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Rich Man-Poor Man, 1939.

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RICH MAN-POOR MAN  
The Third Discourse in the Series on "Fundamental Human  
Relationships"

By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, November 26, 1939

WRHS





Rich Man-Poor Man: This is another fundamental human relationship. Although it is unlike the relationship between parents and children and husband and wife, it is not always a welcome one. The rich and the poor who have always been members of the same society frequently were in conflict. Oft-times they bitterly resented one another. Nevertheless they had to get along together. There was never a society composed entirely of rich people. As a rule, the wealth of the few was made possible by the poverty of the many. Perhaps someday a society will emerge wherein human intelligence, natural resources, and wide distribution will be so combined as to produce so large a social surplus that the abundance of the few will not feed upon the want of the many. But so far such a society has not yet emerged.

It has therefore been found necessary throughout the ages to regulate the relationship between the poor and the rich either by appeals to morality or by specific social legislation. Furthermore, it has been found necessary to define riches and poverty in their various degrees, and a code of conduct and their mutual responsibilities.

It should not be assumed at the outset that wealth was always regarded by all men as a blessing and poverty by all men as a curse, and that the problem is therefore one of reconciling extremes, and the solution consists in abolishing poverty and making all men rich and blessed. The problem is not that advanced. There have always been individuals and groups of individuals who regarded wealth as a curse and poverty as a blessing, who voluntarily preferred poverty to riches, who turned their backs upon comfort and voluntarily chose penury and want. That seems strange to many people. But that is history. That is fact.



In the teachings and in the practices of the great religions of mankind, especially in Christianity, in Mohammedanism, in Hinduism and Buddhism, the ideal of poverty as the true religion and discipline of the noble life occupies a very high and important place. Ascetism, the abnegation of all possessions, things, and the disciplining of oneself to a minimum of physical requirements has always been a very strong motif not only in religion but in some of the great philosophies of mankind. Those especially who aspired to leadership in society were particularly given to the practices of poverty, to the renunciation of the world, to the things of the world, and very often fellowships of such people were established and organized themselves into monastic life. There were large groups of people among all peoples of the earth - in the East and in the West - who chose to be poor, who clad themselves in the coarsest of raiment, who had the most frugal of foods, who lived in the most barren of cells, who walked barefoot very often, who subsisted voluntarily on charity, men who were free of the enslavements, the involvements the spiritual disorientation of the earth.

There have always been people who have wanted to be free, free to seek moral perfection, and they wanted to be free of what things would do to them. They were afraid that the things which they possessed might come to possess them, that the things which they owned, might come to own them. They preferred to have nothing so as to be completely free. "I fear nothing because I have nothing." These people used a characteristic religious metaphor. These people sought a religious kingdom which was as difficult <sup>for</sup> for the rich man to pass through, as it is/a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. There were some among the Greeks and Romans who either because of religious or philosophic reflection came to the conclusion that



if the fullest of life was to be received one must disentangle oneself from things. They proved that there is something better in the world than riches and that riches were in the way of getting to that something better in life. So that we ought not to think that people always thought of riches as the greatest blessing. That is not true.

It is true, of course, that most people have always feared not riches, but poverty. They regard poverty as the greatest evil. They pursue wealth as life's Sumum Bonum. They pursue wealth very often not because it is their highest interest, but to them, the sole interest in life. They are so covetous of wealth that they "live poor to die rich". And in their headlong rush to get things, to acquire things and more things, they frequently trample over the lives of other people, over the lives of those nearest and dearest to them, and frequently, over their own lives. Family feuds flare up. Brothers become estranged. Life-long friends become separated. Hate supplants love and selfishness comes to hold her desolate court in the empty hearts of the human being.

There are other people who also aspire to wealth, not because they are obsessed by greed, not because they hunger for wealth, but because they are afraid of the dependence which poverty gives one. They are afraid of the low social status which unfortunately poverty brings in any society and in any community. They are afraid of the lack of influence the lack of prestige which they would have. "The wisdom of the poor man is held in contempt." Sometimes the rich, though foolish man is often regarded as a man of supreme wisdom. You have sat in on Board meetings, I am sure, when someone who has nothing but money talks a lot of foolishness and is listened to, while the poor man who may have good ideas is thrust



aside. Men are afraid to be put in the position where their influence for good might be destroyed because of their position as poor men in society.

Now our religion, Judaism, wise in the ways of life, is distinguished by its genius for balance. There is always an even balance even in this regard - "Rich man-Poor man." Our religion knows the dangers of wealth to the individual, to society. "Gold hath been the ruin of many", said the wise Ben Sirah. "Watching for riches consumeth the flesh." "The man whose greatest love is for money will never have enough of money to satisfy that great hunger in life." Our religion calls attention - our sages, prophets, rabbis, call attention to the hard-heartedness, to the lack of sympathy, to the oppression of the poor which riches frequently are responsible for. "Those who sell the righteous for silver, and the poor man for a pair of shoes." Our religion knows that concentrated wealth is frequently responsible for corrupt justice. Our religion knows that frequently men make idols of gold and silver.

Our religion also knows of the wholesome discipline of poverty, of want. Want is a spur. It always has been a spur. Want has been a factor actually in the biologic and mental evolution of the human race. Man's lack of physical equipment necessitated a greater development of his intelligence. Man is possessed of fewer finished appliances than any animal. Man is born unshod, unclad, unarmed and man has had to supply in order to exist, in order to survive, through the development of the useful arts, as we call them, the deficiencies of nature. "Poverty has been the mother of all the arts, of all the sciences, of all the trades." And want, to this day, is still the goad of human progress for the individual, for the system.



But on the other hand, our religion knows that excessive, and prolonged and involuntary poverty frequently breaks the human spirit, destroys the virtues in human life, disfigures the image of God in man and makes many people today malignant, hateful, bitter with frustrated avarice. Poverty creates a sense of demoralization, insecurity in the life of an individual and of society. Poverty is responsible frequently for the corrosion of the soul of the individual, a soul corroded by contempt and frequently by pity to which that individual is subjected.

And our religion also realizes that possessions and economic competence frequently act as a strong defense to a human being, a strengthening of his defenses. Therefore they strengthen his moral life, they free man from the consuming worries of his life. It releases his energies for other interests.

Therefore we find in our Bible such expressions as "Wisdom is good as a competence". "Wisdom is a defense, and so money is frequently a defense for the individual."

The value of money as defense, not the value of money for indulgence, for the sake of confidence, money to give a man confidence, spiritual stability - that is a blessing in our sacred text. "The wealth of the rich man is a strong city of defense. The insecurity of the poor man is his Poverty." Therefore our religion extolls neither riches as such, nor poverty as such.

"Riches are good," as Ben Sirach said, "unto him that has no sin." Riches are a severe test for an individual. But if a man comes through that unscathed, then let him glory". "Riches are a blessing to those who know how to use them." Our religion, therefore, does not denounce wealth as intrinsically evil, nor does it denounce private property. But it does prefer as the norm for human life, neither the one nor the other, neither riches nor poverty.



Thus you have that beautiful prayer at the <sup>of one</sup> close/of the chapters of the Book of Prophets: "Give me, O Lord food sufficient for my needs." And the Rabbis, centuries later, express the same theme: "Much of it is bad, some of it is good."

Having suggested this balance, riches and poverty, our religion proceeds to admonish all men to remember things about possession generally. First, that even the man who looks for defense in wealth ought not to forget that riches often take wings and fly away. We have seen it in our own day. We have seen how money was reduced in some countries to less than its counting value. We have seen men who regarded themselves as seemingly established securely in their businesses, in their stocks, bonds, accumulation of wealth, real estate, suddenly as over night, a storm sweep over the land and their strong fortresses toppled and they were left bereft, defenseless. There is no permanence in amassed capital today anywhere in the world. Nor is there any more any particular pride or distinction as in the past.

The fullest defense for an individual is not in things, but in the inner life of the individual, to build not of material things at all, but out of spiritual things, in the inner integrity of heart and mind and soul. That is where our ultimate defense must be in life.

In the second place, we are admonished that real riches are the riches of the heart and of the mind, the things which cannot be bought - health, real friends, the love of a wife or of a husband or of a child, peace of mind - these things cannot be acquired through physical processes at all, but they do represent the essential wealth of the human life, the riches of the heart and of the human mind. And, of course, that great wealth which is the composite of all the spiritual riches of which I have just spoken



is "Contentment."

We are admonished also to remember that one can get rich by subtracting from his desires just as much and more easily for that matter than by adding to his store. It is the way of gaining riches - by reducing your desires.

I think it was Kant, the great German Philosopher who declared: "One is not rich by what one owns, but more by what one is able to do without with dignity." This is a thought which often presents itself to human beings.

And finally, we are admonished to grow rich in new kinds of wants, that one ought to be a seeker, not after goods, but after the good, that one ought to be hungry all the time for the spiritual and the intellectual, for the wine and the milk which are without money and without price.

I read to you, this morning from the great 55th Chapter of Isaiah:  
"There is milk to be had, there is wine to be had, but not for money. The nourishing things of life, the sustaining things of life - those things can be had, but they cannot be had for money.

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?  
And you gain for that which satisfieth not?  
Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good,  
And let your soul delight itself in fatness.  
Incline your ear, and come with Me;  
Hear, and your soul shall live."

We are advised to seek beautiful and noble interests of life in a domain which is outside of wealth seeking. For that you don't need a bank account. For that you need your own will, and your own consecration, and your own enthusiasm.

Finally, our religion admonishes those who have to remember those who have not. The house of plenty must be open to the needs of the house of want. The duty of the rich toward the poor is to help the poor in their poverty, and out of their poverty. The rich must not assume that it is a divine mandate, part of the natural order of nature. Poverty can be eradicated,



especially in a land like ours. And it is the duty of the rich, because they have the power, and they have the control, and very often the opportunities for education and access to government, to work for such a reorganization and human structure of society, or such just economic laws as will progressively eliminate want and poverty from the habitations of human beings who want to work. It is their duty to see to it that men and their families are protected against those accidents of fortune which produce poverty - prolonged unemployment, low wages, the disabilities of old age, sickness, which bring the grim shadows of want and distress into the homes of people.

And the rich man should do that today not only because it is a moral mandate, not only because of enlightened self-interest. It is to the interest of the rich that there be no poverty, few poor people because our world today is swept with revolutions of all kinds, revolutions of the right and revolutions of the left, the flames of which are fed by human want and misery. When revolutions sweep over the world, the rich as well as the poor become victims of them.

I spoke of the attitude of Judaism toward the question of the rich man and the poor man. Judaism was the first religion to embody social vision in concrete legislation. You find it in all the codes of the Bible from the earliest to the latest. We find, for the first time in the history of mankind compulsory measures enacted to protect the weak from the strong, the poor from the rich, to make mandatory the sense of brotherliness, responsibility in a community. We find laws to protect the poor debtor, laws forbidding usury, making mandatory laws to free a man and his wife and his children in the seventh year, who was forced to sell himself to slavery because of poverty. We find laws commanding that gleanings be left in the fields unharvested so that the poor could come in and take the gleanings,



gleanings must not be picked up in the orchards, vineyards so that the poor by their own right could come in and claim them as their own.

The whole code of Jewish Poor Laws is dominated by the thought: "Open your hand wide - we are brothers". The poor man is your brother, a member of your family. He stands with you in an essential family relationship, like unto a blood relationship.

I am persuaded that if there were more of this spirit of brotherliness, more of this sense of family responsibility between the employee and the employer, between the rich and the poor, between the strong and the weak, more of the sharing and the helping, and less of the grabbing and amassing, there would be far less of the bitter class struggle, far less of the endless strife and fewer attempts to destroy the entire system and to set up other systems which have been so far characterized more by their destructiveness and their hate than by their capacity to contribute to essential well being and love among people.

I realize that in a really involved social structure, when a group of the employed is no longer a unit, but part of a mass, it is far more difficult to speak of brotherliness in that situation. A strange impersonality creeps in and because of that impersonality, brutal weapons of force so readily are resorted. Nevertheless, it is the wise corporation that deals with human beings in the mass, in the tens of thousands, and it is to their own interests as well as to the interests of all to remember that they are dealing with people, with human beings, with human souls, and that if the attitude of personal responsibility of man to man, brotherly duties and obligations are banished from human relationships, then life becomes a brutal arena where force and blood and terror will ultimately decide to the disadvantage of all.



And so here too, we come back to the personal element in human relationships. Everyone within the sphere of life, the manufacturer to the woman who employs a single individual in her home, the labor leader who speaks and acts for a corporate group in relation to another group - all these must remember that basically this a human problem involving human personalities, that the relationship must therefore be one of humanity, "Brothers All!", that you can not think in terms of mine and thine, or in terms of our.





1/ A freedom report, the week that S. H. M. has had, <sup>largely</sup> ~~has~~ <sup>has</sup> been <sup>un</sup> welcome one.  
Pm + kid with <sup>the</sup> number of ours are - often in conflict. often bitterly  
resented each other - never talked. Had to get along with one another, if he  
was to endure.

Then we have a Sov. confound entirely of rich men. In a rule,  
the wealth of the poor was made possible by the harvest of the many.  
Perhaps a ret. wild now day emerges when, at human skill, natural  
resources and intel. distribution confining, the practiced as large  
a David murder that the abundance of the poor wild not feed on the  
wheat of the many. So far, no rule ret. has as yet emerged.

4t was: found we. By the themselves the ages, to regulate the report. But.  
well man - from man, by moral exhortation the social legislation.  
Further was if was found we. to define rules and parents, to  
renew the story, and we was of each and to promote a  
code of conduct and moral responsibilities.

4t is not to be assume that wealth was always regarded as a blowing  
and p. as a curse, and that the problem was: one of reconciling exhausting  
or of abolishing p. and making all was not it: Reform and happy.  
Then have always been intel. people who regarded wealth as  
a curse and p. as a blowing - who when family preferred p. to  
riches - who turned their back upon the comfort and luxuries and  
those physical pleasures and wealth.

24th backing and practices of the great rel. of manhood - exp. in  
Christianity, Western. Problems - the ideal of p. as the human regimen  
and discipline for the world, of p. as occupied a very high and important  
place. Exercise was very strong world - those who aspired to  
leadership was also given to the practices of p. the renunciation of  
the world, and the things of the world. - Reverend of each was was  
found in org. monastic life - they was dead in present practices -  
we had been lost in barren also the most purged of  
wealth - and on cheaply -



There have always been those afraid the embarrassment, the entanglements + the disorientation <sup>of</sup> wealth - moral perfection  
Wanted Freedom - wealth a Yoke - Afraid of what things do to a man  
1. Kingdom - Camel - From being the Possessor - Possessed!  
- "Ego nihil times, quia nihil habo". Lucretius  
Saw Vice - Corruptions - Fled from them who for Rel. or Phil reasons - abnegations  
Already in Pagan Soc. - there were such stories of vices -  
Such ind. in not using numbers have existed, to this day - Rel. or Soc.  
Some-thing Better - Possession - In the way -

3/ Most men, however, have feared not R. Ant. P.  
Regarded P. as greatest evil - and pursuit wealth as life's summa bonum  
Pursuit of wealth - highest, in some cases, sole interest.  
"They are so covetous of wealth that they had power to die rich"  
In head-long rush, trample over other lives, lives of dear ones, some-  
times their own lives.  
Family fences plunge up. Further becomes estranged. Friends are  
parted forever. Hate replaces love. Selfishness even to hold  
her destitute court in the empty heart of man.  
There are others, who aspire to wealth, not because they are obsessed  
with greed, but afraid of dependence which P. entails, and low social  
status, and lack of influence. 2/52 2000 1000.

4/ Our Rel-wise in the way of life - and distrusted by its genius for Balance,  
holds an even balance also in this regard.  
It knows the dangers of wealth - to the rich - to society.  
"Gold hath been the ruin of many" (Ben Sira)  
"Watching for Riches consumeth the flesh" ( " )  
Poo xel, li Poo 271c. (Ecc.)  
Hard-Heartedness + Oppression, the Rich - Exploitation -  
"Sell the righteous for Silver, + poor Man for Pair of shoes."  
Corrupt Justice -



Make idols of Silver & Gold -

5/ It also knows the wholesome discipline of Want!

Want is a spur! This has been a factor in man's biologic and mental evolution. Man's lack of nat. phys. equiptment necessitated a greater develop. of his intelligence - man is possessed of fewer finished appliances than animal - Born "unshod - unclothed - unarmed" - Man had to supply by the devel. of useful arts the deficiencies of nature. Pov. is the mother of all the arts and trades. And Want is still the goad to Progress.

6/ On the other hand - Know that excesses of prolonged, and <sup>+ involuntary</sup> helplessness can break the human spirit - demoralize - destroy virtues - disfigure the image of the divine - makjnant - hateful - bitter with frustrated ambition - the insecurity of their lives, the frequent loss of friends, their low esteem - respect - the corrosion of both contempt and pity -

7/ Also realizes that possession and competence may be a strong defence to a man - strengthen his independence - free him from consuming cares - release his energies for other interests -

חכמה היא כח הגנה. "Wisdom is good with a Gufatree"  
כסף הוא כח הגנה. "For wisdom is a defence, <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ money is a Defence" (Eccl.)

The value of money as Defence - not for its luxuries - a power confidence - stability - חכמה היא כח הגנה - כסף הוא כח הגנה  
"The rich man's wealth is his strong city - the insecurity of the poor man is his Poverty"



8/ Therefore Judaism exalts neither Riches as such nor Poor - &

"Riches are good unto him that hath no sin"

Riches is a severe test for a man. If he comes through it  
unscathed - "then let him glory." 1 Pet. 1:7

"uncathed - "then let him glory".  
Riches are a blessing to those who know how to use it"  
~~It prefers the~~

Does not denounce wealth as intrinsically Evil. Nor  
private property.

4 + prepare for the norm of life - neither one nor the other

Prayer of Agur - 'I am poor and needy - do not rebuke me for my sin.'

~~Feed me with any allotted bread -~~  
"Provide me with Food sufficient for my needs"

Rabbis -

9/ It admonishes all men to remember that

① Highest Deference - Integrity, the Heart - Picks take wings

We have seen it - money reduced to less purchasing value -

No Permanence in Amassed Capital - no particular Pride  
or distinction

(2) Real riches - a Rich Heart - a Rich Mind.

riches - a rich heart - Health - Friends -  
and things which cannot be bought -

the long wife - husband or children - and

Contentment -

אליה שלמה-הולמ 2 תל/ק

(3) one can get rich by subtracting from one's desires  
quite as much and much more easily > "adding to one's store"

"One is not rich by what one owns, but more by what one is able to do without with dignity" - Kant

④ One should grow rich in hearts - to be Seeker not after "Goods" but the "Good" - sp. + Intell. a-hunger!



~~to be~~ for "the wine and the milk which are without money and without price."

"Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?"

"And you gain for that which satisfieth not?"

"Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good,"

"And let your soul delight itself in fatness."

"I incline your ear, and come unto me;"

"Hear, and your soul shall live."

Rich in interests - lord of unpurchasable sp. domains.

10) Duty of Rich to support Poor - Help them in their Pov. <sup>Help go</sup> ~~out~~ <sup>of</sup> their Pov.

Rich must not assume Pov. is a divine mandate - part of order of nature.

Can be eradicated - esp. in land like ours - not now

Duty to work for such reorganization - Just econ. laws

Protect a man & his family against Unemployt. - disabilities.

not only business & old age - Under-pay - which causes Pov.

Moral mandate - enlightened self-interest - It is to the

interest of the rich - that there be no great poverty -

And few poor - Revolutions - Right or Left -

11) Jud. - oldest Code (Ex. 20-23) Pov. Laws -

Protect poor debtor class

Forbids Usury

Field - Vineyard - Olive - pomegranate - Fallen - 7<sup>th</sup>

Slave - 7<sup>th</sup> yr - goes free - wife - children.



new laws added later in D- (7C) הוסיפו חוקים חדשים  
הוסיפו חוקים חדשים. (poor - needy)

And in P. (6C) לֹא-עֲבִיד - גְּבוּרִים-כֹּרֵם-יְהוֹלֵל  
(Lev. 25), no one is a slave to another - God!

Always הוסיפו חוקים חדשים. Brother! Our Family!

12/ If there were more of spirit of Brotherhood - Personal help  
of rich for poor - employer for employee - sharing for wealth  
more of sharing wealth > grabbing + amassing  
There would be less Class Struggle - Industrial War -  
less fierce attempts to destroy the entire system -  
+ set up other systems - so far characterized as  
Destructive wars & Hate - Constructiveness & Love!

13/ Corporate Relations -

Human Values - The Unit - היחידה