

Unit 1

Source 1

Do not oppress the widow or the orphan.....

Exodus 22:21-26

<sup>21</sup>You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.

<sup>22</sup>If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me. <sup>23</sup>And my anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your wives shall become widows, and your children orphans.

<sup>24</sup>If you lend money to My people, to the poor who is in your power, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them.

<sup>25</sup>If you take your neighbour's garment in pledge, you must return it to him before the sun sets. <sup>26</sup>It is his only clothing, the sole covering for his skin; in what else shall he sleep? Therefore if he cries out to Me, I will pay heed, for I am compassionate.

כא כָּל-אַלְמָנָה וַיִּתּוֹם לֹא תַעֲנוּן:  
 כב אִם-עָנָה תַעֲנֶנָּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם-צָעַק  
 יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צַעֲקָתוֹ:  
 כג וַחֲרָה אַפִּי וְהִרְגַתִּי אֶתְכֶם בַּחֶרֶב  
 וְהָיוּ נְשֵׁיכֶם אֲלֵמָנוֹת וּבְנֵיכֶם  
 יִתְמִים:  
 כד אִם-כֶּסֶף תִּלְוֶה אֶת-עַמִּי  
 אֶת-הָעֲנִי עִמָּךְ לֹא-תִהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנֹשָׂה  
 לֹא-תִשְׁיִמוֹן עָלָיו נֶשֶׁךְ:  
 כה אִם-חֶבֶל תַּחְבֵּל שְׁלֵמַת רֵעֶךָ  
 עַד-בֹּא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ תִּשְׁיָבְנוּ לוֹ:  
 כו כִּי הוּא כְּסוּתָהּ לְבִדָּהּ הוּא  
 שְׁמֹלְתוֹ לְעֶרֶוּ  
 בַּמָּה יִשְׁכָּב וְהָיָה כִּי-יִצְעַק אֵלַי  
 וְשָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי-חֲנוּן אֲנִי

Read this text aloud, in Hebrew and in English. You may read it all the way through, or one verse at a time, stopping to discuss and clarify the meaning of each verse.

Justice justice

- Consider the relationships in this text. Who does this text speak to?
- What does this text teach about poverty?
- How would you describe God's relationship with the poor in this text?
- What is the relationship of the poor to the wealthy, and the wealthy to the poor?
- How would you describe, in this text, God's relationship with you, the one who reads or hears this part of the Torah?
- And what does this text demand of you?

you shall pursue

Source 2

God has Made One for the Other

*Psikta d'Rav Kahana 28*

In the days of prosperity, enjoy the prosperity" (Ecclesiastes 7:14). R.

Tanchum bar Chiyya said, "in the days of your fellow man's prosperosity, rejoice with him. And in the days of adversity, reflect. If adversity confronts your fellow, consider how to do a kindness and save him....

But why does God create both poor people and rich people? In order for them to draw riches from each other, as it says, 'God has made one for the other' (ibid.)

בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הָיְיָה בְּטוֹב וּבְיוֹם רָעָה רְאֵהוּ.  
א"ר תנחום בר' חייא  
ביום טובתו של חבירך היה עמו בטובה,  
וביום רעה ראה,  
אם נזדווג לחבירך יום רעה  
ראה היאך לעשות עמו חסד  
ולהציל אתו ממנו... ..

מפני מה ברא הקב"ה עניים ועשירים,  
כדי שיהיו מתפרנסין אילו מאילו,  
על שם גם את־זה לעֲמַת־זה עֲשֵׂה  
הָאֱלֹהִים.

Poverty Relief - A community Responds

Sustaining poor people is very clearly an obligation for the whole of society in the Torah. Indeed, much of the Torah is taken up with an explanation of the range of measures involved. These include agricultural assistance (the setting aside of the corners of the field, the fallen sheaves and other fallen produce) and the *ma'aser oni*, the tenth of a crop set aside for the poor. Members of the community were also responsible for lending money to prevent destitution and for redeeming relatives who were forced, through economic circumstances, to sell themselves into slavery (which in certain periods seems to have been quite common).

Much later the rabbis created a number of systems for sustaining the poor that were compulsory in every community in the Jewish world. The *tamchui* was a food collection made every day by three members of the community, who would then distribute it to those who did not have enough to live on for that day.

The *kuppah* was a cash fund also collected from every member of the community. It was distributed each Friday to anyone who did not have enough money to buy food for the following week.

Everyone was obliged to give. Anyone who moved to a new town was obliged to give to the *kuppah* after living there for three days. Staying more than three months meant a person had to contribute to the communal funds. This was calculated by *gabbai tzedakah*, two individuals who were well trusted by the community as a whole, on an individual basis. Each person had to contribute a minimum of 10% and a maximum of 20% of their annual wealth. [Taxes, to the ruling authorities, were a separate matter].

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**Source 3**

**Maimonides Laws of Gifts for the Poor 9:12**

If any person settles in a town for three days, we force him to contribute *tsedakkah* to the *kuppah*, along with the other townsfolk.

If he settles for three months, we force him to contribute to the *tamchui*, after six months we force him to donate money to the clothing fund for clothing the poor of the town, after nine months we force him to contribute to the burial fund for the poor, to provide for all their necessary burial needs.

מי שישב במדינה שלשים יום  
כופין אותו ליתן צדקה לקופה  
עם בני המדינה,  
ישב שם שלשה חדשים  
כופין אותו ליתן התמחוי,  
ישב שם ששה חדשים  
כופין אותו ליתן צדקה  
בכסות שמכסים בה עניי העיר,  
ישב שם תשעה חדשים  
כופין אותו ליתן צדקה לקבורה  
שקוברין בה את העניים  
ועושין להם כל צרכי קבורה.

**Source 4**

No exemptions

**Babylonian Tamud Gittin 8a**

Master Zutra said,  
even a poor person who depends on  
*tsedakkah* for survival  
must give *tsedakkah*.

אמר מר זוטרא:  
אפי' עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה  
יעשה צדקה.

**Questions**

What role does your synagogue play in alleviating poverty?  
What role might or should our communities play?  
Today we might say there is a tension between the need rescue people from the immediate problems they face, and the need to address the causes of their poverty.  
How might your Jewish community do something to get to grips with this problem?

Justice justice

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