

Meir Bar-Ilan, Bar Ilan University (Israel)

“Wealth in the World of the Sages: Why were Korah and Moses Rich People?”

The aim of this paper is to analyze the sages' thoughts concerning wealthy people by drawing attention to two different people that in the Bible have no particular connection with money but in the sages' Haggadah became wealthy people. These two are Korah and Moses and the question arises: what made the sages say that these two were rich people?

It will be demonstrated that the legends concerning the richness of these two are not mere traditions, rather creative commentary by using contemporary ideas as if they are reflecting the biblical text. In this way Korah is characterized as a wealthy person, since Korah was a symbol of a heretic Jew or someone who did not want to obey the sages. Describing Korah as a wealthy person was a way of saying that those who do not obey the rabbis were rich people and that the rabbis wished them an end in accordance with the biblical figure, the first who rebelled against the rabbis' rule, the rule of "Moshe Rabeinu."

In different circumstances there were Darshanim who claimed that Moses himself was a rich man, and it will be demonstrated that this statement was polemical, against rabbis who used their money to promote themselves. In all, wealth is attributed to biblical figures to explain contemporary unethical behavior; money corrupts.

Lawrence Baron, San Diego State University
“Empty Hearts and Full Wallets: Poverty and Wealth in American Jewish Films, 1921-1932”

Although achieving economic and social mobility were the primary goals of the Jewish protagonists in American films from the 1920s and 1930s, success often came at a high communal and individual price. Americanization and affluence challenged Jewish collective solidarity, diminished religious observance, and strained familial bonds. To be sure, Hollywood motion pictures like *The Jazz Singer* (1927) unambiguously promoted the pursuit of the American dream by resolving these conflicts in the end. Since the literary sources for many of these films revolved around the problematic transition from impoverished immigrant to financially comfortable citizen, the ambivalence attributed to making it in the United States remained embedded in their dialogue and plotlines. Based on close readings and research into film production records, this paper will analyze *Hungry Hearts* (1922), *His People* (1925), and *The Symphony of Six Million* (1932) to identify the explicit and implicit discontent that accompanied the success of their lead characters.

Geoffrey Claussen, Elon University
“The Kelm School of Musar and its Legacy on Questions of Work, Wealth, and Poverty”

The Musar movement—a modern Jewish movement focused on the cultivation of moral character—emerged in mid-nineteenth century Lithuania in a time of increased poverty among the Jews, and it sought to respond to that poverty in various ways. Tensions within the Musar movement regarding how to respond to poverty are especially clear within the Kelm school of Musar, which emerged under the leadership of Rabbi Simhah Zissel Ziv (1824-1898). Simhah Zissel’s writings devote considerable attention to the imperative of developing qualities of empathy and responsibility toward those in poverty. Like many others in the Musar movement, Simhah Zissel also gave considerable attention to the moral and spiritual dangers of seeking a livelihood and possessing wealth. Compared to his colleagues, however, he had a far greater appreciation of business activity as a path out of poverty and as a way to serve the needs of others.

Those who trace their vision back to Simhah Zissel’s study hall have tended to emphasize different aspects of the Kelm school’s legacy on questions of wealth and poverty. Thus, for example, some students from Kelm who became influential within Israeli ultra-Orthodoxy emphasized a path of voluntary poverty and a disdain for commerce. By contrast, a number of American Jews who trace their vision back to Kelm have shown less concern regarding the dangers of possessing wealth; they have emphasized more activist and business-oriented strategies for eliminating poverty, often reflecting the distinct values of contemporary American culture.

Aryeh Cohen, American Jewish University**“The Violence of Poverty”**

In this paper, I will analyze texts in the Babylonian Talmud to show that, in the rabbinic imaginary, poverty wielded an untamed violence over the lives of those who succumbed to it. In discussions of withholding workers' wages (b Baba Metzia 111 ff) a person who withholds wages is seen as akin to a murderer. This is explained partially by a previous statement that describes workers who risk their lives for their pay. If at the end of the day the pay is withheld, the Talmud claims, it is as if one had taken their lives. Finally, a poor person himself is likened to a dead person [*nechshav le-met*]. In another story, two porters who suffered a mishap and were in danger of not being paid claim that they would then go hungry, and the court accepts their claim.

One of the bright lights of rabbinic law is the institutionalization of poverty relief (m Peah 8 followed by y Peah 8 and b Baba Bathra 8-11 and elsewhere). The interesting thing is that at the same time as poverty relief is being institutionalized and lauded, the reality of poverty, the violence that is visited upon people by poverty (hunger, disability, illness, death) is accepted as a given. (In a story of Akiva and Turnus Rufus, it is even pictured as Divinely ordained.) It is these two moments and tension between them that I wish to examine in this paper. On the one hand the rabbis portray the destructive violence of poverty very dramatically and also articulate a political response in the sense of a city based poverty relief program. On the other hand it seems that the issue is far from settled. I would suggest that the texts taken together show that the cultural negotiation around poverty, whether and to what extent it is the obligation of the society as a whole to offer relief to the poor, is still fraught and unsettled.

Hasia Diner, New York University

“Peddlers, the Great Jewish Migration, and the Riddle of Economic Success”

In the period from the end of the eighteenth century into the early 1930s over four million Jews from Europe and the Muslim lands left the homes of their birth to make their way to the “new world.” They moved to the Americas, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, as well as to the British Isles and Scandinavia, places that had previously had few, or no Jewish residents. Peddling, the Jews’ familiar occupation, provided one of the principal engines that drove this great migration. In the main these poor immigrants ended their lives economically better off than when they first arrived. Some few became extremely wealthy, while most –indeed all—moved from peddling to modestly comfortable lives, opening and running small stores. This paper will examine the conditions for their move from poverty to reasonable comfort (and great wealth for some), exploring the importance of Jewish economic networks and the connections between peddling and Jewish community formation. Furthermore it asks why their non-Jewish customers embraced them and chose to buy from them rather than from local shopkeepers.

Gregg E. Gardner. University of British Columbia
“Care for the Poor and the Origins of Charity in Early Rabbinic Judaism”

Poverty relief has long been a central concern of the Jewish tradition. We see this throughout early rabbinic literature, legal and exegetical texts from the third century C.E. that would form the foundations of the Talmuds and all subsequent rabbinic Judaism. Following a survey of the various forms of support for the poor in early rabbinic texts, this paper focuses on discussions of *tsedaqah* – a term that meant only “righteousness” in the Hebrew Bible, but would come to denote “charity” in rabbinic literature. How was *tsedaqah* conceptualized as “charity” in the Mishnah, Tosefta and other early rabbinic texts? What are the origins of the rabbinic approaches to charity? This paper will illuminate two kinds of charity – one collective and organized, the other individual and occasional. Reading these texts within the Greco-Roman world in which they took shape demonstrates that rabbinic ideas were deeply influenced by Hellenistic approaches to giving. That is, the early rabbinic movement formulated *tsedaqah* as charity with the help of the Greeks. This paper illuminates the development of Jewish approaches to poverty relief, with a special focus on the origins of charity or *tsedaqah* – which would become one of the central concepts of rabbinic Judaism.

Rela Mintz Geffen, Gratz College and Towson University
“The Cost of Living Jewishly: A Matter of Money or Values”

Over a half century ago President Dwight Eisenhower surprised the American public with his statement that America was actually governed through the joint efforts of a military and industrial complex. In much the same way, over the centuries Jewish communities [*kehillot*] were organized and managed by leaders drawn from wealthy *baalei batim* and the leading rabbinic scholars of the generation. The two classes were also often joined through marriage. The wealthy elite married their daughters to scholars while elders of scholarly families sought wealthy suitors for their daughters. Whether in Spain, Warsaw, or Vilna through these alliances the power and influence of the elite groups was mutually reinforced - an interlocking directorate was formed.

Is the same true today either locally, regionally, or nationally in the American Jewish community? Does wealth buy power? How is affluence more generally related to affiliation? Debates over the role of the cost of living Jewishly have surfaced since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Is affiliation enabled by higher income? In fact, every national and community wide demographic survey has found that organizational and synagogue connections are directly related to household income. Does this mean that Jewish tradition and values aren't important in the decision to allocate discretionary household funds to supporting Jewish identity and the Jewish community? Does the behavior of the Orthodox community, with regard to cost, demonstrate that religious commitment rather than a certain level of wealth is the key to active participation and communal leadership? All of these issues will be addressed in this presentation.

Alyssa M. Gray, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
“Wealth and the Rabbis of Late Antiquity”

The popular response to a query about “Judaism’s attitude toward wealth” is likely to be that Judaism is wealth-positive. While not inaccurate, this popular view requires closer study and greater nuance. This paper will explore such questions as: how did the rabbis of late antiquity—specifically, the Amoraim of the land of Israel and Babylonia and the post-Amoraic Talmudic redactors in Babylonia (ca. third-seventh centuries)—view the acquisition of wealth? Did they prefer certain ways of acquiring wealth over others? How did the rabbis view the wealthy, both wealthy rabbis and others? Can we perceive differences in how wealthy rabbis and wealthy non-rabbis (both Jewish and not) are portrayed in the late antique rabbinic compilations? How was wealth supposed to be used? By reading texts with an eye to geographical (land of Israel and Babylonia) and diachronic (Tannaim, Amoraim, and the Babylonian Talmud’s anonymous, or “*stam*,” voice) differences as well as broader historical context, we will be able to sketch the outlines of an ambivalent rabbinic embrace of wealth in late antiquity.

Jeffrey Haus, Kalamazoo College
“Conspicuous Charity and Jewish Unity: The Jewish *Loterie* in Nineteenth Century Paris”

Jewish tradition contains built-in mechanisms designed to support the poor. In addition to their moral imperatives, these mechanisms—generally categorized as *tzedakah*—promote group cohesion by balancing the wealth of some with the need of others while reinforcing the social relationship between the rich and the poor.

Historians of modern Jewry have similarly portrayed Jewish charity as a unifying force in an era of declining religious observance. This paper will offer a counter-narrative to that interpretation through the lens of the Paris *loterie*—a raffle benefitting Jewish charitable enterprises in the city during the nineteenth century. My reading of an 1846 critique of the *loterie* in the Jewish press will reveal underlying dissatisfaction with the broader system of Jewish charity and communal relations. By conspicuously displaying the wealth of elite Jews, the *loterie* highlighted class divisions that threatened to undermine French Jewish unity. The event’s reliance on female volunteers, in the view of the author, also pulled at the fabric of Jewish family life, taking wives away from their husbands for planning and selling tickets. At the same time, its “top-down” approach to social change clashed with notions of modern philanthropy’s tighter organization and efficiency. Money thus produced a paradoxical effect within this context. As the primary vehicle for Jewish charity, it could connect Jews as funds moved from donors to organizations to recipients. The capitalization of Jewish charity, however, also exacerbated rifts within the population that Jewish philanthropy sought to unite.

Leonard Helfgott, Western Washington University
“Crossing-Over: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in Barry Levinson’s Baltimore Films”

Barry Levinson’s four Baltimore films—*Diner*, *Tin Men*, *Avalon*, and *Liberty Heights*—take place within post WWII Baltimore’s complex, stratified economic and social milieu. Children of Jewish immigrants, his main characters struggle for security in a world that is rapidly changing. They live in a self-contained Jewish social community but operate in an economy that encompasses all of multi-ethnic, multi-racial Baltimore. As aluminum siding salesmen, hairdressers, wallpaper hangers, bookmakers, strip-club operators, and shopkeepers, they occupy marginal positions in the economy.

Well into the last half of the twentieth century, Baltimore remained highly segregated by race, class, ethnicity, and religion. Law and custom defined this compartmentalization, limiting residency and access to social resources, reinforced in many cases by Jewish developers and realtors. Geographically bound, the Jewish community was no exception to citywide stratification. Jewish life was shaped largely by ones’ place on the socio-economic ladder. Working class Jews, many recent migrants from the city’s core, lived further south. As the main roads stretched north into lush Baltimore County, wealth defined residency.

Levinson’s films are set in a period defined by an economy in transition and the nascent Civil Rights movement. The walls of tradition had not yet crumbled, but were beginning to crack. Levinson’s main characters occupy precarious places in a world under siege by modernity. They sit on the cusp of class, ethnicity, and race, tied to the old yet ambitiously seeking the new. I will analyze Levinson’s efforts to capture these tensions generated by economic and social marginality and augment the presentation with relevant clips from each of the films.

Curtis Hutt, University of Nebraska-Omaha
"1Q/4QInstruction: Training for a Money-changer?"

In the fragmentary reconstructed text dated to the late Second Temple period called "MusarleMevin" (1Q/4QInstruction), at least seven copies of which were found at Qumran, training is given by an unidentified teacher to a student described as poor on a variety of topics—several of which are explicitly related to finance. Since its publication in the mid-1990s, the wisdom provided in this sectarian sapiential text with unusual apocalyptic/theophantic elements has been compared to that found in other texts like I Enoch, Ben Sira, the Book of Mysteries, and the common source behind wisdom sayings attributed to Jesus (Q, *Gospel of Thomas*). Others have focused on the social settings that have given rise to such instruction, with the target audience—perhaps, the "congregation of the poor" referred to in Psalms *pesharim* found at Qumran—compared to underclasses in the Second Temple period and to the earliest Christian communities associated with Q as well as the so-called Ebionites.

I pursue in this paper another line of interpretation, first suggested by John Strugnell and Daniel J. Harrington in the introduction to the publication of 4QInstruction found in *Discoveries in the Judean Desert XXXIV* but since ignored by most scholarship on 1Q/4QInstruction. Rather than understanding the instruction provided to the maven as wisdom generally dispensed to the impoverished, I view its target audience much more narrowly. The "poor" student, according to this reading, is plausibly a model future administrative official connected with the Jerusalem temple. Amongst his sacerdotal functions, as evident especially in 4Q416, is dealing with monetary transactions. The consummate administrator at an irreproachable temple is described as "poor" because he does not unduly profit from his holy occupation.

Julia R Lieberman, St Louis University

“Charitable Institutions at the London Saare Samaim Sephardi Community in the Eighteenth Century”

The London Spanish-and-Portuguese Sephardi community, later known as the Bevis Marks congregation, can be traced back to 1656, when a small group of Iberian New Christian merchants received permission to openly reside as Jews. The community organized its religious and charitable institutions similarly to other western Sephardi communities such as Amsterdam. In 1701 a new synagogue on Bevis Marks was inaugurated in order to accommodate the growing congregation. In the eighteenth century the London community became independent from the Amsterdam community and thus began to take on a life of its own.

My presentation will be a study of two charitable institutions: Saare Orah ve-Abi Yetmim, founded in 1703 to address the needs of fatherless boys, and Mahasim Tobim, founded in 1749 to help poor “industrious” families. Who were the poor served by these institutions? How efficient were these institutions? Did they help the poor come out of poverty? What influence, if any, did the non-Jewish English system of poor relief have on the Sephardi practice of *sedaca*? These are some of the questions that my presentation will address.

Gil Ribak, American Jewish University

“Getting Drunk, Dancing, and Beating Each Other Up: The Images of the Gentile Poor and Narratives of Jewish Difference among the Yiddish Intelligentsia, 1881-1914”

Working as a travelling salesman in New York City of the late 1880s, a young Jewish immigrant by the name of Yisroel Kopelov passed through some of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. A Bobroysk-born radical, who arrived in America in 1883 and became active in Jewish labor circles and the anarchist movement, Kopelov was shocked by what he witnessed: “in the Irish neighborhoods the dirtiness was exceptional!” and “roused disgust when looking at them. Just the smell from the house was unbearable!” It was not only “the head lice, vermin, and roaches ... the hunger, dejection, drunkenness and sight of battered faces”, but the whole atmosphere of “neglect and ignorance.”

My paper focuses on the imagery of Gentile poverty and the Gentile poor, especially in comparison to the Jewish poor, as expressed by the Yiddish intelligentsia both in Eastern Europe and America in the three decades before World War I. By the late nineteenth century certain negative archetypical images of the Gentile poor – mainly the peasantry – were entrenched throughout Eastern European Jewish society, usually portrayed as strong, coarse, drunk, illiterate, dumb, volatile, and sexually promiscuous. That common depiction stood in sharp contrast to the Jewish poor, who were often represented – though having their own shortcomings – as much purer and more virtuous. At a period marked by political upheavals, social dislocations, and mass emigration, Maskilim, Zionists, socialists, and Yiddishists kept reverting to similar sets of images and assumptions about the Gentile poor. Interestingly, those attitudes had a distinct transnational aspect: in their interaction with non-Jews in the United States, Yiddish writers and thinkers returned to the categories and archetypes known to them: thus American non-Jewish poor, such as the Irish or Italian immigrants, were comfortably cast as Eastern-European peasantry, clearly differentiated from the Jewish poor.

Yehuda Seif, University of Pennsylvania

“Justice and Righteousness: Philosophical Implications of Jewish and Christian Approaches to Charity and Poor Law in the High Middle Ages”

Charity, as a religious act with societal implications, is fraught with complexity just like any social action that is undertaken within the framework of a religious legal system. Is it a system of norms whose purpose is societal—to improve the condition of certain classes within society? Does it have a religious purpose—to bring the individual’s conduct and character closer to that prescribed by his faith? Though the religious and social objectives of charity need not be mutually exclusive, the emphasis that is placed on each is not simply a theoretical question.

Through an investigation of Jewish and Christian charity law in the High Middle Ages, this paper will attempt to distill the answers to these broad questions. It will focus particularly on the thirteenth century, when the sheer number of paupers increased to a point that thinkers were forced to articulate a system that integrated solutions that satisfied both religious law and social conditions. It will argue that R. Isaac of Vienna (c. 1180-c. 1250), the first Jewish thinker in Ashkenaz to organize these laws, advocated for a theology of charity grounded in the sacred. That is not to say he ignored the plight of the pauper or that community charity did not fit into his system—indeed, he advocated for a strong communal dole that would sustain the poor. But his overall thrust, echoing the approach of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, tended toward sacralizing even the community’s responsibility to give. This was in contrast to the approach of the majority of Ashkenazi thinkers, especially the French Tosafists, who envisioned a system of charity that emerged from community governance and social responsibility. I will show that much of the dispute between these authorities came from their philosophical conceptions of the biblical and Talmudic categories of justice and righteousness.

A similar contrast will emerge from an analysis of Christian sources. On the one hand, canon lawyers were remarkably consistent in trending toward greater civic responsibility and desacralization of charity, mirroring increasing lay participation in eleemosynary activity. On the other hand, many thinkers continued to ground charitable activity in sacred responsibility. This was true of the mendicants, whose absolution of private property and insistence on religious poverty had a deep impact on Church theology in the thirteenth century. It was also the position of figures like Innocent III and Peter the Chanter, who, through their rulings, showed that they were uncomfortable ceding charitable enterprises to the laity.