude. The soup kitchen was originally designed for the use of all poor people while the charity fund, קופה , was to be used for the local poor alone. Yet, now the בני העיר , the representatives of the town could use the money raised for the soup kitchen as well as that for the charity fund in any way they wish. In fact, they soon mixed both collections together and divided it as they saw fit. (T.B. Baba Bathra 8b)

Despite the powers invested in these human agents to alter the existing income distribution, the rabbis seemed to feel that it was best for one to learn to live with what he had. Thus, R. Yitzhak agreed to make R. Mani's relatives poor and then rich again in an effort to solve their interpersonal problems and create peace in their homes. It soon became clear that these changes of economic status did little to accomplish the desired effect. One had to learn to live well regardless of his income. There was a limit to the effects which economics had on one's life. (T.B. Ta'anit 23b) R. Yitzhak had the power to make these changes just as R. Shimon b. Yochai could fill a valley with coins (Midrash T'hilim 92:8), but in neither case does this ability change the basic conditions of life. R. Shimon's students do not take the money; they, too, learn it is best to live with their present allocation.<sup>89</sup>

This allocation of economic wealth is set at the beginning of one's life if not before. During pregnancy, the

supervising angel, **מלאך**, takes a drop of the embryonic fluid and brings it before G-d who announces whether the child will be weak or strong, wise or foolish, rich or poor.

(T.B. Niddah 16b) As Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav:<sup>90</sup>

**אַרבעי יום קודם יציאת הוולד בת קול  
יוצאת מאמרת: בת פלוני, זמון, בית פלוני.  
לפני, שדה פלוני, לפלוני!**

Forty days before birth, a Bat Kol goes out and says: The daughter of so-and-so for so-and-so; the house of so-and-so for so-and-so; the field of so-and-so for so-and-so!

(T.B. Sotah 2a)

The economic status, as well as the marital future, of the child is decided before he is born.<sup>91</sup> In addition to this initial long term allocation, there is an annual review which occurs at the beginning of each year. On Rosh Hashanah a person's year allocation is set:

**שכרו של אדם  
מה שמקרה ומה שמתחבר.**

For on Rosh Hashanah it is decreed about a man what he will earn and what he will lack.

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:11)<sup>92</sup>

Yet, even here the dialectic is not lost since we also know that prayer, tzedakah and repentance can change the decree. Later, on the last day of Succot the agricultural output is determined as the amount of rainfall for the year is fixed. Everyone watches to see the wind direction as it passes over the wood pile. Only if it is blowing from west to east will there be large output, moderate prices and a good situation for both the producers and the consumers.

(T.B. Yoma 21b)

At times, one gets the impression that the rabbis felt that the total amount of wealth in the world was a fixed constant.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, if any particular group were to increase its holdings, this implied that some other group had decreased its share of the world's wealth. There are ten **קִקְּבִים**, ten measures or shares of wealth and ten shares of poverty which exist in the world. (T.B. Kiddushin 49b; Esther Rabbah 1:17) This is the sum total of the world's economic situation. Some part of the world must be rich and some part poor. Given the rather parochial outlook of the rabbis, it is not surprising that this wealth and poverty was allocated completely among the locally rich and poor. Moreover, there were several instances in Jewish history when G-d took wealth away from other groups so that the Israelites might prosper. He put down the Midianites in order to raise up Israel (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:7); He transferred wealth from the Egyptians to His people. (Sh'mot Rabbah 9:9) At the least, it is clear that the rabbis did not see economic growth enabling all people to gain simultaneously. In answer to the question of whether there would always be poor people in the world, the rabbis said:

כַּמֶּנּוּן אֵתְּ עוֹשִׂים רָצוֹן שֶׁל מַלְכוּת  
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּאַחֲרֵי, וְכֵשֶׁלֶאִין אֵתְּ עוֹשִׂים  
רָצוֹן שֶׁל מַלְכוּת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּכֵס.

Whenever you do G-d's will, others  
will be poor, but when you do not

do His will, they will be among you.  
(Sifrei Piska 114)

The set amount of poverty will always exist in the world.  
The only way to remove it from the Israelites is to shift  
it onto other peoples.

Yet, this understanding did not answer the rabbis'  
underlying questions. Why did poverty have to exist in  
the first place? Why was the distribution of income not  
created equal in the beginning? As King David says to

G-d: רבון העולם, יש עולםך!

Master of the Universe, make your  
world evenly balanced!

and G-d replies:

אלו עולםי עולםי, מן  
חם נאמת מן יצוריו.

If I make My world equal, who will  
practice truth and loving-kindness.<sup>94</sup>  
(Sh'mot Rabbah 31:5)

There is something inherent in the unequal distribution  
which fulfills a higher purpose. Why did G-d create the  
rich and the poor? He created them so that they might  
draw sustenance from each other. (Pesikta Rabbati 201)  
The economic structure set the stage for activities of a  
more critical nature.

We shall discuss this higher purpose and how it was  
expressed in terms of the tests which G-d makes of both  
the rich and the poor in Chapter 6. Here, it is impor-  
tant to realize that the rabbis were not completely satis-  
fied with this answer. They looked at the priests and

saw that no priest could offer the **קטורת**, the incense offering, twice until each had offered it once. Why? The distribution of income among the priests was to be kept reasonably equal! (T.B. Yoma 26a)<sup>95</sup> Even the critics of Judaism asked the rabbis why G-d, that great lover of the poor, did not treat them any better. They were forced to respond:

כדי שניצול אנו בהן  
מדינת של גיהנום.

so that we may be saved through them  
from hell.

(T.B. Baba Bathra 9b-10a)

As the poor live among us, they present endless opportunities for the rich to do tzedakah and to acquire merit thereby. The only answer possible was that G-d had a higher purpose in bringing the affliction of poverty down on some people.

Yet, G-d does not abandon the poor in their miserable state. In fact, there is a special, close relationship between G-d and the poor. He treats them differently, paying close attention to their plight. He has called them His people:<sup>96</sup>

אלה ישראל לפני הקד"ה :  
מי הם עמך? אלהם : עני"ם  
שנא' כי נחם ה' עמו ועניו ירחם.

Israel said before G-d: Who are Your people? He said to them: The poor. As it is said: "For G-d has comforted His people; He will have mercy on His poor." (Isaiah 49:13)

(Sh'mot Rabbah 31:5)<sup>97</sup>

G-d is near to the people and seeks to comfort them. In warning the Israelites not to despise them, He uses a word play on 'עם' which expresses that the poor are My people and that they are with Me. They are under G-d's protective wing. (Tanhuma Mishpatim 15) They are even referred to as "בני", My children, whose prayers have special efficacy before Him:

כשיצאו ישראל ממצרים רדף אחריהם פרעה ואנשיו  
 ופרעה הקריב. וכתב: ויצעקו אל ה'. היתה  
 משה אל ה' מנסה לבטל המקום. אמר לו הקדוש  
 ברוך הוא: מה אתה עושה ומנסה לבטל המקום? כי  
 שמעתי תפילתו של בני ישראל.

When Israel went out from Egypt, Pharoah pursued them. As it is said: And Pharoah drew near. (Ex. 14:10) And it is written: And they called out to G-d. (Ex. 14:10) Moses began to pray to G-d, too. G-d said to Moses: Why are you standing there and praying, My children have prayed and I have heard their prayer. As it is said: You call to me. (Ex. 14:15)  
 (Sh'mot Rabbah 21:4)

This midrash comes at the end of several passages which the rabbis bring to show that all people are equal before G-d. Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, has no closer relationship to Him than does the most poverty-stricken Israelite.

Indeed, the poor may have even greater access to G-d than His anointed King David. David calls upon G-d five times in the first book of Psalms in an effort to get Him to rise up,<sup>98</sup> but each time G-d refuses, saying:

בוא בני אפילו את מלכא כהן בעמי

אין קם. ואימתי אני קם? לשבתא  
 עינין נשדדים ואביונים נאנק'ים.

David, my son, even if you call Me to arise several (more) times, I will not do so. When will I arise? When you see the poor oppressed and the needy sighing.

(Bereshit Rabbah 75:1)

When the poor are suffering, G-d moves to ease their plight without waiting to be called. Yet, if they do cry out to Him, He will move even faster to help them.<sup>99</sup> (Sifrei Re'ai 117) In addition, if someone goes to the aid of the poor and is penalized for doing so, G-d hears his cry and saves him as well. Thus, when Pelotit, Lot's daughter, was found guilty of supporting a most afflicted poor person and was about to be burned by the Sodomites, she called out to G-d and He said:

אודה נא מראה הכצקתה הבאה אלי:  
 אם כצקת הנצרה הנאת צא אנני סדום  
 אהפוך יסודותיה שיה לא צלה וסרה למטה  
 שני: הכצקתה. הכצקתם אין כתיב אלא  
 הכצקתה.

Let Me go down and see if (the situation) is like her cry which comes to Me. If the Sodomites have done according to the cry of this girl, I will overturn Sodom's foundation. As it is said: "Is it according to her cry?" (Gen. 18:21) Is it according to their cry is not written rather is it according to her cry.

(Pirkei R. Eliezer 25)

As the poor go from door to door seeking support, it

is G-d who goes with them and stands by their side at the threshold:

א"ר אבין: העני הנה עומד ע  
פתח ויהקב"ה עומד  
ע ימיו... שאל' כי יעמוד  
ע'מין אביון.

R. Avin said: A poor person stands on your threshold and G-d stands at his right...as it is said: "For He stands at the right of the needy." (Ps. 109:31)  
(Ruth Rabbah 5:9)

The poor are not alone. In fact, at times it seems as if G-d is their business partner. Thus, if someone lends money to the poor or gives them charity, it is G-d who repays. This repayment can come in the form of **זכות**, of merit, in the Higher Court. When Satan mentions his sins before G-d, this merit defends him. Moreover, he who cancels a long overdue debt which a poor man owes him will find that G-d has graciously forgiven him for the sins he committed long ago. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:1)

Another form of repayment was noted earlier. Whoever lends money to the poor so that they can buy bread and live is repaid by G-d with long life as well. Should he or a member of his family be in danger of death, G-d will save him and will increase his time in this world. (Vayikra Rabbah 34:2; Tanhuma Mishpatim 15)<sup>100</sup> Any act of kindness which a person does for the poor is treated as if he did it for G-d Himself. The tzedakah which our Fathers did for the poor in their midst earned them the position

of bequeathing homes and wealth to their descendants. (Shoher Tov Mishlei 18)

In His protection of the poor, G-d has agents on earth. We find that the Bet Din serves as the guardian of the poor without being asked specifically to do so by the poor themselves. It is a **שׂוֹרֵר אֶלֶף**, an agent of the poor. If one party to a lawsuit is awarded damages and says that the award is so small that it should go to the poor, he cannot come back later and change his mind. The **שׂוֹרֵר אֶלֶף** has accepted his donation on behalf of the poor and the pledge cannot be rescinded. (T.B. Baba Kamma 36b)

It should now be clear that the rabbis accepted the economic order within which they lived. They proposed no revolutionary or economic changes of any fundamental nature. Rather, they sought to give the existing distribution cosmic significance. G-d had set the allocation of wealth, and although the rabbis may have wondered why he did not do so in a more egalitarian manner, they did their best to justify the present situation. They proposed and urged that those who were well off share their holdings with the poor, emphasizing over and over again the tzedakah and lending responsibilities of the wealth. They also saw some change occurring in the distribution as a result of the observance of mitzvot. While a close relationship was postulated between G-d and the poor in an effort to ease their burdens, as we shall see below, they could only justify the economic order of their

times by recognizing and accepting the idea that it had been established on the basis of higher, non-economic criteria.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CAUSE AND ROLE OF POVERTY

As we have seen, poverty was a state which the rabbis hope to avoid. They often shared the popular notions about how to keep from tempting fate and bringing poverty down upon oneself. In its harshness poverty was also seen as a form of punishment by G-d for the sins which were committed by the Israelites. Yet, beyond these interpretations lay a different level of interpretation. Poverty was described as a purposefull state of existence through which the Jew and his society could be changed and improved. When people were poor, they tended to think and behave in a different manner and these changes may have been for the better. Poverty might serve as the instrument of G-d's will for good. In this chapter, we will examine each of these aspects of the causes and role of poverty.

Jewish conventional wisdom has always contained many formulae which described the causes of poverty and implied the means by which one might avoid it. Thus, we find a great concern with cleanliness and with not even giving the appearance of wasting anything, especially food. The Israelite is warned in general terms:

יִהְיֶה אִדָּם זָבִיר בְּתֵבֵלָא בְּתוֹק בֵּיתָא.

People must be careful with produce  
inside their homes,

for it is only as a result of their misuse of produce that

that Israel has been called **דל'ם**, poor. (Yalkut Sh'moni Shoftim 60) One must also be careful in the way he drinks frothy beer, for the froth can lead to catarrh, headaches or even poverty:

מישתיה קשה לזכרס, מינפרו  
 ביד קשא לרשא, מדחיה  
 קשא לעניא.

Drinking it causes catarrh; blowing it away causes headaches; skimming it causes poverty.

(T.B. Chullin 105b)

The more messy one is with the froth of his beer, the more disastrous will be the results. The proper way to drink such beer is to let the froth settle by itself.

Cleanliness is crucially important if one seeks to avoid poverty:

פארי בביתא קשי לעניא.  
 נוארא בביתא קשי לעניא.  
 זצא אפואא דחזבא, קשי  
 לעניא.

Bran in one's house causes poverty.  
 Crumbs in one's house causes poverty.  
 Dirt on the spout of a pitcher causes poverty.

(T.B. Pesachim 111b)

Why should this be so? Crumbs and dirt are dangerous because they provide an opening for **אבד**, the angel of poverty, to enter one's house. The angel's name means literally filth. He who is wasteful and careless with his food

may find that he has lost his sustenance altogether. The angel of poverty is particularly active on Tuesday and Friday nights:

בעלי שבתות ובעלי רביצות  
שרו מטיקין ציליה

On Tuesday and Friday nights evil  
spirits rest on them (crumbs).  
(T.B. Pesachim 111b)

As long as one keeps his house clean, these spirits cannot enter and harm him. As Abaya realized, it is more than merely a question of tidiness for its own sake.

Cleanliness prevents poverty as the following midrash illustrates:

הלא זכא דהוה מהדר צליה שמו  
בצניותא ולא הוה יכיל עיה בקא  
זכיר אנשורא טאבא. יאמא חז כח  
ע' פתא איביל: אמר: השתא ופא'  
נפ' ב' צא' בתר דאכיל א"י' מא  
צקרינהו ע' ב' ש' צנהו א' צהא. שמעיה  
דקאמר: ווי דאפקיה ההא זכא  
מביתיה.

Once the angel of poverty was following a certain man but could not get him because he was so careful with crumbs. One day he ate bread on the grass. The angel said: Now he will surely fall into my hands. After he ate, he took a spade, dug up the grass and threw it into the river. He heard the angel say: Oy! This man has thrown me out of his house.

(T.B. Chullin 105b)

In addition, he who hangs food which is not usually hung up in his house puts his economic status in suspense.

As the popular saying expressed it:

תלם' בבי'תל קט' עני'תל  
תלם' סילתל תלם' חזני'תל

Something hanging in the house causes poverty. If you hang a basket of food you put your sustenance in suspense.

(T.B. Pesachim 111b)

Any unusual or frivolous behavior with respect to one's food can lead to poverty in which one would certainly be more careful.

Similarly, the drinking of wine and the consequent loss of control will also make one poor as we learn from the rabbis' etymological word play on תירוש, new wine:

תירוש. שלל המתגאה בו נעשה רל.

New wine: All who become boastful through it will become poor.

(T.B. Yoma 76b)

Respect for one's dwelling place is another possible guarantee against personal economic disaster. Thus, one who urinates on the floor beside his bed or who is careless in the washing of his hands will be led into poverty. (T.B. Shabbat 62b) Such is also the case for him who marries inappropriately, whether an Israelite to a priestess (T.B. Pesachim 49a) or a man to a woman who will curse him for not buying her jewelry. (T.B. Shabbat 62b)<sup>101</sup> Finally, he who appears to scorn his wealth by releasing his slaves before their time has been completed or who is unduly involved with the worries of his possessions during the times when he should be observing the Shabbat or studying in the Bet

Hamidrash will also find himself quickly reduced to a lowly state. (T.B. Gittin 38b)

The preceding collection of aphorisms are cautionary statements and warnings against certain kinds of behavior. Some may be taken rather literally, e.g., he who wastes what he has may soon lose it. Yet, the others are little more than the wives' tales of the period.

Let us now turn to those cases where poverty is seen as a punishment from G-d for sinful behavior. This may apply in the situation described above where the landowner is seen inspecting his property on Shabbat or having his main meal during the time of discourse in the Bet Hamidrash. Although these activities are obviously cautionary in nature, and thus also exaggerations, they do illustrate the rabbis' understanding of the spirit of Shabbat which was not to be violated. Once a person has become poor, it is clear that G-d disapproves of his behavior:

כ'ן מן העוה אדם כ' מלמטה  
ועל מלמעלה.

Once a man becomes poor below (on earth)  
he becomes poor above (in heaven) too.  
(T.B. Sanhedrin 103b)

Just as the poor man has few friends on earth, so he has few supporters in heaven as well. G-d has also abandoned him.<sup>102</sup> On his trip to Rome, R. Yehoshua b. Levi saw the great plight of the poor and attributed it to G-d's smiting them. G-d's judgments against man are very strong. (Pesikta de Rav Kahane 9:1) Yet, we must not forget the

other side of the dialectic: G-d loves the poor. Each pole, love and abandonment, plays a role. Thus, these midrashim cannot be used as a basis for despising the poor. Whenever a person sins, G-d begins to bring the signs of poverty upon him. First, he suffers economic losses so great that he must sell his field. Later, he sells himself into slavery. (Tanhuma Behar 3) In answer to the question "Will there always be poor people?" the rabbis say that as long as Israel does G-d's will, as long as the Jews do not sin, the poor will be among the non-Jews. Once Israel begins to transgress, however, the poor will be among its citizens. (Sifrei Piska 114)

Those who do not busy themselves with the study of Torah or who do so in an improper manner will also be punished with poverty. As R. Akiba said:

כֹּס אֵינוֹ עֹמֵק הַתּוֹרָה זֶלֶם עֲנִיּוֹת וְכִנְיָא.

Whoever does not busy himself with Torah, brings poverty unto his children.

(Kallah Rabbati 2)

He who does not set the proper example for his children by his own dedication to the study of Torah will find that his children will not study at all and will, therefore, become poor. In addition, he who learns the Torah well but is too conceited to share his knowledge with others and to learn from them will also see the signs of poverty:

סִימָן לְעֲשֵׂת הַלֵּל עֲנִיּוֹת.

The sign of conceit is poverty.

(T.B. Shabbat 33a; T.B. Kiddushin 49a)

Such conceit was the cause of the great poverty experienced in Babylonia. Yet, these midrashim are not to be taken literally. Perhaps poverty is used here as an example of the bad consequences which result from improper behavior. Finally, in an obvious exaggeration designed to bolster the often limited power of the Sages, the midrash tells us that those who do things of which the Sages disapprove will soon find themselves deprived of their possessions.

כַּד מִקּוֹם שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ חֲכָמִים עֵינֵיהֶם  
עוֹלָם אִם מֵתָהֶם.

Wherever the Sages set their eyes (against someone), there death or poverty (will come).  
(Mo'ed Katan 17b; Nedarim 7b)

In a further effort to justify and ease the pain of poverty, the Sages postulated an idealizing theodicy: the instrumental role of poverty. They preached about the positive function which it might have in the life of the individual as well as that of his society, and about the good which might result from it. Jacob wanted the tribe of Simeon to be the poorest of all the tribes. He hoped that they would leave their cities and become beggars among their brethren. These abandoned cities could then become the עֲרֵי מִקְלָה , the cities of refuge. The poverty of the Simeonites would help to structure the Israelite society according to G-d's will. (Bereshit Rabbah 98:10) Similarly, to safeguard the

holiness and accuracy of the parchments which were used for T'fillin and mezuzot as well as the sacred writings themselves, the Knesset Hagedolah decreed twenty four fast days for the scribes. With their reduced income, they were sure that the scribes would continue to work and that they would do so carefully, with pure hearts. (T.B. Pesachim 50b)<sup>103</sup>

In fact, G-d used poverty to cleanse and purify all of the Israelites. The rabbis cite Isaiah 48:10

הנה צרפתיך ולא ככסף, בחרתיך  
ככור עוני.

Behold I have refined you but not as silver;  
I have tried you in the furnace of affliction  
(poverty).

as the proof-text for their assertion that G-d had selected poverty as a good quality for the Jews. (T.B. Chagigah 9b)

It purifies them and G-d brings increasing amounts of it upon them until they are ready to repent. Each time the Israelites sinned, He renewed the punishment until they realized the errors of their ways. (Vayikra Rabbah 34:6)

As R. Aha explained,

צריכין ישראל לחראבא ערבון תתקבא.

Israel needs carobs to do repentance.  
(Vayikra Rabbah 35:5;  
Pesikta de Rav Kahane 117a)

It is only when the Israelites were reduced to such a lowly state that all they had to eat were carobs, that they turned back to G-d and repented. Thus, when seeking someone to read before the congregation, the rabbis recommended

choosing for such an honor one who was:

זקן ורזיז ויש לו בנים  
וביתו ריקס כפי שיהא  
עמו שלם בתפילה.

An old man, fluent (in the prayers),  
who has sons but whose house is empty  
because his heart will be fully in his  
prayers.

The poor do pray more fervently; they turn to G-d more  
often.

An even stronger statement of this view is found in the  
following hyperbolic midrash from Seder Eliyaha Zuta Pirka 5:

שמתוך צניות בן יראין את ה'. אין להם  
לחם לאכול ובגד לעבוש ושמן לסוך ובקטל  
רחמים ומצאו... אין עושי חסד באין  
אלו מתוך צניות, אין עושי צדקה  
באין אלו מתוך צניות ואין גומלי  
חסד באין אלו מתוך צניות.

For in poverty they fear G-d. When they  
have no bread and no clothes and no oil  
for anointing, then they seek mercy and  
find it...those who do acts of loving-  
kindness do not come except from the midst  
of poverty; neither do those who do chari-  
table deeds nor those who do good deeds.

It is only out of poverty that people learn to behave well.

It is a good condition for those who seek to be righteous.

Indeed, in Babylonia it was the great poverty of the peo-  
ple which made the holiday celebrations so very joyous.

The special days of the calendar became the high points of

the year for those who could not afford to celebrate at any other time. (Shabbat 145b)

Poverty also provides less distraction for the Jew, enabling him to concentrate more fully on the study of Torah. Compared to Torah, all other activities are considered

**דברים בטלים**, idle matters, on which as little time as possible should be spent. If one accepts the fact that he is poor and turns his mind to Torah instead of business, poverty will have played a useful role. It will have served as the **ראשית דרכו**, as the beginning of His way.

(Shoher Tov T'hillim 5; Midrash T'hillim 5:2)<sup>104</sup> To be pious and rich is a difficult task, even for a chasid, who is known for his fulfillment of the mitzvot beyond the letter of the law. Thus, the rabbis tell of one chasid who was very poor but who had vowed not to accept help from anyone. Elijah appeared before him as an Arab and offered to lend him two silver pieces so he could set himself up in business. The chasid accepted the loan and soon became quite wealthy. However, as he got used to being rich he forgot **זמן חסידותו ושמו תפלתו**, the time of his righteousness and the practice of prayer. G-d complained to Elijah that he had obstructed the path of the one true chasid in the world. It was only after Elijah made the chasid become poor again that he was able to live as a rich man and still be as pious as he was before. It was easier to be pious, to be a chasid, as a poor man. (Yalkut

Sh'moni Ruth 601)

By now it should be easier to understand how the rabbis could at times refer to poverty as a good quality, even as a blessing.<sup>105</sup> In several different places, the rabbis describe how G-d searched among all of the possible good qualities with which He could bless Israel. At the end of this search, He concluded that there was none better for His people than poverty. (Seder Eliyahu Zuta Pirka 5; T.B. Chagigah 9b) Indeed, in the words of R. Akiba, which paraphrased a popular saying of the day,<sup>106</sup>

יֵאֵר מִסְכָּנוּתָא לְבִרְתִּי דִּיזְקָא  
כְּעִרְקָא מִמֶּלֶךְ בִּרְיָא דְסֹסָא חִילָא.

Poverty is as becoming to a daughter of Jacob as a red band on the head of a white horse.

(Vayikra Rabbah 35:5; Pesikta de Rav Kahane 117a)

When David asks G-d why the distribution of income is not equal, He answers:

חֶסֶד וְאֵמֶת מִן יִצְרָאֵל

Love and truth, who will practice them?  
(Ps. 61:8)

(Sh'mot Rabbah 31:5)

If everyone had the same income and wealth, how could people help one another? If they were all wealthy, no one could serve as a lender. If they were all poor, there could be no security offered as backing for loans. If

**חֶסֶד** and **אֵמֶת** are to be practiced in the world, the distribution of income cannot be equal. (Tanhuma Mishpatim 9)

Furthermore, the presence of the poor in the world serves as a way of saving all Jews from hell. As we have seen above, the poor who have nearly lost control over their lives are not held fully accountable and, therefore, will never see gehinnom themselves. (T.B. Eruvin 41b) G-d acknowledges the tremendous burden which is placed upon them and as compensation for their suffering:

הלכך עניו יחלצו מדבר של ע'ה'ה'.

As a reward for his affliction, He will deliver him from the judgment of gehinnom.  
(Yebamot 102b)

Here poverty becomes, in itself, a means to a greater reward. The rich are also saved from hell by the existence of the poor. Those of G-d's children who are so afflicted offer opportunities to the rich to do tzedakah. If they respond and fulfill their responsibilities to the poor, G-d will reward them and they too will be spared from the judgment of gehinnom. (Baba Bathra 9b-10a)

Thus, we see that the theodicy arguments given by the rabbis are threefold. First, poverty may cause the poor to become better Jews. It may encourage them to fill their lives with mitzvot and with righteousness and may result in their drawing closer to G-d. Second, poverty is in itself a guarantee of a higher reward. Finally, it serves to enable the rich to earn zechut through the performance of additional mitzvot. Yet, none of these arguments proved very satisfying, for the harshness of poverty still remained.

The rabbis kept wondering how long it would have to continue to exist. They often compared two biblical verses in their efforts to find a deeper understanding of this problem:

כִּי לֹא יִחָדֵל אֲבִיּוֹן מִקֶּרֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל

For the poor shall never cease from the midst of Israel. (Deu. 15:11)

and

אֵפֶשׁ כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֲבִיּוֹן

There shall be no needy among you. (Deu. 15:4)

Thus, we find the story of Ilfa and R. Yochanan who decided to fulfill Deu. 15:4 in their own lives and consequently left the academy to seek their fortunes. Along the way R. Yochanan heard an angel say,

אֶיכָּא בְּהוּ חֵד אֶק"מָא לִי שְׂמִינָא.

One of them still has much to achieve.

Since Ilfa did not hear the angel, R. Yochanan assumed that it was talking about him. He left Ilfa and returned to the academy, using Deu. 15:11 as his explanation. It is clear from this midrash that the rabbis felt that in the short run, in a man's lifetime, poverty would not be erased. Therefore, ideally the proper verse to fulfill would be Deu. 15:11, as R. Yochanan had done, especially in the fortuitous instances where its fulfillment led one to the study of Torah and consequently, to wealth as well. (T.B. Shabbat 151b)

Thus, as we have already seen the rabbis did not discourage their students from praying that the poverty which did and

would continue to exist would be found among other peoples. Although poverty had followed Israel since the time of the destruction of the Second Temple (Shoher Tov T'hillim 9), they hoped it would not do so forever.

When the rabbis took the longideal view, they could see a time when there would be no poverty. That time would come when the Jews stopped sinning and willingly devoted themselves to the life of Torah. Thus, when Rav Yirmiyah interprets Zech. 14:21, he concludes:

נא' ולא יהיה כנעני?  
אמר רב ירמיה: אין כאן עני.

What is the meaning of "And there will be no merchant"? Rav Yirmiyah said:  
There will be no poor people here.  
(T.B. Pesachim 50a)

In the end of days, the Temple treasurers would not need to buy or sell for the Temple since its wealth would be very great. There would no longer be any poor people and consequently no need for merchants. At that time, poverty would have been erased through the performance of mitzvot. Yet, this was a messianic, ideal state. In the meantime, the poor had to console themselves with the theodicy arguments as best they could and were to make the most of what little they had.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE TESTING OF THE RICH AND THE POOR

אשרי אדם שהוא עומד בנסיונו  
שאין בריב שאין הקב"ה מנסה אותו.

Happy is the man who passes his test  
for there is no one whom G-d does not  
test.

(Sh'mot Rabbah 31:2)

As we have seen above, G-d sets the economic stage on which man's life is acted out. He has created the rich and the poor; He has given them their allocations. In this chapter we will consider the individual's economic status as a form of testing which he must undergo. There are different tests, different temptations, for the rich and the poor, but all people will find that their love of G-d and their desire to fulfill His commandments are the substance of the test. Many of them will involve the interrelationship between the rich and poor. In this context, the rabbis taught that G-d had created two groupings for a distinct purpose:

כדי שיהיו זכין אחד לאחד

so they could benefit one another.  
(Vayikra Rabbah 34:5)<sup>107</sup>

כדי שיהיו מתפרסין אחד מאחד

so they would support one another.  
(Pesikta Rabbati 201)

The way the two groups live together will cause merit and

blessing to come to them both or will result in punishment for that group(s) which fails its test. Below, we will analyze the tests which the rich and the poor must undergo and the consequent rewards or punishments which will be brought upon them accordingly.

Let us begin with the rich. The tests which they face are of two types: (1) the way in which they view themselves and their money; (2) the use to which they put their money and the way in which they relate to the poor. Great wealth can easily lead the Jew astray. It can cause him to become arrogant and to rebel against G-d. When the rich man gives his large tithes to the Temple, he must overcome the temptation to do so ostentatiously. This temptation to self-worship is so strong that it is included among the three things concerning which G-d proclaims His special approval each day:

אמר רבי יוחנן: שלשה מכריז עליהן  
 בקב"ה בכל יום: ... ועל עשיר המעשר  
 ביחודו בצניותו.

Rabbi Yochanan said: About three (people) G-d makes proclamations each day:.... about a rich man who tithes his fruit in modesty.

(T.B. Pesachim 113a)

The midrash also warns the rich not to attribute their wealth to their own powers, basing its argument on Jer. 9:22,

כה אמר ה': ואף יתהלל עשיר בצלו.

Thus said G-d: The rich shall not boast about his wealth.

One should not conclude that he has earned his riches solely as a result of his own efforts, for lasting wealth comes only as a blessing from G-d. (Tanhuma Mattot 7) Nor may the rich spend their days in luxury, consuming their wealth. They must avoid that trap and continue to work. Thus, we find that Hiram was not pleased with the rich people whom Solomon sent to him because they were **מכובד'ין בעל' ובעל'ה**, that they had succumbed to soft-living and were by then unable to work. (T.B. Shabbat 54a) The rabbis disapproved of such idleness. They praised the rich land-owner of the tribe of Asher who still spent his time breaking up the earth around his olive trees and removing stones. He had not become idle but used his time productively and was very generous as well. (T.B. Menachot 85b)

The dangers of wealth are so great that the rabbis, in their characteristic hyperbole, claim **לאין אדם מורא בהקב"ה אלא מתוך שבע'ה** that man rebels against G-d only in the midst of satiety. (Sifrei Eikev 43)<sup>108</sup> The Sodomites, with their enormous wealth, soon found that they no longer feared G-d for they had come to put their faith in their riches.

**ולא בטחו בצל יוצרם אלא בחוב  
גורמם, שהעושר דוחק מבעל'יו יראת  
שמים**

And they didn't have trust in the shadow of their Creator rather in the magnitude of their wealth, for wealth pushes its owners from the fear of G-d.

(Pirkei R. Eliezer 25)

The temptation to believe in their own powers had been too great for the Sodomites to resist. They also succumbed to another of the traps laid for the rich: they began to covet the wealth of others.<sup>109</sup> They closed off their society and its treasures to all outsiders and began to plot against one another to build up their personal holdings. They went so far as to push unstable walls upon the rich and to rob them with near abandon. (T.B. Sanhedrin 109) This sin of coveting is a most difficult one to resist and he who can set out his proper terumah and tithes without coveting them is to be counted among the most trustworthy of men. (Tanhuma Vayeshv 5)

Money can easily become the idol of rich Jews. In one midrash, the rabbis note that during the time of the Second Temple the Jews fulfilled the Torah and were careful about their tithes. Then why was the Temple destroyed?

נפני עאריהן אהב כספן ואינן  
א'ל אהב כספן.

Because they loved money and hated their fellowman.

(Tos. Menachot 13:22)

This sin is hyperbolically portrayed as being worse than avodah zarah, bloodshed and forbidden unions! It was the sin of the Sodomites once again. Excessive materialism is but one of its manifestations. Of the four people whom the Sages found too unbearable for words one was the **עוץ מלך**, the wealthy flatterer. He was so unbearable because he had

no need to lie to increase his holdings since he was rich already. (T.B. Pesachim 113b) Endless striving after wealth was just another trap, as was the incessant worry over one's possessions.<sup>110</sup> Interestingly, we find that the tzaddikim were most frugal in their expenditures for personal comforts, not because they wished to build up their capital, but rather so as not to be tempted into eventual dishonesty to satisfy these insatiable needs. R. Eliezer knew the attractions of ever-increasing materialism and did his best to withstand it. (T.B. Sotah 12a)<sup>111</sup>

The second test which the rich must undergo focuses on their relationship and attitude toward the poor.<sup>112</sup> The rabbis are rather explicit in their instructions to the rich as to the proper treatment of the poor. They go so far as to say that the poor must be made to feel like *בני ביתך*, like the members of one's household. The doors of one's home are to be opened wide, in every direction, so the poor will be able to enter from whichever direction they approach without having to trouble themselves and walk around the house. This midrash, while not to be taken literally, does stress the need to make it as easy as possible for the poor to find aid. (Avot de R. Natan 7:1; T.B. Avot 1:5) Furthermore, the rich must not be embarrassed by their poor relatives. Rather, following the example set by G-d, they are to include them in their festival and life-cycle celebrations. They are not to violate the injunction of Proverbs 11:17 against being cruel in this way.

וְאֵלֶּכָּה שְׂאֵרֵי אֲכֻלִּי: אֲחֵרֵי אֶלְכֻסְנֵי:  
 זֶה שֶׁמֵּצֵאתָ לוֹ שְׂמֵחָה וְאֵינוֹ  
 מִבְּקִיךְ אֶת קְרֹבָיו עַל מַשֶּׁלֶם  
 עֲנִיּוֹת.

"He that is cruel troubles his flesh."  
 R. Alexandri said: This refers to one  
 who has a joyous occasion and does not  
 associate with his relatives because  
 of (their) poverty.

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:3)

One's poor relations must be acknowledged and treated well.  
 The rabbis cite another verse, from Proverbs 19:7, as a  
 condemning characterization of the usual situation in which  
 the poor are not so treated:

כָּל אֲחֵי רֵעַ עֲנָוִי.

All the brothers of the poor hate him.  
 (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:12)

This is contrasted with G-d's exemplary behavior to the poor.  
 He recognizes them<sup>113</sup> as His own and treats all people equally.  
 He listens to each in turn:

כָּל שְׂוִיָּה לִפְנֵי - הַנֶּשֶׁם וְהַעֲבָדִים  
 וְהָעֲנִיּוֹת וְהָעֲשִׂירִים.

All are equal before Him - women, slaves  
 the poor and the rich.  
 (Sh'mot Rabbah 21:4)

The prayers of all people find their way to G-d.

The proper attitude toward the poor is based on feel-  
 ings of empathy.<sup>114</sup> The midrash tells the rich to put them-  
 selves into the place of the poor:

## הוי מסתכל בעצמך כאילו אתה עני

Look at yourself as if you're poor.  
(Tanhuma Mishpatim 15)

When the poor man says 'Look at me, look at me!' (Vayikra Rabbah 34:7), he is asking the rich man to consider his situation carefully, to help him in such a way that he will derive the greatest benefit (Shoher Tov T'hillim 41) The midrash points this out strikingly by describing the most inappropriate response to such a plea:

שפשיק לאתו העני בענין רע ואמר  
על: ע'ת את אצ'ל ע'מי ונ'ע'ם? חמי  
שק"ן חמי כרע'ן חמי כרסון חמי  
קפ'ן!

For he responded to the same poor man in the wrong manner and said to him: Why don't you go and work and get food to eat? Look at those hips, those legs, that fat body, those lumps of flesh!

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:7)<sup>115</sup>

It is not the role of the rich to harass the poor or to chastise them. Poverty itself is enough of a burden and it is not the result of any deficiency on the part of the poor. In fact, the land-owners must take into account the general level of poverty in the country when they are calculating the size of their pe'ah. Even when the harvest is bad, the pe'ah must remain high if there is widespread poverty. (T.J. pe'ah 1 Halacha 2)<sup>116</sup> The land-owners must help to offset poverty, not blame it on the poor.

Knowing how easily the poor can be embarrassed, the

rabbis emphasized that the way in which one shared his wealth with them was as important as the amount that he gave. We find a certain Nakdimon who lost all of his wealth as well as that of his daughter-in-law because he did not give the right amount and because he gave it in an unacceptable way:

כשפיר יוצא מביתו לבית המדרש  
כדי מילת פיו מציעין תחתו ובאים  
עניינים ואקפסין אותו מאחוריו.

When he would go out from his house to the Bet Hamidrash, woolen clothes would be spread beneath him and the poor would come and roll them up behind him.

(T.B. Ketubot 66b)

After he had walked on the clothes, the poor could take them and wear them! Surely, this method of distribution to the poor was a most embarrassing one. The rabbis preferred that donations be made more privately and recalled that there was a **אשכול חסדים התיב בירושלים**, a Hall of Secret Donations in Jerusalem. (Sifrei R'ei 117) They also spoke about Mar Ukba who used to throw four zuzim into a certain poor man's house each day, trying his best not to reveal his identity. When the poor man sought to discover the name of his benefactor, Mar Ukba hid in a furnace rather than show his face! (T.B. Ketubot 67b) While this midrash is certainly hyperbolic in nature, it does express the strong feeling of the rabbis that one should go to some lengths to spare the feelings of the poor.<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, as the little children learned in their study of the alphabet, one must run after the poor to help

them. (T.B. Shabbat 104a)<sup>118</sup> Again an extreme case is given to show the rabbis' great concern. Eliezer of Barthotha used to run after the charity collectors whenever he saw them and give them all of the money he had. Eventually, the collectors began to hide from him since they realized that he had gone too far. Nevertheless, he was rewarded greatly by G-d for his sincere concern for the welfare of the poor (T.B. Ta'anit 24a) One's obligation to the poor is never fully completed for one must continue to support them as long as it is necessary. The owner of an ass, which had a very heavy load on its back and kept falling down, is required to pick it up if it falls. However, should it fall five times, he does not have to straighten it up a sixth time. This does not apply to the case of a poor person.

מנין אם החזקת אפילו ארבעה  
 וחמשה פעמים, חזר והחזקת? ת"ס  
 והחזקת בו.

Where is it shown that if you have held him up four or five times, you must return and hold him up again? Torah says: "And uphold him." (Lev. 25:35)

(Sifra Behar 25)<sup>119</sup>

One must continue to support the poor even if it takes a hundred times to do so. (Sifrei R'ei 117)

This help must be such as to meet the needs of the poor, according to their former station and sensitivities. Once again, challenging the poor about their tastes is improper even if one is supplying them with horses and servants.

Thus, Hillel the Elder himself served as a poor man's servant when he could not find someone else to do so. He ran before him for three miles. (T.B. Ketubot 67b)<sup>120</sup> Mar Ukba used to send a poor man old wine. When his son noticed that the poor man was getting "spoiled" as he sat while others sprayed the wine into his mouth, Ukba did not take his advice and stop sending the wine. Rather, he sent him twice as much since he was so delicate. (T.B. Ketubot 67b)<sup>121</sup> The message here is that one should not question the needs of the poor but should endeavor to fulfill them. This is also expressed in more specific terms. The rich must begin by learning about the condition of the poor. He must know his state so well that he can determine if it is most appropriate to give him bread or dough or grain. Must he give the poor the finished product or can they make it themselves from the raw materials? Can he give them bread or must he feed it to them directly:

הראוי ע'יתן לו פת, נותנים לו פת.  
 הראוי ע'יתן לו ע'סר, נותנים לו ע'סר.  
 הראוי ע'יתן לו מצה, נותנים לו מצה.  
 הראוי ע'האכילו בתוך פיו, מאכילים בתוך פיו.

If it is fitting to give him bread,  
 let them give him bread.  
 If it is fitting to give him dough,  
 let them give him dough.  
 If it is fitting to give him grain,  
 let them give him grain.  
 If it is fitting to feed him,  
 let them feed him.

(Sifrei R'ei 118)

The rich must invest a significant amount of time and energy

in their efforts to aid the poor. At the least, they must try to give them appropriate aid. As Rabbi Jonah said:

אשר נותן עֵדֶם אין כתיב כאן אלא  
אשר משכיל את עֵדֶם והוא שמסתכל  
במצווה היאך לעשותה.

"Happy is he who gives to the poor" is not written here rather "Happy is he who considers the poor" (Ps. 41:2) This refers to one who considers how best to fulfill the commandment.

(T.J. Pe'ah 8:9)<sup>122</sup>

The form in which the money is given was also something which had to be considered carefully. The rabbis were quite concerned about those who had once been well off but who had become poor and were too proud to accept charity in the usual way. Therefore, they urged the rich to offer to lend money to these poor people and when the time came for repayment to tell them that it was a gift. R. Simeon went so far as to suggest that the poor leave something as a pledge that they would repay the loan כפי שתנא דעתו עלין, so that his spirits would be raised. (T.B. Ketubot 67b)<sup>123</sup> Another way of helping the poor to keep their pride was to tell them that you had heard of an inheritance which was soon to become theirs. Once they had received it they could repay the loan:

ר' יונה בשם ר' זבדא בן זבדא  
מנכסין והלא מתב"ש עיקר, היה הולך אצל  
ואמר לו: בשביל שמעתי שנפלה עק יחשה

במדינת היס, האם לך חפץ זה לכשאתה  
מתרועע את נאמנו ובעצרה נאמנו  
או כפי אומר לו: מתנה לך נתיב.

R. Jonah, when he saw a great man fallen from his wealth and too embarrassed to take (charity), would go to him and say: 'Since I heard that you have come into an inheritance from abroad, I offer this thing to you. When you come into the inheritance you will give it back to me. But when he gives it back, he says: I gave it to you as a gift.

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:1)<sup>124</sup>

One must go to great lengths to ease the embarrassment and the burdens of the poor.

The rich were also warned not to steal from the poor.<sup>125</sup>

The midrash captures their reaction most poignantly:

אם הוא עשיר מהו גזל? לא  
דיבר אלא במתנות צדק שכל ח"ב  
ע"מ ע"מ מן התורה: עקל, שכחה,  
ובאור ובעשר ע"מ.

If he is poor, what is there to steal?  
Rather, it speaks about the shares of the poor which one is obligated to give them on the authority of the Torah: gleanings, forgotten sheaves, the corners of the field, and the poor man's tithe.

(Bamidbar Rabbah 5:2)

The rich steal from the poor when they do not give them the full amount to which they are entitled under the law. One of the reasons given for the exile of Judah was that the Jews did not give the poor what was theirs and that they themselves ate the poor man's tithe. (Echah Rabbati 1:29)<sup>126</sup>



While the punishment of death is somewhat extreme, the point is that the rich would suffer severe punishment quite often if it were not for the fact that there was a little of the faker in all poor people. This is brought out more clearly in a midrash in which R. Chanina's wife complains that he should stop supporting a certain poor man when she hears people asking Him,

במה אתה סומך, בטלי כסף או בטלי צדקה?

On what will you dine, silver or gold cloths?

To this R. Chanina responds:

היינו צאמר רבי אלעזר, באו ונחזיק  
טובה לרמאין שאמלאו הן, היינו חטאין  
בכל יום.

This is what R. Eliezer said: Come, let's be grateful to the rogues among them, for without them we would sin everyday.

(T.B. Ketubot 67b)

No doubt the person R. Chanina has been supporting had been poor at one time, but now he too qualifies as a rogue or a partial faker. Without such fakers, the rich would suffer the full amount of their punishment.

Yet, those who pretend to be poor are punished for doing so. As the preceding midrash concludes:

המקדש צדקה ואין צריך לזכור  
סוף: אינו נפטר מן העולם עד  
שיקלאו ע'צ' כק.

He who accepts charity without (proper) need of it, his end: he will not leave

this world until he reaches such a state  
(that he needs charity).<sup>128</sup>  
(T.B. Ketubot 68a)

Here is our first example of the punishment of the rich and it typifies the way in which G-d acts against wealthy sinners: those who fail to use their wealth according to His will, who fail to act as proper custodians of His riches, will soon lose their holdings.<sup>129</sup> Why do the rich become poor?

ע"י שלא פשטו ידיו לעניי רחמי,  
וע"י שלא עשו רצון אביהם שבשמיים.

Because they did not extend their hands  
to the poor and did not do G-d's will.  
(Vayikra Rabbah 34:13)

This idea is expressed most strikingly in the image of the גלגל, of the wheel which was seen as characterizing the cycle of economic life. As the midrash describes it:

אמר בואר העולם הזה? עולם שגבולו  
כפי חרס שבו התחילתו עולם מלא  
והעליונים יורדים ויורדים יקנין. כן לא נא  
שלא עשר היום הוא עשיר למחר, ולא  
נא שהא עני היום עני למחר. עולם?  
שגבולו הוא העולם.

To what can the world be likened? To a well wheel in a garden. Clay containers are attached to it. Those at the bottom come up full and those at the top go down empty. Similarly, not all who are rich today will be rich tomorrow. Why? Because the world is a well wheel.

(Sh'mot Rabbah 31:14)<sup>130</sup>

The economic world is seen as rotating, causing those on top

to be shifted to the bottom and vice versa. These changes could take place over several generations, explaining the rabbis' warning that poverty will surely come to you or your son or your grandson. (Ruth Rabbah 5:9; T.B. Shabbat 151b) In the natural course of events, this wheel<sup>131</sup> turns according to G-d's will and it seems to affect everyone equally. However, should the rich use their wealth inappropriately, the wheel will be speeded up for them:

אני עשיתי אותך עשיר ואותו עני,  
אם אתה נותן לו אני הופך את  
העשיר ואעשה אותו עני ואותו עשיר  
אעלה? כי אלקים שופט, זה ירד וזה ירם.

I made you rich and him poor. If you do not give to him, I will turn the wheel and make you poor and him rich. Why? "For G-d is judge - this one He will bring down and this one He will raise up." (Ps. 75:8)

(Tanhuma Mishpatim 15)<sup>132</sup>

Another image which is used is that of ladders. When a matron asks R. Simeon b. Halafta what G-d has been doing since He finished creating the world, he answered:

יושב ועושה סולם, מזה עולה ומזה יורד.

He sits and makes ladders, raising up one person, lowering another.

(Bamidbar Rabbah 22:7)<sup>133</sup>

The basic underlying mechanism of the economic system was seen to be this continuing process of ups and downs.<sup>134</sup> Poverty would eventually come to all people, but the misuse of one's wealth would cause it to come sooner and the proper

use of it would delay its coming. (Shabbat 151b)

When this **שנא** turned against the rich, they did not merely lose their wealth. In addition, the twenty four curses found in Psalms were set upon them (Vayikra Rabbah 34:11) and their family life would soon begin to deteriorate. This latter refers to the fact that the rich would soon need the priest to settle their marital problems for their wives would begin to stray. (T.B. Berachot 63a) As long as the members of each economic grouping continue to act according to G-d's will, the **שנא** will turn at its regular pace and all people can expect to see both poverty and wealth within their families' history.

Yet, should the rich pass these tests, they could succeed in postponing the inevitable changeover. If they lessened the burdens of the poor and redistributed their income to them most generously and in a considerate manner, they might remain as G-d's custodians for a longer period of time.

מה יעשה אדם ויהיו בניו עשירים?  
 ויקיים: יעשה חסד שמ"ס וחסד' אשתו.  
 ואילו בן חסד' שמ"ס: יבזר מעותיו לעניים  
 שמו: עזר, נתן לאביונים, צדקתו עומדת ערב

What should a man do so that his sons will be rich? And they observed: Let him do the will of heaven and the wishes of his wife. And these are the wishes of heaven: Let him disperse his money to the poor, as it is said: "He has dispersed, he has given to the needy; his righteousness endures forever." (Ps. 112:9)

(Kallah Rabbati 51)

If one follows the desires of his wife, he will have chil-

dren; if he follows those of heaven they will be rich. In fact, the same advice is given to those who wish to have sons. (T.B. Baba Bathra 10b) Those who fulfill the mitzvot of tzedakah on a regular basis will merit wealth themselves (Derech Eretz Zuta 4) and will pass that wealth on to their children.

(T.B. Baba Bathra 9b-10a) As the rabbis said:

הוי אוריב אור העני' כד' גל' יבטל בנק  
 עידי אור מידה ירי ביתך פתח ערוחה כד' גל'  
 יחטרו מניתיך.

Love the poor so your children will come  
 to be in their condition; keep your house  
 wide open so that you'll never lack sustenance.  
 (Derech Eretz Zuta 9)

The love for children and the concern for their welfare are used here as levers to get people to give charity.

We have seen above that whoever lends to the poor is repaid at a critical moment by G-d. If he lends his money without interest, it is credited to him as if he had fulfilled all of the mitzvot (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:3)<sup>135</sup> Furthermore,

אדם נתן פחטה לעני צדקה ונקבה פני שכינה  
 טע' אני בצדק אחזה פניך.

A man who gives a peruta to a poor person deserves and receives the presence of the Shechinah, as it is said: "In righteousness I will see Your face." (Ps. 17:15)

(T.B. Baba Bathra 10)

Six blessings will be bestowed upon such a person and if he pays special attention to the needs and feelings of the poor he will receive eleven blessings. (T.B. Baba Bathra 9b)<sup>136</sup>

Yet, despite the great rewards which come to those who fulfill the mitzvot of tzedakah and the צלות which such behavior earns for them (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:1), one cannot use acts of charity to erase his other sins. (Shoher Tov Mishlei 11) At best, the ענין can be slowed down temporarily.

Let us turn now to the tests which the poor must undergo in their lives. The most difficult of these is the acceptance of their lowly economic status with equanimity. Although their lives may be quite difficult, they must not complain to G-d.

As R. Yehuda explained:

אָר יחזקיה ב"ר שמון: הֵנָּה יוֹשֵׁב וּמַתְרַדֵּם:  
מִדֵּי אֵיךְ מַפְלִיג? הֲלֹא יֵשֵׁן עַל מִטָּתוֹ וְאֵין יֵשֵׁן כֹּהֵן!  
פְּלִיג יֵשֵׁן בֵּיתוֹ וְאֵין כֹּהֵן!

R. Yehuda said in the name of R. Simon:  
This poor man sits and complains - How am  
I different from so-and-so? He sleeps in  
his bed and I sleep here; he sleeps in his  
house and I sleep here!

(Vayikra Rabbah 34:16)

As more and more suffering comes into their lives, they must resist the temptation to become angry at G-d and to rebel against him. (Sh'mot Rabbah 31:2) Indeed, one should bless G-d during his time of sorrow for then his **בְּרִינָה**, his livelihood, will be doubled. (T.B. Berachot 63a) The poor can speed up the **גְּלוּלָה** if they remain at peace with G-d during the time that they are in its downswing. It is interesting that one of the situations to which this is compared is that of a husband and a wife.

אָדָם שֶׁלֹּא נוֹטֵל אִשָּׁה וְעוֹשֶׂה עִמָּה יָמִים בְּרִבּוּי אִפְסָן  
הַעֲנִי אִשְׁתּוֹ אֵינָהּ כּוֹפֶרֶת בּוֹ אֲלֹא אִמְרַת בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁפִּי  
עָשִׂיר הִאֲכִילָנִי וְהַעֲבִישָׁנִי וְעַכְשִׁיו שֶׁהֵעֵנִי אֵינִי כּוֹפֶרֶת בּוֹ.  
וְהַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁבֶט צוֹנֶה-אֶם נָתַן לִי הִיא הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עָלַי  
לֹא נָתַן לִי אֵינִי מְכַרֶּת אֶתְּךָ. לֵכֶךְ נִאֲמַר: יֵאָכֵל  
בְּזָדָה אִשָּׁה מְרֵעָה.

A man who takes a wife and does well by her for a long time, even if he becomes poor his wife will not repudiate him. Rather she will say, "When he was rich he fed and clothed me and now that he has become

poor I will not repudiate him." But if she is a prostitute, if he gives things to her she acknowledges him, but if he doesn't she doesn't recognize him. Thus it is said: "Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her friend." (Jer. 3:19)  
(Sh'mot Rabbah 32:5)

The poor Jew is urged to act like an **אדם** and not like a **דב**, to remember the good times of the past and to be faithful to his G-d even in the present difficult situation.

In his poverty, he is also tested in the economic sphere. Can he keep another's pledge without coveting it? (Tanhuma Vayeshev 5) Will he return lost property to its rightful owner and resist the temptation to keep it for himself? (T.B. Pesachim 113a) Will he be able to overcome his constant concern about his sustenance and live a life of mitzvot? (T.B. Yoma 35b) The poor must strive not to succumb to the economic pressures which are upon him. He must rise above them and live as a righteous Jew. Furthermore, he is challenged to maintain his independence as much as possible.<sup>137</sup> Thus, R. Akiba encourages the poor to make Shabbat into a regular day rather than accept help from others. (T.B. Shabbat 118a) He who is entitled to receive charity but refuses to accept it will see the **סוף** swing in his lifetime. He will not die until he is in a position to be able to support others. (Mishnah Pe'ah 8:9)

In this chapter we have seen that both the rich and the poor are tested within the context of their economic status. Each grouping undergoes spiritual as well as economic trials

and the outcome of these experiences affects the rate at which the  $\delta\epsilon\delta$  operates in the world. Within the economic sphere the goal is clearly to achieve wealth and once having gotten it to keep it as long as possible. It must have been somewhat comforting for the poor to believe in the existence of the  $\delta\epsilon\delta$  since it insured that sometime in the not too distant future their families would be on top.

However, it is significant that the main focus of the testing is on the rich. They have the ability and the freedom to act independently and it is their attitudes and deeds which concern the rabbis. Since there appear to have been no enforceable legal formulae designed to redistribute income and wealth, the rabbis had to rely on exhortations and threats of future punishment. Surely, they did not see and did not expect to see the rich punished in the short run for their failure to pass the tests of wealth, but they hoped that the fear of a shift in the  $\delta\epsilon\delta$  sometime in the future would at least help to prevent the more blatant excesses and abuses of the well-to-do. In all of these midrashim, they show great awareness and understanding of human nature and of the temptations of daily life. One gets the feeling that their approach here is based on a desire to create the right attitudes within the rich. In the absence of strictly defined mitzvot, this was the best that could be achieved.

## CONCLUSION

The rabbis were troubled by the economics of their society. They were keenly aware of the differences between the lifestyle of the rich and that of the poor. However, as we have seen, they defined the problem primarily in theological terms, considering it one of theodicy. They struggled to understand G-d's role in the distribution of income and wealth and to justify the existing situation within the context of His overall plan. Thus, the biblical idea that one's economic status, important as it might be, was not the primary determinant of the quality of his life, was carried over into rabbinic thought as well. The study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot were certainly more significant aspects of one's life.

Yet, beneath this general feeling lay strong opinions about the nature of wealth and poverty. Wealth was a blessing from G-d; the rich were His most active and powerful partners in the world. The rabbis preferred wealth to poverty, despite all of the dangers and temptations which confronted the rich. Wealth could be used to much good; it could become the instrument of G-d's will. The rabbis wanted to be in this economic grouping and to face up to the challenges which came with it. On the other hand, poverty was seen for the terrible condition that it is. It was one of the greatest evils in the world, a most harsh and oppressive form of existence which was to be avoided if at all possible.

Although it was G-d who had established the existing order and allocation of resources, that did not mean that there was no role for man to play. He was to adjust the present distribution within the confines of the institutions and structures of his society. The rabbis did not follow the lead of the Book of Proverbs; they did not blame poverty on the inadequacies of the poor. Rather, they were quite sensitive to and aware of the difficult life they were forced to lead and went to great lengths to urge the rich to treat them well and to share their wealth. The two avenues which existed for the redistribution of wealth were taxes and tzedakah. Since this latter was not specified in detail in the law, the rabbis made great efforts to teach the rich the true spirit of charity and concern for one's fellowman. Without enforceable statutes, they could do little more than urge. To this end they used both the incentives of great reward for proper behavior as well as the threat of punishment in the world-to-come or in future generations for improper or insufficient actions. This may help to explain the great emphasis which is found among the midrashim on the proper behavior of the rich and on the tests which they must undergo.

The rabbis' understanding of human nature was very helpful to them in this effort. They perceived the natural feelings of the poor against the rich and realized that the temptation to steal from them would be very great. The harshness of their lives would make it easy to justify taking from those who were so much better off. They also understood how

easily the rich could become haughty and over-bearing, attributing their success to themselves alone. The wealthy would naturally want to ignore the plight of the poor and could easily come to scorn them as well. Such insights into human behavior and psychology helped the rabbis make their messages more poignant and effective.

Although they looked to the day when all poverty would disappear, they recognized that that was a messianic hope. To justify the existing system and to help the poor cope with their difficult situation, the rabbis developed an instrumental theory of poverty. Poverty could lead to rewards for the poor as well as the rich. In fact, its existence in the world enabled all parts of society to increase their zechut and to lead more righteous lives. Yet, with all of this, the rabbis never lost sight of the fact that the life of poverty was one filled with embarrassment, dependency and pain.

The basic underlying mechanism which characterized the rabbinic conception of economics was the שְׂדֵה. If poverty was such a great evil, at least one knew that in the long run it would leave his family and that everyone would share in it more or less equally. The שְׂדֵה also served as a useful homiletical device. One could influence the speed at which it turned in the life of his family through the performance of mitzvot and through proper behavior within his economic grouping. Thus, the rabbis were able to transcend the level of the material and to put the economic system within the context of G-d's higher plan and the more important values and

qualities. Although the midrashim presented above are quite interesting and insightful, they do not provide us with the basis for a theory of income redistribution. The rabbis were concerned with attitudes; they urged the haves to treat the have-nots with consideration and understanding and to think of them as full and worthwhile people. While we have not learned that lesson to this day, our complex society requires more than good intentions and the proper attitude if the problems of poverty are to be lessened. Modern institutions cannot be influenced by the rabbinic ~~etc~~ theory. There is little hope of alleviating economic hardship without the creation of institutional controls and guidelines. It is thus essential that further studies be made to determine the extent to which the ideas expressed by the rabbis were in fact incorporated into halachic corollaries. The question before us is not one of identifying the problem areas, of perceiving improper behavior. Rather, we need to learn how to establish laws and systems within which such areas will not develop in the first place and will be resolved quickly when they do appear.

One source of data for such additional research might be the extensive responsa literature. This must be examined closely to see if Jewish communities ever enforced the ideas suggested by the rabbis. Were the rich ever compelled to yield part of their wealth or to make minimal contributions to the support of the poor? Did the community ever interfere

in the workings of the marketplace in order to aid the poor or to create a more equal distribution of economic power and wealth? These are some of the important questions for our times, for our economic problems can only be addressed on an institutional level. It is hoped that this initial study will inspire others so that the day will come a little sooner when:

כי לא יהיה בק אביון.

There shall be no needy among you.

(Deu. 15:4)

## NOTES

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel, (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1961) p. 68. Hereafter referred to as Vaux.

<sup>2</sup>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, (Abington Press, New York, 1962) p. 854. Hereafter referred to as IDB.

<sup>3</sup>Vaux, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 69-72.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>6</sup>IDB, p. 854.

<sup>7</sup>Vaux, pp. 68-69.

<sup>8</sup>IDB, p. 818.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 818.

<sup>10</sup>Vaux, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>12</sup>Robert H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament, (Harper & Bros., New York, 1948) pp. 581-2. Hereafter referred to as Pfeiffer.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 511.

<sup>15</sup>Encyclopedia Judaica, (MacMillan Co., New York, 1971-2) p. 944.

<sup>16</sup>Vaux, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup>Pfeiffer, p. 657.

<sup>18</sup>Th. C. Vriezen, An Outline of Old Testament Theology, (Basil, Blackwell, Oxford, 1958) p. 223, n.1.

<sup>19</sup>IDB, p. 818.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 818, 844.

<sup>21</sup>Pfeiffer, p. 657.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, pp. 652, 655.

<sup>23</sup>IDB, p. 818. The terms שֶׁן and נֶזֶר appear most often.

<sup>24</sup>Pfeiffer, pp. 653-656.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Heinisch, The Theology of the Old Testament, (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1950) pp. 185-186. Hereafter referred to as Heinisch.

<sup>26</sup>IDB, p. 819.

<sup>27</sup>Pfeiffer, p. 727.

<sup>28</sup>IDB, pp. 818-819.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 844.

<sup>30</sup>Heinisch, p. 177.

<sup>31</sup>IDB, p. 843.

<sup>32</sup>Heinisch, p. 187.

<sup>33</sup>IDB, p. 853. Yet, compare this to the sentiments expressed in I Sam. 2:7 and Job 1:21.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 843.

<sup>35</sup>Vaux, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup>Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, (Harper & Bros., New York, 1962) Vol I, pp. 400-401.

<sup>37</sup>Vaux, p. 74.

<sup>38</sup>Heinisch, p. 32. Heinisch makes this assertion despite the fact that the verses which he cites are open to other interpretations. See, for example, Proverbs 14:31; 17:5; 22:2.

## NOTES ON CHAPTER II

<sup>39</sup>The citation from T.B. Shabbat 25b is:  
תנו רבנן - איצה עשיר? כל שיש לו נחת רוח בעשרו, דברי רבי  
מאיר. רבי טרפון אומר: כל שיש לו ק' כרחמין ומאד שבות ומאד  
עבדים שזקבין קהין. רבי עקיבא אומר: כל שיש לו אישה  
נאד במעשים. רבי יוסי אומר: כל שיש לו בית הכסא סמוך למלתנו.

<sup>40</sup>The citation from Bamidbar Rabbah 22:8 is:  
ואיצה עשיר? השמח בחלקו. שני: יגיע כפי' כי תלא  
אשר'ק וטוב לך.

<sup>41</sup>The citation from T.B. Baba Metzi's is:  
והיון גאמר רבא עבני מחוצא: אלקירו אלש'כו כי  
פי' דיתת'תרו.

<sup>42</sup>The citation from T.B. Eruvin 86a is:  
רבי מכבד עשירים, רבי עקיבא מכבד עשירים.  
כדדרש רבא בר מרי: ישב עולם עבני אלקים חסד  
ואמת מן ינצלו. אימתי ישב עולם עבני אלקים - בזמן שחסד  
ואמת מן ינצלו.

<sup>43</sup>For a different usage of *עושר* in connection with prayer, meaning abundantly or with great fervor, see Bereshit Rabbah 63:5.

<sup>44</sup>The citation from T.B. Shabbat 92a is:  
דאמר מר: אין השכינה שורה אלא עם חכם, גבור  
ועשיר ובעל קומה.

<sup>45</sup>Claude Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching, (KTAV, New York, 1970) p. 276.

<sup>46</sup>The citation from T.B. Ta'anit 21a is:

א"לפא ורבי יוחנן הוו זרמי באורי"תא דחיקא א"לפא מלתא טובא  
אמר: נ'קח עני' ונ'עבד עמקא ונקיים בתפשי' א"לפא כ' לא עבד ק' א"לפא.  
א"לפא א"לפא תיתי א"לפא רע'עא הוו קא כרבי ר'פא! א"לפא  
תרי מלכ' השרת שמע'יה רבי יוחנן דאמר חד עמקרה  
נ'שע' ע"י"הו רבי א"לפא ונק'ט'נהו שמני חין ח"י עמק  
הטא ועוסקין בח"י שעה. אמר ל'יה: א"לפא שיק'נהו דא"לפא  
בהו חד דק"מא ל'יה שעה, רבי יוחנן שמע' א"לפא לא  
שמע' אמר ל'יה ר' יוחנן מל'פא: שמע'מר מ'יה? אמר  
ל'יה: לא. אמר מד'שמע' א"לפא וא"לפא לא שמע' ש"מ ל'יה  
ק"מא ל'יה שעה. אמר ל'יה: רבי יוחנן: א"לפא, וא"לפא: ר'פא!  
כ' לא יח'ד א"לפא מקרב הארץ. ר' יוחנן ד'יה א"לפא לא ד'יה  
דא"לפא א"לפא ל'יה יוחנן. אמר ל'יה: א"לפא את'מר וזר' לא ד'יה מ'יה.

<sup>47</sup>The interpretation given to Torah here is that of righteous deeds since the tribes are chastised for building fences for their flocks before they had built cities for their children.

<sup>48</sup>The citation from Kohelet Rabbati 5:14 is:

תני בשם רבי יואל בשם ר' א"לפא: ר'פא פ' קפולות כלומר:  
כ' הי'ד'ם כל' ע"י ר'פא, א"לפא וכל'פא נ'פטר מן ר'פא ר'פא ר'פא  
פ'טולות כלומר: לא נ'ח'ת מן הי'ד'ם ר'פא כל'פא. שכן שמה אמר  
כאשר י'בו מ'טא א"לפא צ'ד'ק י'ב'ק ל'כ'ת ר'פא וטולות וז'.

<sup>49</sup>The citation from T.B. Mo'ed Katan 28a is:

ר' ח'א לא חד' מ'ז' ע'מ'ק'ר'בא ל'יה. יואל חד' א"לפא ל'יה כ'פ'א.  
א"לפא ט'ר'ף א"לפא. אמר ל'יה: א"לפא, א"לפא. אמר  
ל'יה: וטא קא מ'ר'ח'מר א"לפא? א"לפא ז'ק'ב' א"לפא ל'יה  
קא מ'ר'ח'מר? ע"י ל'יה א"לפא ש'טא ד'פ'וס א"לפא ל'יה  
(פ'ט'יה).

<sup>50</sup>The reader will begin to realize at this point that there is a tension which underlies much of this area of rabbinic thought. The earlier anti-wealth attitudes are here balanced by more positive feelings. If wealth is a reward for the study of Torah, it must be a good quality.

<sup>51</sup>The citation from Yalkut Sh'moni Kohelet 973 is:

טוב שם ממון טוב. שמתן טוב לעשירים; שם טוב לעניים ולעשרים.

<sup>52</sup>The citation from T.B. Kiddushin 82b is:

רבי מאיר אומר: לעולם ילמד אדם לבקש אומנות נקייה  
וקשה ויקשה רחמים עלי שבעושר והנכסים שלו שאין  
עניות מן האומנות ואין עשירות מן האומנות אלא  
עלי שבעושר שלו שלא: יי' רכסו ועי' נכדו נאסר ה' צבאות.

<sup>53</sup>Dreams can serve as portents of wealth. If one sees a very rich man such as R. Elazar b. Azariah in his dreams or sees turnip heads planted in the ground (an apparent symbol of fertility), his fortunes will increase. (T.B. Berachot 57b)

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>54</sup>They were not **גפיר התלואה בתוך ביתו**.

<sup>55</sup>Although Vayikra Rabbah 34:6 contains two rabbis' opinions, as we shall see below, it is not unreasonable to find a link between them. Thus, one Amora answers the question 'how far had Israel sunk' in spiritual terms and the other in material terms. Perhaps the former sinking preceded and led to the latter one. This interpretation is borne out by the context of the midrash itself.

<sup>56</sup>In a parallel passage (Tanhuma Behar 3) **שבעו מן** is replaced by **שבעו בעלי המצות**; **טובים** is replaced by **טובים** and the level of poverty is such that they could not afford the offering.

<sup>57</sup>Yet, in Sifrei Re'ai 116, when confronted with the possibility of giving support to an **אביון** or to a **תאב**, it is the **תאב** which takes precedence. The meaning here seems to be one who is literally starving.

<sup>58</sup>It is also possible that the **צני** has precedence because he may not qualify for the charity which would sustain the **אביון** until his wages are paid.

<sup>59</sup>In Sh'mot Rabbah 31:11 a parallel passage is found, but here poverty balances all other suffering. The intent is the same.

<sup>60</sup>In Job 19:21 **א' ק' refers to fifty plagues.** Since ten plagues were brought down on Egypt from G-d's finger, His hand would bring fifty plagues.

<sup>61</sup>**א' ק' - lit., when You diminish (smite), You smash into splinters, i.e., You afflict one with poverty.**

<sup>62</sup>It is interesting to note here that the prooftext given for **א' ק'** is Ex. 4:19 **כ' מ' כל ה'א'נ'ס'י'ם** where the midrash tells us elsewhere that **מ' מ'** does not literally mean died but rather lost their influence. (T.B. Nedarim 64b)

<sup>63</sup>The full citation from T.B. Berachot 18a is:  
**אמר רחבה א' יהודה: כל ה'א'ה ה'א'ת וא'ן מ'א'הו,  
 א'בר מ'א'ס, א'וע'ז ע'ר'ס ח'ל'ע'ש'ו'ן, וא'ס פ'א'ו'הו, מ'ה ש'כ'רו?  
 א'ר א'ס: ע'ל'ו ה'כ'ת'ו'ב א'א'מ'ר'י, מ'א'ה' ה' ח'ו'ט פ'ע', "ו'ח'כ'ד'ו  
 ח'ו'ט א'ב'ו'ן."**

<sup>64</sup>An interesting speculation explains this as follows: The two festivals linked in this midrash are the beginning and end of the grape harvest, times when the maidens of Jerusalem would dance joyously in the vineyards.

<sup>65</sup>This phrase appears several times (Bamidbar Rabbah Naso 14:23,24; T.B. Shabbat 102b; T.B. Tammid 31b) and it usually refers to religious expenses: one should not economize in his sacrificial offerings. Nevertheless, since it is also used to refer to the Temple, where no sign of poverty is to appear, the understanding given in the text seems to be a legitimate interpretation.

<sup>66</sup>The full citation of T.B. Gittin 30a is:  
**ר'ה'מ'א'ה מ'ע'ת'ו'ן ו'א'ת ה'ע'נ'י ב'ב'ית ה'פ'ן ו'ח'ת מ'פ'ר'י'ש ע'ל'ו  
 ב'ח'ז'ק'ת ע'נ'י י'ט'א'ל... ה'ע'ש'יר ה'ע'נ'י א'ין מ'פ'ר'י'ש ע'ל'ו  
 ו'ז'כ'ר ה'ל'ה ב'מ'ה ש'ב'י'צ'ו' ו'ר'ב'נ'ן: מ'א'ו' ש'א'ן ע'ל'י'ת'ה  
 ב'ע'ב'וד ת'ק'נ'ת'א ו'מ'א'ו' ש'א'ן ע'ל'י'ת'ה פ'ע'ל' ע'ב'וד'**

תקנתא? מיתר שכיחא עשרות לא שכיחא. אמר  
 רב פבא: פ"נ דאמרי אינשי חברק מת אשה;  
 איקשר לא קאטר.

<sup>67</sup>However, see T.B. Arachin 17a and T.B. Niddah 70a for a contrary view.

<sup>68</sup>Another way of interpreting this would be to understand **פני** as poor in Torah, though this is perhaps far-fetched since **פ** is understood in economic terms unless there is reason to think otherwise.

<sup>69</sup>This midrash is but another example of the rabbis' efforts not to embarrass the poor. The poor do not wait for their dole at the owner's discretion.

<sup>70</sup>A second Amora relates their sinking in material terms. The Israelites became so poor that they could not bring a single poor man's offering.

<sup>71</sup>In Tanhuma Behar 3, **ד** is defined similarly: **שפי** **דא** **מחמי** **טוב**, they were impoverished with respect to good deeds.

<sup>72</sup>The proper attitude of the rich to the poor will be discussed in greater detail below in Chapter 6. Here we seek merely to set out certain broad principles.

<sup>73</sup>The full citation of T.B. Baba Metzi'a 30 is:

דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב: אבס כי לא יהיה  
 בק אביון. שלק קודם לטל כל אדם.

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: There shall be no needy among you (Deu. 15:4). "Yours" takes precedence over that of every other person.

<sup>74</sup>In this context it is interesting to note that elsewhere the midrash tells us that,

י קדיק עניות ירבו לעולם, תעשרה נטלה בהם ואחר  
 כל העולם כולם.

Ten measures of poverty came into the world.

Babylonia took nine and the rest of the world one.

(T.B. Kiddushin 49b)

<sup>75</sup>It is difficult to draw any strong conclusions from this midrash since it is preceded by the statement that the charity collectors used to hide from this Elazar since he would give them everything he had, a practice which the rabbis did not encourage.

<sup>76</sup>The citation on which this conclusion is based is:

וּבֵן עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת עֹפְרָעָה רַב וְשֹׁמֵן.  
חֶפֶז אֲחֵר: שִׁמְשְׁכָנוֹת אֶת בְּעָלֵיהֶן.  
וְחֶפֶז אֲחֵר: שִׁמְשְׁכָנוֹת אֶת בְּעָלֵיהֶן.

And they built storehouses for Pharoah. (Ex. 1:11)  
Rav and Shmuel disagreed:

One said: they endangered the lives of their owners.

One said: they impoverished their owners.

(T.B. Sotah 11a)

The context of the verse from Exodus shows the Israelites being oppressed by Egyptian taskmasters. This eventually led to the lives of the Egyptians being endangered and their property plundered.

<sup>77</sup>At the time of Rabbah and R. Joseph this option was removed.

<sup>78</sup>The cases include refusing to give evidence, breaking one's word and uncleanness, although the last is not a "crime". The full citation is:

אֵלֹהֵי מִכְּאֵין קָרְבָן עֹלֶה וְיֹרֵד - עַל שְׂמִיעַת קוֹל וְעַל בִּטּוֹי  
שְׁפָתַיִם וְעַל טוֹמְאוֹת מִקְדָּשׁ וּקְדָשׁוֹ וְהִיאֲלֹמֶת וְהַמְצֹרֵד.  
תָּנוּ רַבָּנִן: יֵשׁ מִכָּאֵ בִּדְלוֹת וְעֲשִׂירוֹת וְיֵשׁ מִכָּאֵ בִּדְלוֹת  
וְיֵשׁ מִכָּאֵ בִּדְלֵי דְלוֹת.

<sup>79</sup>Lev. 14:10, 21.

<sup>80</sup>It should be remembered, however, that one is not obliged to impoverish himself in order to save someone else

from a loss. (T.B. Baba Metzi'a 30) In addition, it is important to note that the person involved here is a rav who is also rich. Perhaps there are higher demands placed upon such people.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>81</sup>Malachi 2:8

Ps. 24:1

לִי הַכֶּסֶף וְלִי הַזָּהָב  
לִפְנֵי הָאֵלֹהִים וּמַלְאָכָה

<sup>82</sup>See also Shoher Tov T'hillim 82 for a similar reference.

<sup>83</sup>See also Vayikra Rabbah 34:4,

מִן הַשֶּׁמֶט לִפְנֵי עֵץ ... וְהָיָה שֶׁמֶט לִפְנֵי עֵץ

<sup>84</sup>Thus, the two midrashim which deal with G-d's giving R. Shimon B. Halafta a jewel so he could celebrate a festival may be the rabbis' way of saying that he never should have asked for it in the first place. Rather, he should have made do with what little he had.

(Sh'mot Rabbah 52:3; Midrash T'hillim 92:8)

<sup>85</sup>The rich are to use it for **מִלִּין** (Tanhuman Mishpatim 12) and for **שֶׁחַח** (Tanhuma Mishpatim 9).

<sup>86</sup>We do not address ourselves to a person's ethical behavior or his observance of Torah here since Chapter 6 will deal with this area in great detail. The issue at hand is rather whether hard work will yield additional financial gains.

<sup>87</sup>This can also be seen in the influence which human activity has on the economic status of the prophet Elijah. If the Jews are meritorious, he will come on heavenly clouds. If they are not, he will become lowly and will be riding an ass. (T.B. Sanhedrin 98a)

<sup>88</sup>The citation from Mishnah Shekalim 2:5 is

מִתְּחִיל עָנִי וְעָנִי  
מִתְּחִיל עָנִי לְמִתְּחִיל עָנִי

<sup>89</sup>The sanctity of the original distribution of wealth, which was in theory an equal one, may be seen in the laws of the Seventh and Jubilee Years. One who violates the laws of the Seventh Year eventually loses all of his economic and

and personal status. (T.B. Kiddushin 20a)

<sup>90</sup>Another version of this citation, attributed to Shmuel, is found in T.B. Mo'ed Katan 18b.

<sup>91</sup>In T.B. Shabbat 156a there is a discussion of the role of the stars in determining a person's future. Yet, it is concluded that the constellations have no control over Jews.

<sup>92</sup>See also T.B. Baba Bathra 10a.

<sup>93</sup>This was not such a strange conclusion to reach in a society where land was the main source of income and wealth.

<sup>94</sup>See also Tanhuma Mishpatim 9.

<sup>95</sup>This offering, made before the public, brought the priest wealth, as did any act which served the needs of the public. For further details see T.B. Yoma 26a.

<sup>96</sup>Yet, recall the previously noted midrash which stated that the shechinah rested only on the rich. (T.B. SHabbat 92a)

<sup>97</sup>See also Sh'mot Rabbah 31:12.

<sup>98</sup>Pss. 3:8; 7:7; 9:20; 10:12; 17:13.

<sup>99</sup>

ממך אני עושה עו  
קטן מזה יד שאין קולא.

(Sifrei R'ei 117)

<sup>100</sup>A similar case is found in T.B. Berachot 18a to which reference has already been made. He who escorts the dead (poor) to the cemetery honors G-d and is repaid by Him.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER V

<sup>101</sup>In all fairness to the wife, her curses will lead him to poverty only if he can afford to buy her the jewelry she wants and still refuses to do so!

<sup>102</sup>See also Mishnah Avot 3:11.

<sup>103</sup>The citation reads:

אלו אשר כותבין מאי טעמא? עשרים וארבע תעניות  
ישבו אנשי כנסת הגדולה על כותבי ספרים, תפילין  
ומצוות שלא יתעשרו, שאימתי מתעשרין אין כותבין.  
תני רבנן: כותבי ספרים תפילין ומצוות הן  
ותעריהן ותערי תעריהן וכל העוסקים במלאכות  
השמים לאיתר"י מוכרי תבואת-עצים אין להם סמך  
ברכה לעולם ואם עוסקין עשה רש"י.

<sup>104</sup>The citation reads:

ולמה הם עניים בעולם הזה?  
כדי שלא יתעסקו בעבירות בטלים וישכחו  
את התורה. וכן הלא אומר: ר' קנ"י ראשית ערכו.

<sup>105</sup>Despite the religious value which poverty was to have for the Jews, it is undoubtedly also true that the conditions of great poverty both in Palestine as well as in Babylonia gave the rabbis a reason to find something good in it. (Esther Rabbah 1:17; T.B. Kiddushin 49b)

<sup>106</sup>R. Akiba's words are elsewhere attribute by Shmuel to the following popular saying:

יאה עניותא עידיבאי כי ברעא סומקא לסוסא חילא.  
(T.B. Chagigah 9b)

The meaning is the same as the version by R. Akiba given in the text.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

<sup>107</sup>Elsewhere (Ruth Rabbah 5:9), the midrash claims that the poor do more for the rich than they do in return. In the example used about Ruth and Boaz, we see Ruth working very hard for a single slice of bread which is of no significance to Boaz. Yet, through this small effort Boaz will receive much merit. This is a hyperbolic, dramatic justification of poverty. See also Kohelet Rabbah 3.

<sup>108</sup>This is consistent with the view expressed earlier that poverty is a blessing because it turns one to G-d.

<sup>109</sup>This may be seen, in part, in their hostile attitude toward charity and toward those who shared with the poor. (Pirkei R. Eliezer 25)

<sup>110</sup>See. T.B. Yoma 35b.

<sup>111</sup>The citation reads:  
 ותקח לו תבת אטא - מאי טא אטא? איך אעצור:  
 מיטאן עזציקים שמחנא חביב עליהן יותר מאפן, וכל  
 כך אמר? עפי שאין בלשטין ידיון קצצה.

<sup>112</sup>Although we will not discuss the responsibility of the rich to the non-Jewish poor, the rabbis felt that for the sake of peace consideration should be shown to them as well. They were to have equal access to the poor tithes and were to be supported and cared for in case of illness. (T.B. Gittin 59b-60a)

<sup>113</sup>See Sh'mot Rabbah 31:5.

<sup>114</sup>This is shown in a negative way by the midrashic definition of a **רשע זרוק**, a subtly wicked person, as one who gives a poor man the single dinar that will make his holdings total two hundred zuzim. He will then be ineligible to receive poor tithes. (T.B. Sotah 21b)

<sup>115</sup>For a parallel passage see Vayikra Rabbah 34:4.

<sup>116</sup>In addition, the part of the field left for pe'ah must never be the worst. (T.J. Pe'ah 4:3)

<sup>117</sup>This may explain why some of the Sages felt that one should give a poor man clothing without questioning him at all and others felt that one should give him food without asking him for proof of need. (T.B. Baba Bathra 9a)

<sup>118</sup>The full citation is:  
 גימיל עילת - גמול עילת, מא' טעמא פשוטא כרעיה  
 עילת, עילת? עילת? עילת? עילת? עילת? עילת?  
 אחר עילת.

<sup>119</sup>See also Sifrei R'ei 116.

<sup>120</sup>See also Sifrei R'ei 117.

<sup>121</sup>See T.B. Ketubot 67b for additional examples.

<sup>122</sup>A parallel passage in Vayikra Rabbah 34:1 has

הוי מסתכל בו האק עזכות צמו.

<sup>123</sup>See also T.B. Baba Metzi'ah 31b.

<sup>124</sup>See also Shohar Tov T'hillim 41 and T.J. Pe'ah 8:9.

<sup>125</sup>Indeed, this is considered such a serious sin that the rabbis say

גדול עונש גזע עניים יותר מעון פור המבול

(Kallah Rabbati 12)

<sup>126</sup>See also Tanhuma Vayishlach 10 where stealing from the poor is defined as not allowing the poor to take the gleanings or favoring some of them over others.

<sup>127</sup>The citation is:

בשמה רבי יוחנן וריש לקיש הוי נחת מסחו בפרט  
במ/ס"ן פטברא ופזז בהון חד מסכן. אמר עמון:  
זכון ב. אמרין ליה: כ' נפקין אמן זכין בק.  
נפקין אשכחון יתיה פמח. אמרין בלוי ושא זכמן  
כיה בחילוי נטפס במיתתיה. כ' ק"מין מסחין  
יתיה אשכחין לס דדנך גביה.

See also Vayikra Rabbah 34:10 for a parallel passage.

<sup>128</sup>See also Mishnan Pe'ah 8:9.

<sup>129</sup>See, for example, Tanhuma Mishpatim 12 and T.B. Bera-  
chot 63a.

<sup>130</sup>See also Ruth Rabbah 5:9, Sh'mot Rabbah 31:2 and  
Vayikra Rabbah 34:9.

<sup>131</sup>Elsewhere in Tanhuma Behar 2, the word **מַנְעֵנִין**, charms, is substituted for **סַעֲסָע**.

<sup>132</sup>See also Tanhuma Vayishlach 10 and T.B. Temurah 16a.

<sup>133</sup>The key verses for most of the preceding midrashim are:

Prov. 29:13 **רָם וְאִישׁ תְּכָכִים נִפְגָּשׁ**  
 Prov. 22:2 **עֲשֵׂה וְרָם נִפְגָּשׁ עוֹשֶׂה כְּלוֹם ה'**  
 Deu. 15:10 **כִּי בִגְעַל הַבֶּקֶר הִנָּחָה**  
 and Ps. 75:8 **כִּי אֶעֱלֶם שֹׁמֵר זֶה יִשְׁכַּח וְהוֹי יִרָם**

<sup>134</sup>An halachic expression of this rabbinic understanding is found in the way in which the priests considered the poor. The valuation of a poor person could be made quite low but it was always done on a temporary basis since poverty was seen as being a short term set-back for the individual. (T.B. Arachin 17a)

<sup>135</sup>The citation is:  
**כֹּה אִי שֵׁשׁ בּוֹ עוֹשֶׂה וְנִתַּן צְדָקָה עַל־יָדָיו וְאִינוּ  
 מַעֲשֵׂה בְרִיּוֹת, מַעֲשֵׂין עֲלֵיו כְּאִילוֹ קִיָּם עַל הַמְצוֹת מֵאֵין.**

<sup>136</sup>Elsewhere in Vayikra Rabbah 34:11 the midrash states that twenty-four blessings will come to him.

<sup>137</sup>However, if he is in desperate need, there is no doubt that he should make his conditions known to the community. (T.B. Shabbat 104a)

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