

*[Thursday's Study]*

<sup>2</sup> The play and movie were adaptations from a collection of Yiddishkeit stories written by Ukrainian author Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich [1859-1916], who wrote under the *nom de plume* Shalom Aleichem.

*Oh, dear Lord, You made many, many poor people.  
I realize, of course, it's no shame to be poor...  
but it's no great honor either.*

One of the more curious characters in the 'Fiddler' story was *Nachum* the Beggar. Always dirty and disheveled from scrounging, Nachum frequented all the places where the Hebrew men of the village could be seen gathering. Never daring to speak, he would approach the group tentatively. He would then extend his hand, inviting the men to give him alms. Each time he garnered the attention of a fellow Hebrew he would shrug his shoulders as if to say '*this too is part of being a Jew*'. After being waved away by one or two men Nachum's plight would always touch the heart of someone – often Tevye – who would smile and give the beggar a morsel to eat. Tevye thought of himself as poor – but then he saw someone much, much poorer than himself, and it stirred something inside of him. Nachum's extended hand and helpless shrug was his reminder concerning how blessed he and his family really were.

The subtle point of Nachum's character in the play, juxtaposed upon Tevye's frequent conversations with the Almighty, is that in relation to the Holy One *we are all beggars*. And in relation to the business of the Holy One's Kingdom, we all, like Nachum, often project ourselves as lame carriers of His glory. Just like *Nachum* the beggar, and like Tevye's beloved but all-too-often lame horse, if our Stronger Covenant Partner in Heaven does not have compassion upon us, and bless us, we too will starve.

And so before we leave Sinai and head toward the Land of milk and honey our King has promised us the Most Beautiful Voice the world has ever known speaks once again. He does not want us to suffer from the foolish illusion that we will all be rich, by the world's standards, once we get to *Eretz Yisrael*. He does not want us to think that being rich by the world's standards is even something to which we should aspire. He says:

***Vechi yamuch achicha umatah yado imach***

*If one of your brothers becomes poor, and his hand becomes weak/powerless among you,*

***veheicheizakta***

*then you are to strengthen, nourish, and help him become secure and able to stand on his own<sup>3</sup>.*

**[Leviticus 25:35[a]]**

So ... there will be poor people among us - *even in the Promised Land*? Who would have imagined? How are we to respond to Nacham's of our world?

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<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew verb used by the Holy One to describe what we are to do with regard to a brother who becomes poor is derived from the verb root *chazak* – *chet, zayin, qof*, Strong's Hebrew word #2388.

As Yeshua said: *The poor you have with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good.* Mark 14:7 [a]. But who is ‘poor’? And what does ‘doing good’ to the poor look like in real time?

The definition of who is ‘poor’ and how the Bride-People of the Great King are supposed to deal with them are both very, very weighty issues indeed. Fortunately, both issues are addressed thoroughly in Torah.

### ***Mi Nacham? Who is ‘Poor’?***

What does the term ‘poor’ really mean? In our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Westernized culture the term “poor” has somehow become so redefined as to include persons of the “working class”. In order to get elected demagogues have found it helpful to stir up class envy. They have found they can touch both a materialistic and a self-righteous cord in people by defining “poor” as other than grossly wealthy. The ‘grossly wealthy’ are then blamed for all the society’s ills. It is a disingenuous – but highly effective – political strategy. In America, therefore, politicians now conveniently label everyone other than our society’s richest people as ‘poor’. People on ‘fixed incomes’ are therefore classified as poor. Couples who do not earn a combined income in the six figures [\$100,000.00 or more per year] are therefore classified as ‘poor’ as well. Spouting an ‘apartheid’ message of division and distrust, aspiring politicians consider the ‘poor’ as a potentially useful constituency of easily manipulated economic class bigots. As a result they define ‘poor’ more and more broadly with every election cycle, because doing so, if they can sell it to the media and the public, will increase the size of their constituency and stir up the populist passion. It gets politicians elected all the time. But it is all smoke and mirrors.

The Holy One defines poverty much differently than America’s politicians. He defines poverty in terms of actual, critical *need* – not *class envy*. He does not insist – or even suggest – that *wealth be equally distributed*. There is no instruction in the Torah or anywhere in Holy Writ for us to develop a welfare state, or tax people one cent in the name of accomplishing whatever a fallen man may consider a “fair” redistribution of wealth. All the wealth of the world is *His* – and He can distribute it to whom He wills. He does not consider ‘working class’ people to be “poor”. Neither does He consider people on a *fixed income* to be “poor”.

The Hebrew word which our English Bibles translate as “poor” is *ebyon*<sup>4</sup>. It means in a *desperate situation*, about to starve to death, or die due to lack of raiment or shelter, if no one arises to rescue them. It means being *subject to oppression and abuse because of lack of provision*. In the eyes of the Holy One, the poor are merely *those who will starve or die of exposure today without assistance*.

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<sup>4</sup> Ebyon is *alef, beit, yod, vav, nun sofit*. Strong’s Hebrew word #34, it is pronounced *abe-yone*’.

*Ebyon* is not a *comparative* term – *i.e.* one person is not ‘poor’ in comparison to someone else. One is either about to starve to death or be exposed to the elements under conditions that make death likely [*i.e.* be poor] or he is not.

If a person is not ‘poor’ *from a Biblical standpoint*, to intervene in his situation is *not Biblical*. It is, instead, to substitute one’s ideas of proper wealth distribution for those of the Holy One. The Serpent, however, always tries to convince people who have all that the Holy One thinks they need that they are ‘poor’. In the Holy One’s wisdom, He had given Adam and Chava all they could ever need to fulfill the grand plan He had for them. But the Serpent convinced them they were poor because of the Holy One had not offered them one thing among a million – the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And thus the first ‘Apartheid’ speech found a willing audience and had its deadly effect.

### ***What is ‘Doing Good to the Poor’ Supposed to Look Like In The Kingdom of Heaven***

What does ‘*doing them [i.e. the poor] good*’ look like in real time? What does the Holy One tell us we are to do for the poor brothers we always have among us? He says ‘**chazakta**’! He tells us it is our reasonable covenant service to *chazak* our brother. What does it mean to *chazak* someone, you ask? It means to *get personally involved in their desperate situation in real, tangible, game-changing ways*. The verb *chazak* means *to firmly establish* – to assist, nurture, and strengthen someone to the point he can stand on his own. The verb is first used in Genesis 19:6 to describe what an angel did for Lot and his family – taking them by the hand, leading them out of the city of Sodom, and then safely establishing them in a safe location in order that would be safe from the calamity that was about to occur.

Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind in regard to our calling to *chazak* the poor among our brethren. First of all, we in the Community of the Redeemed are never to allow ourselves to think ill of, look down upon, feel contempt for, or make fun of anyone who is “poor”. We must keep in mind at all times that we deserve nothing. We are supremely blessed just to be alive. We are no better than the poorest man. Poverty could just as easily be our lot.

Secondly, we in the Community of the Redeemed are never to look upon any possession the Holy One has entrusted into our stewardship as our own. All possessions – indeed all material things in this world - belong to the Holy One and to Him alone.

Thirdly, we should not feel *guilt* over the fact that the Holy One has, in his infinite wisdom and covenant faithfulness, chosen to entrust possessions in our care. We

should also reject any sense of *pride* or *privilege* that may arise from having more possessions than anyone else. We need not – must not – ever apologize for or feel bad about having possessions when someone else does not. We must not substitute our judgment – or any man’s judgment – for the judgment of the Holy One.

Fourthly, we are not called to take up a burden for every poor person or people group in the world. The poor ‘in the world’ are His business, not ours. As part of His wise plan of redemption each of us has been assigned a very specific sphere of influence and impact. Within the sphere of influence that the Holy One has assigned to us there will always be plenty of poor people who will need our attention. We do not have to – and act independent of the Holy One if we *try* to<sup>5</sup> – solve all the problems of the “poor”. We are merely to follow the instructions He gave us in the Torah.

So what does the Holy One say is to define our approach to the poor people we encounter within our assigned sphere of influence? The Holy One does not want us to be confused about this. He does not want us to think helping the poor is the government’s responsibility. He wants us to understand it is a highly personal and intimate one. He thus lays out for us a series of very practical instructions on the subject of how exactly we are to *chazak* a brother in need. Let’s look closely at those instructions, shall we?

**Phase I of Chazak-ing the Poor Brother Living Among Us:**  
*The Open Hand And Interest-Free Loan*

In Deuteronomy 15:7-9 Moshe begins a summary of the Holy One’s instructions regarding our responsibility to *chazak* the poor as follows:

*If there is among you a poor man of your brethren,  
within any of the gates in your land which the Holy One your God is giving you,  
you are not to harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother,  
but you shall be to open your hand wide to him  
and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.*

[Deuteronomy 15:7-8]

This relates to a descriptive use of the verb *chazak* in Torah from the inspired Writer’s description of Yosef’s actions in making available grain from the storehouses over which he had been given authority in order to avoid mass starvation during the seven years of famine. See **Genesis 41:56-57**.

The Holy One makes it clear in Deuteronomy 15 that the first issue we have to address in connection with our dealings with the poor is internal. It is a *matter of the heart*. Above all, we are never, ever to ‘harden our heart’ [in Hebrew, *lo tametz et-*

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<sup>5</sup> Remember, Yeshua taught us that ‘*without Me you can do [Hebrew asah] nothing.*’.

*levavcha*] against a poor man. We are never to think up reasons why we can or should ignore his need. We are never to rationalize away our responsibility. We are never to look for excuses not to help him. We are never to cease to be moved with compassion for him – even if he himself is responsible for the state in which we find him.

The Holy One then makes it clear that the second thing we are called upon to do in relation to the poor is very, very practical. The ‘matter of the heart’ must become a *matter of the hand*. We are never, ever to ‘shut our hand’ [in Hebrew, *lo tiqfotz et-yadeicha*] from a poor man. We are not told to open either our bank account or our grain bins to him; but we are told to ‘open our hand wide’ to him. That means whatever we have ‘in our hands’ – i.e. anything non-essential and disposable – is to be considered fair game for a loan. Not a donation. Not a gift. An interest-free loan – and not a loan for indulgences of the flesh, but a loan for that which is essential to his survival, and that alone. We are given freedom, subject to the essential ‘*lo tametz et-lavavcha*’ and ‘*lo tiqfotz et-yadeicha*’ parameters discussed above, to put such conditions and safeguards on the loan as we may, after prayer, deem to be appropriate. But we are to respect his dignity enough to present the offer to him as a business transaction – i.e. an investment in his potential that comes with responsibilities of repayment - instead of as a ‘hand-out’.

We have been raised up as a people in order to *be a blessing to every family on the face of the earth*. **Genesis 12:3**. We are therefore to model the goodness and kindness of our King to the world in real, tangible, ways. To the extent we find ourselves having more of the staples and necessities of life than we need for our own families, we will from time to time be called upon to ‘open our hand’ to the poor among us - and to *share food and/or other necessities with him*.

Likewise, if we have money or other goods available beyond our immediate needs which could provide what is necessary to *chazak* him and his family, we are to willingly lend that money or material thing to him without interest. This is our reasonable covenant service.

### **Phase II of Chazak-ing the Poor Brother Living Among Us:**

#### ***The Corner of the Field and the Gleanings of the Orchard and Vineyard***

A second interesting use of this verb in regard to Yosef’s wise and just dealings with the impoverished is found in Genesis 47:20-24, where it is reported that as more and more people in Egypt became destitute due to the continuation of the famine Yosef used the resources made available to him by Pharaoh to purchase their land, but then sent them forth to sow more grain in the same fields for their



own families first [the first 80% harvested was for them], and for the common good second [the final 20% harvested was for the common fund].

Perhaps it was with this familiar example in mind that the Holy One told us to leave the ‘corners’ of every field for the poor [and for the stranger]. In the original ‘love’ chapter, Leviticus 19, the Holy One put it this way:

*When you reap the harvest of your land,  
you are not to wholly reap the corners of your field,  
nor are you to gather the gleanings of your harvest.  
And you are not to glean your vineyard,  
nor are you to gather every grape of your vineyard;  
you are to leave them for the poor and the stranger:  
I am the Holy One your God.’*

[Leviticus 19:9-10; see also Leviticus 23:22]

How much square footage are we to leave in the corner of our field for the poor and the stranger to eat? How many grapes are we to leave on the vine for them to consume? We are not told. This is a mitzvah without prescribed measure. The quantity is not legislated as a matter of *halakah*. Nor is it supposed to be determined by habit or by tradition. The exact amount of the crop we have grown that is to be left in place for the poor and the sojourner to eat is to be worked out by us with the Holy One each growing season. With regard to each corner of each field, in each year, He wants the quantification of our ‘corner’ to be a subject of personal decision we make – after consulting with Him privately concerning the matter. We are to make this a matter of regular, consistent prayer. We are to invite Him to give us more specific instructions. It is supposed to be for us an important facet of learning to walk with, *sh’ma*, trust, and co-labor with the Holy One.

But what if the needs of the poor people within our sphere of influence get to be too much for a ‘corner of the field’ approach to be successful? The Holy One has instructions for that scenario as well.

### **Phase III of Chazak-ing the Poor Brother Living Among Us:** *Taking Him Into Our Homes as an Indentured Servant*

Other nations and cultures create vast – and usually very inefficient - beurocracies to administer entitlement programs that they like to promote as being for *the poor*. That is not, however, what the Holy One has called us, His *holy nation*, to do. The Holy One has instead instructed us:

*And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor,  
and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave.  
As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you,  
and is to serve you until the Year of Jubilee.  
And then he is to depart from you—he and his children with him—*

*and is to return to his own family.  
He is to return to the possession of his fathers.  
For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt;  
they are not to be sold as slaves.  
‘You are not to rule over him with rigor; you are to fear your God.  
[Leviticus 25:39-43]*

Alas, the Holy One knows the future. He knows that it will not only be our fellow Hebrews who will be coming to us needing assistance. As our ancestors once went to Egypt, seeking food and shelter from a famine, the Holy One has ordained that the people of the nations will come to us. As Moshe prophesied:

*The Holy One will open to you His good treasure, the heavens,  
to give the rain to your land in its season,  
and to bless all the work of your hand.  
You will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow.  
And the Holy One will make you the head and not the tail;  
you will be above only, and not be beneath,  
if/as/when/to the extent you sh’mar the mitzvot of the Holy One your God,  
with which I charge you today, and are careful to observe them.  
[Deuteronomy 28:12-13]*

What will we do when foreigners come calling? What will we do when the nations of the world come begging us to take their babies because they cannot feed them or care for them the way we can? This too is part of our Bridegroom-King’s grand redemptive plan. We are in no wise to turn the desperate parents of the nations away. When we are established in the Land of the Patriarchs He wants us to deal HIS WAY with the poor of the nations, even as we deal in HIS WAY with the poorest of the poor among our own families, clans, and tribes.

### ***Introducing The Most Radical, Benevolent Form of Human Trafficking The World Has Ever Known***

The Holy One has a plan to redeem all of humanity from bondage to the serpent. He has a plan to heal people from all nations, tribes, clans, and tongues from the diseases contracted through the ingestion of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. His plan is radical. He intends for us to be at the epicenter of it. And *when we get established in the Land of Promise* He therefore commissions us to deal with the hardest cases of poverty we will face by engaging in a very unusual form of human trafficking:

*And as for your male ebed [servant] and your female amah [handmaid]  
whom you may have from the nations that are around you,  
from them you may acquire an ebed or an amah.  
Moreover you may acquire the children of the strangers who dwell among you,  
and their families who are with you, that they beget in your land;  
and they will become your responsibility.  
And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you,*



*to inherit them as a responsibility;  
they will be your servants forever.  
But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel,  
you are not to rule over one another with rigor.*  
[Leviticus 25:44-46]

Think of our father Avram for a moment. Do you remember who accompanied him on his journeys? In addition to his wife he had a number of servants that Torah tells us were ‘born in his house’. Among these was Syrian-born Eliezer of Damascus. See **Genesis 15:2 and Genesis 24**. But there were apparently a significant number of ‘taught servants’ from Avram’s household who accompanied him into battle to rescue Lot and his family. **Genesis 14:14**. We are not told how these men became associated with Avram – just that they did. We are not told what they were taught by Avram – only that they were. Nowhere are we given any reason to believe that these men were taken against their will, mistreated or abused in any way, or employed by Avram in any selfish mission. They were, instead, a part of his household. When he had no sons, they became like sons to him. Call them servants if you will – or call them slaves. Those are merely labels. But be sure to put whatever negative connotation you may have for the label you use away when you think of the kind of relationship those men had with Avram Avinu and/or that he had with them. They were an important, valued, and integral part of the household the Holy One gave Avraham to: *... teach his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of YHVH, to do righteousness and justice ...* **Genesis 18:18**.

If people from other cultures and nations of the world have become so perverse and sick that they actually want to sell their children into servitude, or if they are in such desperate circumstances that they feel they have no choice but to do so, the Holy One makes it clear that we may buy those children from them if we have the means. We are not to go into the bushes and round them up and force anyone into bondage. We are not to steal children away from their parents. We are not to try to convince parents to sell us their children. But if a child’s own parents do not want to, or do not feel they can, provide the basic needs of those children, part of our call of redemption is that we are to redeem them lest anyone else does. Better that we take them in than that the Midyani or the Yish’maeli – the ones who bartered for Yosef - swoop them up and market them off. Better we take them in than that they get taken in and abused by the *Potifar’s wife value systems* prevalent in foreign cultures. Better we take them in than that they are purchased for resale by sex traffickers. At least we can give each child a sense of their worth as seen through the eyes of their Creator. At least we can offer them a reason to live, food to eat, and shelter – which their parents either refused or were unable to do. At least we, like Avraham, can *teach them how to keep the way of the Holy One, to do righteousness and justice*. Unlike others who do not know the Holy One and His ways of mercy and kindness,

the Holy One knows we will – if we remain true to the covenant - treat them with the utmost respect. Unlike others, we will actually incorporate them in our households.

As Yeshayahu [Isaiah] prophesied:

*The sons of foreigners will build up your walls,  
And their kings will minister to you.*

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*the sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you,  
And all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet;  
And they will call you the City of the Holy One - Tziyon of the Holy One of Israel.*

[Isaiah 60:10, 14]

Taking a person of a different culture into your own home is the most radical form of redemption the world has ever known. It is highly offensive to modern man. But the Holy One does not particularly care what offends modern man. He cares about *people* - not concepts, or ideas, or principles of man's versions of 'social justice'. He cares about *children's lives, futures, and destinies* - not the moral sensitivities of fallen men who think they know better. The Holy One called and empowered us – as individuals and as a Kingdom culture - to be the *best stewards of human souls on earth*. He knows, you see, that if we just follow His instructions, children who are going to be sold into slavery by their parents anyway will be far better off with us than with anyone else. As the prodigal son said when he came to himself: *How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!* Luke 15:17. We are called to make our households as benevolent as the household of the prodigal son's father. If foreigners come into our households, we are to take care of them like our own. And some of them will embrace our God and His Ways. For the Holy One has said:

*Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Holy One, to serve Him,  
And to love the name of the Holy one, to be His servants—  
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant—  
Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,  
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifice will be accepted on My altar;  
For My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*

[Isaiah 56:6-7]

But wait, you may say – why does not the Holy One provide for foreign servants to go free in the Yovel year the way Hebrew servants do? Alas, Dear ones, remember that, unlike Hebrews, foreign servants have nowhere to go when the shofar blows. If their parents have sold them into servitude, to what would they return?

### ***Embracing the Holy One's Radical Plan of Caring for the Poor***

We have thus seen that in the eyes of the Bridegroom-King poverty is best dealt with by *individuals and families* – members of the Redeemed Community at large who have experienced the spiritual enlightenment, renewal, and blessing of the

Holy One, and want to pass it on. It is not supposed to be dealt with by legislation, by government programs, by private foundations, by charitable organizations, or for that matter by local churches, synagogues, temples or mosques.

One of the main reasons the Bridegroom-King called us to be His kingdom of priests and holy nation is so that we can, as Avraham did, represent His Heart and His goodness to the poor people with whom He brings us into contact. The presence of poor people in our midst thus poses a crucial test of our commitment to the Holy One and the covenant lifestyle to which He has called us.

All of the Torah's instructions regarding dealing with the poor are instructions *to individuals* – to heads of families. Never does the Holy One address any responsibility with regard to the poor to any community policy-maker, legislator, priest or clergyman. Instead, every Torah-submissive man, woman and child is to have or be in the process of developing:

- [a] a proper understanding of the things that cause a person to be poor,
- [b] a proper (not condescending or sentimental) attitude toward the poor around him, and
- [c] proper behavior toward the poor around him - so that the poor person does not fall into, or perpetuate, a co-dependent lifestyle or develop an “entitlement” mentality.

The Bridegroom-King wants us – as His representatives on earth - to deal with the poor as He would. He does not want our dealings with the poor to be corrupted by demagoguery, manipulation, or begging for donations. He wants us to learn to feel about the poor what He feels and to see in and concerning the poor what He sees. He then wants us to join Him in doing what He does.

The time of abdicating this responsibility to government and to ‘non-profit’ organizations is rapidly coming to an end. The Holy One expects – and is prophetically calling forth - much more from His people. Who will take up the challenge?

If we do not get in tune with Him on matters involving the poor, the widow, the fatherless, and the foreigner, you see, our light will go out. Our salt will become flavorless. And if, when, and to the extent that happens demagogues of secular government with oppressive agendas will rush in to fill the void we have failed to fill. That will leave the world – including the ‘poor’ - worse off than ever. That has already happened, hasn't it? So how does the Holy One want us to reverse this nightmarish trend? The same way a young man keeps his way pure – by *sh'mar*-ing the Holy One's instructions. See **Psalm 119:9**.

## ***Questions For Today's Study***

1. Describe the phases of the radical plan Torah lays out for dealing with the poor.
2. The Haftarah reading for today is a short excerpt from the prayer uttered by *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah] upon his redemption of his uncle's field at *Anatot*. Regarding the land of Israel, Yirmayahu confesses to the Holy One that his ancestors:

*... came in and possessed it.  
But they didn't sh'ma your voice, neither did they walk in your Torah;  
they did nothing of all that You instructed them to do:  
therefore you have caused all this calamity to come on them.*

[Jeremiah 32:23]

Why, according to Yirmayahu's prayer, did "all this calamity" come upon Jerusalem and its people? [Note: the prophet lists three separate reasons in this verse].

3. In today's reading from the apostolic writings we read about a visit made by Yeshua to His parents' home synagogue in Natzret.

[A] What did Yeshua say that made the people in the synagogue angry?

[B] What was the nationality of the widow Yeshua said the Holy One chose to take care of in the days of Eliyahu [Elijah]?

[C] What was the nationality of the *metzora* [leper] that Yeshua said the Holy One chose to take care of in the days of Elishahu [Elisha]?

[D] What did the angry mob from the synagogue in Natzret want to do to Yeshua?

[E] How did Yeshua avoid this fate?

*May you know Your Redeemer lives Beloved;  
And May you stand with Him upon the Eretz upon that day.*

***The Rabbi's son***

## ***Meditation for Today's Study***

Psalm 67:6-7

*The eretz has yielded its increase.  
The Holy One, even our own God, will bless us.*

*The Holy One will bless us.  
All the ends of the eretz shall fear him.*