

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

PARSHAS RE'EH

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

AVOIDING POVERTY

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Part I. The Sin of Poverty

Leaving Kollel

There's an interesting story in the Gemara (Taanis 21a) about two *Chachomim* who were sitting and learning together for many years in the yeshiva. One day they decided "נִיקוּם וְנִיזִיל - Let us get up and leave the yeshiva, וְנַעֲבֹד עֵסֶקָא - and we'll start a business."

Why should they do such a thing, to leave the kollel? So the Gemara says that *dechika lei milsa*, they were having trouble paying their bills, supporting themselves, and so they made the decision, "וְנִקְיִים בְּנַפְשֵׁיךְ - We have to do this in order to fulfill in ourselves the *possuk*, אָפֶס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיוֹן - 'There shall not be among you a poor man'" (Devarim 15:4).

A remarkable story. Two great *talmidei chachomim* decided to stop sitting and learning all day long because there's a *chiyuv* not to become poor. Now, what happened afterwards, the end of the story, is also quite remarkable. But you'll have to look inside on your own; for what we need that's enough.

By the way, I noted here another Gemara: Bava Metzia *daf lamed, amud beis*. There too it says that this *possuk* is saying that it's a mitzvah to take precautions so that you shouldn't become poor. אָפֶס - It's wrong! כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיוֹן - Don't become an *evyon*! If a person allows himself to become poor and he has to come and ask for help from others because he neglected this commandment, then he has a *cheit*. That's a *chiddush* most people don't know.

The Inevitable Sin

Let's understand one thing first: Poverty is inevitable. It's a גִּלְגָּל הוּא שְׂחוֹזֵר בְּעוֹלָם - a wheel that turns in the world, בָּא בְּנוֹ, וְאִם בְּנוֹ לֹא בָּא, שָׂאָם הוּא לֹא בָּא, בָּא בְּנוֹ, וְאִם בְּנוֹ לֹא בָּא - if he won't come to poverty, then one of his descendants will one day (Shabbos 151b). It's a wheel that is inexorably turning.

And there are reasons for that. The world must have poor people and that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu sometimes volunteers a person for the job. There are cases where people are chosen for a role of poverty in life. He sends a jury notice called "poverty" and it's the type of notice you can't ignore.

The Poor Tzaddik

That's the famous episode of Rabi Elazar ben Pedas (Taanis 25a). Rabi Elazar ben Pedas was so

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poor that once when he was weak and had nothing to eat, he found a head of garlic and ate it — and he fainted from the taste. And in his swoon — he was a great man — Hakadosh Baruch Hu appeared to him. And so he said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, “How much longer will I suffer like this in poverty?”

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “Look. If you want Me to change things, I’ll have to turn the world back to *tohu va’vohu*, to the pre-Creation time. I’ll recreate the world from the beginning and maybe this time it will fall out that you won’t be poor.”

So Rabi Elazar said “בְּלִי הָאֵי וְאִלֵּי” It means, “You’ll do all that and still it’ll only be a ‘maybe’?” And so he asked, “How many years do I have left to live?” And when Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him that he had already lived more than half of his years, so Rabi Elazar said, “Then let it go. It’s not worth it to turn over the world. I’ll finish my job.”

Picked for Poverty

Now, this story is very important because we learn from this that when a person is chosen for the role of poverty, he’s chosen in such a way that it’s connected with history. There are reasons, and reasons behind those reasons. Poor people are what you call a “catalytic agent”; it’s a phenomenon that causes certain good qualities in mankind to come to the surface. If society had nothing but affluent people then all the good qualities would fall into disuse. It’s only because there are those who need help that mankind is able to exercise their free will to do kindness.

The poor man serves also as a model for others. It might be a warning for what could be, how much you should appreciate your good fortune that you’re able to pay the rent every month and buy food for your children. Or he shows the world how a great man is able to bear the sufferings of poverty and serve Hashem no matter what the circumstances are. He’s a lesson for mankind. Sometimes he serves as a test for someone who would say, “Well, it doesn’t pay to be a servant of Hashem. Look at Rabi Elazar ben Pedas who studies Torah day and night and is suffering profound poverty.”

And so the poor person serves a number of functions, even more than the few that I enumerated. It’s a certain plan of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who and when and how, for the sake of all these purposes. And it’s tied up with links in a long chain to the generations before and the generations afterward in the most complicated way which only Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself understands.

And therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, “Your role in history is to be a poor sage.” That’s what He said in effect, that He needs Rabi Elazar to fill that role in history. “And in order to change that I would have to change this whole generation and I would have to change the generation before that and the generation before that. Because one is tied up to the other all the way back to the beginning which means I would have to reshape all of history from the first man on.”

Poor Judgment

And so we see that some people are born to be poor. Because who would be willing? Nobody. So Hakadosh Baruch Hu looks for “volunteers” — He looks for those people who are most suited for that role according to His plan for history. That’s why sometimes people are born to be poor the first part of their lives and then they’re rich in the latter part of their lives. Sometimes they’re born to be rich in the first part of their lives and poor in the second half.

But whatever Hashem’s plans are, בְּהַדְרֵי כְּבֹדִי – you have to do whatever you can to avoid jury duty. What Hashem has in store is not our business. Our job is to fulfill the mitzvah לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיֹן, to do whatever it takes not to be poor. That’s what the *possuk* is saying here; we should make up our minds never to become poor.

The Secret to Wealth

Do you know how? You’d be surprised. Number one is to be a hustler. It may surprise you people to hear such talk in the *beis haknesses* but it’s Shlomo Hamelech speaking. He says וְיַד הַחֲרוּצִים תִּעֲשֶׂיר – *the hand of the hustlers becomes rich* (Mishlei 10:4). If

you're going to get up at 10:00 in the morning or if you'll always have a sign on the door, "I'll be back in fifteen minutes," that's not hustling. I saw a barber shop like that. All the time: "Will return in 15 minutes." Meanwhile, for two hours he's playing cards in the back.

No; you have to work hard. A man who leans back and waits for his lottery ticket to bring in the big money, he's a sinner. No, it doesn't pay to wait. Shake a leg! Try to get orders! Look for new customers!

It means get up early and go to work. Today, it's a not decent world so you think only the janitor gets up early — he's out early in the morning to take out the garbage. No, no. You get up before the janitor! And be a loyal employee. If you have a business, be a good storekeeper. If you're grouchy with customers who bother you, if you're late in delivering orders, and a thousand other things, that's not called fulfilling the *לא ידעה בך אביון*. Take steps that you should have a decent *parnassah*.

Now, don't ask me right now about a specific case, should this *bochur* learn in yeshiva or should he get a job and learn Torah in his spare time? There's no question that for many people it's much better if they can get married, settle down, raise a family, become *baalei parnassah*, and go to *shiurim*. But it's impossible to answer this in general because it depends. Sometimes there are very good *talmidim* who have a future in Torah. They have good heads and they are making progress and they love learning. They don't waste any time. For them we say, don't rush out into the world. We need *talmidei chachomim*. But for very many people, there's no question that hustling for an *umnus* is important.

Work, Save, Give

Another one. Give *tzedakah*. *מלח מִמֶּנּוּן חֶסֶד* — If you want to salt your money, it means to preserve it, so deduct from it (Kesuvos 66b). It means give charity. In order to ensure your wealth you have to follow the prescription of Hakadosh Baruch Hu: *עֲשֹׂר בְּשָׁבִיל שְׁתַּתְּעֶשֶׂר* — Give a tenth of your income to good

purposes in order that you should become rich (Taanis 9a).

Also, the Gemara says not to spend too much money. You hear that? You have to learn how to save money. Don't waste. Don't spend unnecessarily. And teach your children to save money. Absolutely, teach them to put money in the bank. Don't think it's selfishness and greed. It's a virtue to save money; it's included in the mitzvah of not being poor.

Married for Money

Now, the next *eitzah* will surprise you. Included in the ways of avoiding poverty is to respect your wife. It's a Gemara. The Gemara says *אֱדָוָה לְנִשְׁיָךְ – respect your wives, כִּי יִהְיֶה דִתְתַעְתְּרוּ – in order that you should be rich* (Bava Metziah 59a). Isn't that a queer thing? When Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees a man who respects his wife — it doesn't mean he obeys his wife; a wife should obey her husband; but he respects his wife, he honors his wife — when Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees that, He gets busy and rewards him by making him rich. It's a Gemara!

Now you want the logic behind it? We don't have enough time but I'll just tell you one little explanation. When a man honors his wife, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "I'm going to help him so that it shouldn't be empty words. He should be able to honor her with certain things, too." And therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will give him more money to allow him to buy her some trinkets from time to time. So when a man honors his wife Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to make him rich.

And we understand the opposite. If a man *doesn't* honor his wife, if he's overbearing and cruel and harsh, then he can expect what was described about the plight of the poor.

I'll tell you one more way of avoiding poverty. *מָה יַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם וַיִּתְעַשֶּׂר – What should one do to become rich? יֵשׂא וַיִּתֵּן בְּאִמְנוּהָ – Do business honestly* (Niddah 70b). That's just the opposite of what businessmen may think. They think you can't make money if you're honest, so they're traveling in the wrong direction. That's what the Gemara says.

Praying Against Poverty

Of course, in addition, he has to pray. **וְהִנֵּיא בְּעוֹתָא** – *prayer helps* (Akdamus). Even if Hashem has poverty plans for someone, He often puts in a proviso that *tefillah* can change things. Nobody knows and that's why he has to have pity on himself – like you have to have pity on a fellow Jew, and you are certainly a closer relative than anybody else – and therefore you should pray for yourself. It's important to pray that you should always be on top of the wheel.

And who should go down to the bottom? Those who don't pray. There are plenty of non-prayers in the world so let them be the ones who slip down to the bottom. If you're holding onto the wheel and as the wheel turns you let go for a second, you slip, hold on again with *hishtadlus* and *tefillah* so you remain at the top.

Now, the subject is too big for one little evening but this you have to understand: if a person brings himself into poverty, he's a sinner. **אָפֶס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיֹן** is a command. Don't become poor! That's included in the service of Hashem. **לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיֹן** – *There shouldn't be any poverty among you*. Of course **כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה** – it's a fact in the life of a nation that there are poor people too, but you shouldn't choose that role.

Part II. The Problem With Poverty

Poverty is Survivable

Now, the question is, what's so bad about poverty? I won't say it's an easy life, but how long is this world already? So you won't be able to go to Florida in the winter. That doesn't make you a poor man yet, by the way, but whatever it is it's only a short stay in this world anyhow. And usually people survive the experience.

First of all, there's always welfare. The government is throwing away our hard-earned money like nobody's business, so you might as well grab some too. The whole country is in a frenzy of wasting money, and so if the poor man wants to

take welfare and food stamps, why not? And there's *tzedakah*, too. No nation in the world comes close to practicing charity like the Am Yisroel.

Whatever it is, the poor man survives. Like it says in *Iyov* (36:15) **יְהַלֵּךְ עָנִי בְּעֹנֵיו** – *Hashem strengthens the poor man in his affliction*. The poor man is suffering affliction, yes. Sometimes he's sick and he can't afford a doctor. His apartment is cold. He doesn't have clothing. He can't feed his children. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu steps in and helps.

The Proof is in the Pudding

Don't you see a lot of poor people surviving? You see people who have sometimes twelve children, even more, and they have no big income and it's remarkable what good *shidduchim* they did for all their daughters; they married them off to the very best families.

Where did the money come from? So if it's a Yerushalmi, let's say, you might suspect him of going to America every year to raise money. Even so, it's remarkable. And there are Yerushalmis who sit and learn all day long and never leave Yerushalayim, and they married off their daughters to big *talmidei chachomim*. And their daughters are living in their homes with their husbands and they also have thirteen children. They're having *nachas*.

The Happy Poor

The fact is that poor people can be happy just as much, even more, as the rich man. Money has nothing to do with happiness. The hustler who's making it big, he's cleaning up, it doesn't mean he's happy. Money causes trouble, too. If you compare how many people in Brownsville jump off roofs and how many jump off the Park Avenue penthouse roofs, the penthouses win out. Chazal told us long ago that **מְרִבָּה נִכְסִים מְרִבָּה דְּאָנָה** (Avos 2:7).

There are very many unhappy rich people; and the poor man without a nickel in his pocket can stride down the street in this ocean of air and he's so happy. He has two hundred miles of it all the way up. "Ahh! My two lungs have the wherewithal to extract the oxygen from this delectable mixture of

gases that I breathe in, and the oxygen immediately unites with my hemoglobin and now the bloodstream becomes more red, invigorated, and the life-giving oxygen is coursing through my veins.” So in case you are stuck here for the winter while your friends are frolicking in Florida, you can be a very happy person.

The Happiness Hustle

Now, I don’t claim that just by saying it, you have it already. Just like you have to hustle to become rich — you can’t do it by being a part-time worker — same thing to acquire *this* wealth; you must put in a lot of study and labor! There should be academies for that study. I would be willing to open one but I wouldn’t have any disciples. After the first lesson everybody would think he knows it all and he wouldn’t come back a second time. It’s a pity because we could make all the poor people very happy. It’s a lifetime of training, but it’s fun as you go. And it’s well worth it because whatever efforts you put into the job of learning how to enjoy life, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to reward you for it in this world in addition to paying in the World to Come.

Poverty, it seems, is not the worst thing. You’ll survive; there are expedients for survival. It’s not too long; a hundred years and you’re done. Also, you can be a very happy poor man, even happier than your rich neighbor. And we’ll see soon that there are other benefits to poverty, spiritual benefits. So it’s a question: Why is it that the *possuk* warns us to be careful not to do anything that might lead to poverty? Everyone knows that there’s some affliction there; what do you have to tell me? If I’m not looking for that lifestyle, I’ll be careful. And if I don’t care, I don’t care. Live and let live.

The Most Important Exercise

And so we listen to a Gemara in Mesichta Avodah Zarah (5a). It says there that *עָנִי הַשּׁוֹב בְּמֵת*, *a man who is poor has actually stopped living*. Why is that?

Because the purpose of life is one thing — and let’s not be vague or confused about it because then you won’t know what your objective is and you won’t

know where you’re heading. *The purpose of life is to exercise properly your free will*. That’s what we’re here for. To make use of this rare gift that no one in creation possesses except man. Hakadosh Baruch Hu possesses free will but He’s not in creation — He’s outside of it. Otherwise, no one has it except mankind.

And this great gift is given to us only for a short time. Before you were born, you didn’t have it, and after you leave this life, you will no longer possess it. No more free will after this life is over. All you’ll do is enjoy the accomplishments which you achieved here with your free will.

And let us keep this always before our eyes. Whatever other things may attempt to crowd into our minds, let’s never allow them to becloud the issue, to obstruct our goal. We have but one purpose in life and that is to exercise this rare gift of free will in the way that Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires that we should do.

Poor in Ruchniyus

Sometimes a poor man can’t afford to buy a *sefer* that would have helped him in his learning. Or let’s say he has to buy a pair of *tefillin*. He can’t afford it so he settles for something questionable. As far as *tefillin* is concerned, he’s a *meis*. He has to buy an *esrog*; he can’t afford it. He buys something not so kosher; it’s more of a lemon than an *esrog*. He’s a *meis*.

A poor man has to live in the neighborhood that he could afford. But the Gemara says *לְעוֹלָם יָדוּר אָדָם בְּמִקְוֶה רַבּוֹ* — *always a man should dwell near his rebbi* (Brachos 8a). Suppose you’re a Lubavitcher *chassid*, so you should live near your *Rebbe*. It’s not only the *zechus* of being close, but you gain; you see his ways and it’s easier to come and listen. Or maybe you’re a *yeshiva* man and your *rebbe* happens to be the *yeshiva*. There are a lot of *rebbeis* there, too, but the building itself, the institution, is also a *rebbe*. Whether it’s the Mirrer *Yeshiva* or Chaim Berlin or Lakewood, you want to settle near that big *rebbe* of yours. But you can’t always pay what it costs. And so you look for the cheapest place and you settle

perhaps behind Boro Park. You find a place on 6th Avenue and it's a big walk to come to any *makom Torah* from there. So your poverty has frozen you into inaction. Your *bechirah* can't function fully.

Freedom of Speech

But there's even something worse than that. You don't even have the free will to express yourself for Hashem. Here's a man with a little job and he holds onto it for dear life because otherwise he wouldn't be able to pay the rent the next month. He has nothing in the bank. He has nothing but debts with the baker and the grocer and the butcher. And therefore, to please his employer he'll do almost anything. Not only he'll give up his learning or other good things to work overtime but sometimes he even gives up his principles in order to accommodate himself to those whose help he needs.

If you have to work for somebody, you have to *chanfe* your boss. You can't speak up like a Jew has to speak up. Of course, you won't speak against the Torah, but you can't tell the truth either. Let's say his employer is an ardent Zionist, then he might even go along, or at least he's certainly not going to express himself. You have to keep your mouth closed; you lost your free will.

I had a case very recently. Somebody wanted a donation so a business acquaintance with a gentile wife gave him a donation.

So the gentleman who gave the donation said, "What would your rabbi say about my marriage?"

So he said, "I cannot speak for my rabbi."

Well that already is a retreat. Although he retreated for a good cause, it's a retreat.

If you need money, you're enslaved. You're sold out and you cannot speak your own mind.

Use It or Lose It

And so the rich man is a *boicher*; he has the ability to choose, to accomplish, more than the poor man. It means he's more alive.

Let's say a man doesn't have money. So he can't give *tzedakah*; not much anyhow. You know what

happens if you don't give *tzedakah*? Not only the *mitzvah* you lose out on, but your character degenerates. After a while you lose all interest in giving *tzedakah* because you're out of practice. The feeling of *tzedakah* becomes atrophied.

A poor man gets letters from all the yeshivas. What does he do? From the mailbox, he throws it straight in the garbage can. Because he has no money anyhow. He has no choice and so he loses interest. The rich man, however, has money so he reads it and sends something in. He's practicing having sympathy for yeshivas. It changes him.

He might even be invited to the yeshiva after a while. They see he sends checks, so they call him up and say, "We invite you to join the Board of Directors." And now he takes an interest in the problems of the yeshiva. He worries about the yeshiva. And little by little he becomes more and more of an *oihev Torah*, someone who loves supporting Torah, building Torah.

Now the poor man, it's possible for him too, but he'll have to work very hard at developing that perfection of the mind. He has to learn *mussar* and he has to think into it a lot. But a rich man automatically becomes an *oihev Torah*.

I was once at a rich man's office. And I saw that the biggest *rosh yeshivas* had been there. Which poor man would be *zocheh* to spend time with the *roshei yeshiva*? This man did. And he spent a lot of time in their company! That's a *zechiyah*! It's a greatness!

The Wealth of Choice

And so whatever Hashem's plan is, we have to do whatever we can not to be poor. Hustle, *daven*, give *tzedakah*, respect your wife, do whatever it takes because that's called living. Living means the opportunity to choose to serve Hashem.

The most important reason for the *mitzvah* of **לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֲבִיּוֹן** is because you want to guard your free will; you want to utilize it and cultivate it because that's your opportunity in this world to bring forth the latent abilities that lie hidden within

you. And the poor man will always be limited to some extent because of his poverty.

Part III. The Benefits of Poverty

Thrown Under the Wheel

Now, let's turn over the coin and see the other side because we have to understand that there are benefits to poverty, too.

We quoted earlier the *possuk* in Iyov, יְחַלֵּץ עָנִי, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu fortifies the poor man in his poverty*. But the Gemara (Yevamos 102b) says no, that's not the *pshat*. It's true, but there's a more important *pshat*. יְחַלֵּץ עָנִי means He takes out the poor man; He extricates him. From where? From Gehenom. A man who might have been headed for Gehenom, so what does Hakadosh Baruch Hu do? יְחַלֵּץ – He extricates him, בְּשֹׂכָר עָנִי – as a reward for his poverty. It means that as a result of his poverty, a person can become successful enough to avoid a trip to Gehenom.

Now what does that mean? What type of success is there in lacking money?

The answer is: many things. And each one is important because the more a person is aware of the benefits, the more he'll utilize them and the more he'll succeed. And even though in certain areas he's losing out in *bechirah*, he'll gain in other important ways from this *galgal hachozar*.

Greatness of Suffering

First of all, you don't need me to tell you that whatever suffering you'll undergo in this world saves you from the Next World's *yissurim* – and therefore there's no question that the *tzaros* of poverty are *mechaper* on a person. So much so that if someone suffers from *dikdukei aniyus* – we don't know from that today – the Gemara (Eiruvim 41b) says that he won't even see the opening of Gehenom. He won't even pass by the door.

That's quite a promise; just like in this world we'd like to be outside of the hospital, it's good to be

on the outside of Gehenom. And that's what happens when a man falls into such abject poverty that he has to count pennies. And even pennies he doesn't have enough; he doesn't know where the next penny will come from. That man is getting his Gehenom in this world.

Now, today's poor – I told you once that it's an American phenomenon that there are poor fat people – so those types of poor aren't guaranteed to stay outside of Gehenom altogether, but there's no question that a lot of punishment is wiped off the slate when a person suffers in Olam Hazei.

Greatness of Character

But that's nothing yet. Not only he suffers, but he becomes great. It's a *kapparah* because the experience makes him good; it elevates him by purifying his mind and his character. A poor man can acquire a great deal of good character. And so as he's losing weight – he can't afford the pastries that his neighbors have – but he's putting on spiritual weight.

How is that so? Number one, you have to know that as a result of being poor, people become very humble. Arrogance is one of the worst forms of flaws in a man's character and poverty breaks down arrogance. So he becomes an *anav*. *Anav* by the way is related to the word *ani*. There's a reason for that. And so even though it's forced upon him – he'd rather have a full stomach and be a little more empty of *anivus* – it's still a tremendous achievement of perfection.

Self-control, too; the poor man has to say no to himself constantly. I must do without. I have to deny myself. His mind makes peace with having less. He learned how to say no.

The other fellow, however, has all the things that his heart desires and so he has to put in very, very much effort to achieve that. I'm talking to all of us in America.

American Brats

We have to be very much concerned because we're accustomed to getting what we want. There

are stores everywhere and there's a pantry and refrigerator full of good things, all the water you want to drink. You want to take a bath, you can fill it with hot water. You go to the bathroom, you flush, and gallons of good drinking water go down the drain. We're certainly spoiled and we have to realize we have a big job ahead of us in purifying our character. People who have plenty to eat have to be suspicious that their characters are no good.

But at the table of the poor family, a child asks for another piece of bread — he doesn't bother asking for ice cream and spending money — and the mother says, "I can't give you another piece of bread, my child. Wait for the next meal." And the little boy doesn't go into a tantrum — maybe the first time he tried it, but afterwards he gives up and that's it. His mind tells his body, his poor little hungry stomach, "Look, you have to take it and that's all."

That's self-control. That's *kovesh es yitzro*. You know what that does to the child? It makes him a beautiful character. It's a pity on American children, they're lacking this gift of poverty because those who have suffered poverty are beautiful people. They learned that the world is not a place where you can do whatever you want. They teach themselves self-control and after a time self-control becomes a habit of the mind. It's a perfection because they're under the rule of their *seichel* now.

Forced into Greatness

So you'll say they're forced into it. It's true. He would choose wealth any time. And the little boy, surely; if you would give him a chocolate cake, he'd dive into it. He's being forced into *prishus*, into self-control, into abstention. He didn't choose!

It doesn't matter! When you're forced into something good, it's still good. He gains a perfection of character that will be his forever.

But not only self-control and *prishus* and *seichel*, too. He exerts himself in *tefillah*, always turning to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that He should save him, to help him pay his grocery bill or rent. He's desperate, after all, and so it's from the heart.

That type of prayer, with genuine feeling, with intensity, is certainly effective in increasing his awareness of Hashem. It develops his *emunah* and his *bitachon*.

Tzidkus in Poverty

Also, because of the pressure of poverty, a man seeks to find favor in the eyes of Hashem — he wants Hakadosh Baruch Hu to rescue him from his poverty, so he does *lifnim mishuras hadin*; he does *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim*. He's careful. He does extra. He's *mekabel* upon himself good *hanhagos*. That's a big achievement. One day he'll be very happy with that.

And so as the pressure of poverty pushes down on him, he must be aware of these opportunities. The acid test of poverty can be utilized for great personal achievements.

There are so many qualities inherent in a person that a poor man can much more easily bring forth. He learns to sympathize with the downtrodden. He can more easily feel his fellow man's anguish. He becomes softer. Of course, if he's not willing to think, he can become wild, too. He can become bitter and angry. It's a test. But he has a big opportunity to succeed in many areas that a wealthy man might find more difficult.

Wealth of Torah

One more thing before we end, one more opportunity. The Gemara says הִזְהָרוּ בְּבָנֵי עֲנָיִים שְׂמֹחֵן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה – *be careful with the children of the poor because from them will come forth the Torah* (Nedarim 81a); they'll be more successful in learning Torah. Our really great people came from the ranks of poor children.

And the Ran explains, why is that so? What's so good about being poor when it comes to greatness in Torah? So he says one of the reasons is because they have nothing else but Torah. Isn't that a beautiful reason? They have nothing else to do. They don't have bikes. They don't have expensive cameras. They have nothing except the Gemara.

A poor boy has no money to spend and no place to go. Instead of going out to the pizza store for

lunch, he remains in yeshiva and he learns *bein hasedarim*. Sometimes at home there's not much to eat either. It's cold at home too. In the yeshiva, at least it's warm. And so the poor sit in the yeshiva and become great. He comes in the evenings to learn and he stays late. He doesn't have anything except learning and therefore it's easier for him to succeed in learning.

Slabodka Poverty

I was in yeshiva with such people. They never had a suit in which the pants and the jacket were the same material. Why is that? Because when his jacket wore out he bought a secondhand jacket, and then when his pants wore out he bought a secondhand pair of pants, so he could never catch up.

Others were ashamed to go out in the street because their pants were torn. I had one *chaver*, a very close friend who had patches on top of patches on top of patches. He had to patch the patches. It's not an exaggeration. He always had ventilation at the elbows. Big holes. He loved the wintertime because then he went out with his long coat that covered it up. In the summer, he didn't venture out into the street because he couldn't bear to have the double-decker patches displayed to the public. It's a true story.

You don't see that today anymore, poor boys whose pants are so torn that all summer they didn't go out in the street. But these are the boys, because they didn't go out in the street, they sat and learned Torah. And they became great. By the pressure of poverty, became great.

Appreciating the Poor Days

Now, that yeshiva man, he became affluent later in life. Later he never wore a suit in which the coat and the pants didn't match. Also, no more ventilation of the sleeves. But he looked back and he remembered that the happiest days of his life were those days of poverty because that's when there was nothing else in his head except the Gemara morning and evening.

And he was making the progress that his heart yearned for. He was learning *yiras Shamayim* and he was learning good *middos*. In those halcyon days, the happy days of his life, that's the time when he actually was living.

So you'll ask me a question. How can I call that "living"? We said before that poverty limits free will. A poor person is *chashuv k'meis*; he's as good as dead because it limits his *bechirah*, his opportunities.

The answer is that it depends what kind of poverty and what kind of person. A poverty that requires you to beg, that requires you to bend before others and compromise on your *avodas Hashem* — that you have to be very cautious of. That's no good. But this yeshiva man didn't beg anybody. He lived on \$10 a month. For breakfast and supper he ate a piece of bread and a half cube of sugar and he was happy with that. Because he understood what life is for and that he could utilize his poverty to become something.

And those were his happiest years because there was nothing else before his mind except to grow great the way Hashem wanted. And so, *absolutely* he lived! He learned all day long and he learned with energy.

Poverty and Wealth

And so both things are true. A person should be careful not to come to poverty — *אָפּס בײַ לאַ יִהְיֶה בָּךְ*. That *possuk* should stand before our eyes always. No one should look for the tests of poverty and the perfection that might come along with it. And yet, *חֲזַר הַקְדּוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל כָּל מַדּוּת טוֹבוֹת לִיתֵן* — *לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא מַצָּא אֱלֹהִים עֲנִיּוֹת* — the greatest gift that Hashem could give to His people is poverty (Chagigah 9b). A remarkable statement!

And therefore, the understanding man, the *frum* man, he'll fulfill all the *eitzos* we spoke about, how to avoid poverty. He'll hustle and he'll *daven* and everything else. But the *frum* Jew knows also that it's a wheel that turns and that sometimes it might be his lot to endure some poverty, some of the

difficulties of not having enough. And he'll utilize that opportunity, too, to become more and more spiritually wealthy and to find more and more favor in the eyes of his Creator Who placed him into his station in life.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

Choose Life!

This week's *parsha* begins with the mitzvah to "choose life," which means we are empowered to use the gift of free will – our purpose in this world – for the right things. When the Torah tells us not to bring poverty upon ourselves, it means we should be sure to safeguard that gift.

This week, *bli neder*, I will *daven* to be saved from the test of poverty. And if I currently find myself on that end of the wheel, each day I will express one benefit that I am gaining from the experience.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

103 – Poverty | **433** – Benefits of Misfortune

E-58 – Wealth of Choices

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Q&A

WITH
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MILLER ZT"L

שאלות ותשובות עם ראב"ד אביגדור מילר זצ"ל



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QUESTION

If a man is learning in kollel, isn't he transgressing the commandment בְּזַעַת אֶפְרָה תֹאכַל לֶחֶם, that with the sweat of your brow you should eat bread?

ANSWER

And the answer is, he is sweating plenty.

If a man works at a job but he is a loafer isn't he loafing? The mere fact that you are nominally employed does it mean that you are sweating for your living? Plenty of people are sitting in their offices and loafing. They are deceiving their employers; they are getting paid for nothing.

So if a man is in a *kollel* and he is really learning, so he is a servant of Hashem and he is doing important services for the Am Yisroel. And that's בְּזַעַת אֶפְרָה תֹאכַל לֶחֶם; the world has to support him. And he deserves support even more than a man who works.

Now, those people who sit in a *kollel* and come in, let's say, 10 o'clock in the morning, while their wives go out at at half past eight, or half past six, to work for them, and this loafer waltzes in at 10 o'clock after reading the entire newspaper at breakfast – that's not a *kollel* man. At lunchtime he doesn't eat in the *kollel*. He takes a bus back home and eats lunch at home and then comes back. I once met a man like that. I would send him to work. Let his wife go to the *kollel*. He's not a real *kollel* man; he's like any faker who sits at his job and doesn't do the work.

But if he comes early to the *kollel* and he is there all the time and works hard – you won't see him standing on the street in front of the yeshiva in the middle of *seder* – he is inside laboring over the Gemara, so he is a hard worker. Like one *rosh yeshiva* said once, אֶגְרִי דְיוֹמָא אֲנִי – “We are hired workers by the day. We are being paid for our work.”

January 1986