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Shabbat - 8th Day of Passover / 22 Nissan, 5575 / April 11, 2015

לֹא־תֹאכַל עֲלֵיוֹ חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל־עֲלָיו מִצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בְּחַפְזוֹן
יֵצְאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי
חַיֶּיךָ

Eat unleavened bread with it; seven days you should eat unleavened bread therewith, even the for you came out of the land of Egypt in a hurry. Therefore you will remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.



The unleavened bread we eat during Passover is described in these verses as lechem oni which during the Seder is mentioned by its Aramaic name: Halachma Anya. Typically, Hagaddot translate this as 'bread of affliction' which we eat to remember the hardship of our ancestors. Rabbi Akiva, chooses to read the text as lechem ani, as in "bread of poverty," connecting to the sentiment pronounced in the seder: let all who are hungry come and eat. Rabbi Shmuel reads the word as lechem oni, relating to oni'im "many words" because many words are proclaimed over it - referring to the lengthy ritual telling of the Exodus experience as we gather at the Seder table on which 'it' - matzah - is served. (Source: BT Pes. 36a). These multiple meanings point to the fact that different rabbinic sages sought to highlight important lessons we can learn through the observance of Passover. Irrespective of the understanding we choose for עֲנִי לֶחֶם Rabbi Akiva's connection of caring for the poor at this time resonate with every Seder experience. Few literally invite the hungry to their Seder tables, but many contribute to special Passover funds that exist in any Jewish community. Ma'ot chitim "the wheat fund" or kimcha d'pischa, "Passover flour" are a response to hunger at this time and ensure that poor families are able to share in the Passover rituals.

What are we to make of the statement in the previous chapter that is also found in this week's reading: "The poor will never cease out of the land: therefore I command you, saying, You shall open your hand wide for your brother, to your poor, and your needy, in your land." [Deut 15:11] Is there truly a tradition of acceptance that there will always be poverty and the community is obliged to care for them?

Israel's current statistics on poverty are bleak. According to the government's Social Security branch (the NII) in 2014 there were 1.6 million people living under the poverty line, which includes more than 750,000 children. The charitable organization Latet reported an even starker number: 31.6 percent of the country's population,

Additional Resources:

[Yad Eliezer](#) is Israel's Largest Poverty Relief Agency

[OpEd](#) post from summer 2014

[Latet](#) addresses both immediate and long-term needs of the poor

[YNet December 2014:](#)

Latet's claim that Israel's officials underestimated the country's level of poverty

amounting to 2.5 million people (almost 1 million of whom are children), live in poverty.

The fight against poverty became a major source of concern for Israel's government, prompting them to create a special committee within their Welfare and Social Services Ministry in 2013 that goes by the name: War on Poverty. The fifty members are comprised of academics, non-government workers and representatives from government ministries and local municipalities. Five subcommittees address immediate concerns and long-term ways to combat the conditions that allow for such high rates of poverty. Subcommittees are: 1) employment and economics; 2) individual family and community; 3) housing; 4) education; and 5) health.

Where government falls short is in addressing immediate needs. The poor rely primarily on charitable organizations for assistance. Sixty thousand families are fed on a regular basis out of organizations like Latet and Yad Eliezer. In addition to putting food on the tables of poor families they mobilize and motivate the public to recognize the need and to give generously. In addition, these organizations lead efforts to change national priorities to include doing more to combat poverty. Despite their efforts, they claim that at least 25% of the children they support go to sleep hungry a few times each month; 22% of the children do not bring food to school each day and 45% of the children from these impoverished families end up going to special boarding schools because of economic insecurity of their families.

By the 8th day (or for some of us the 7th day) Passover is coming to a close. The matzah crumbs that seem to linger on tables, chairs and floors can be a reminder to everyone that this "bread of affliction" or "bread of the poor" represents an ageless, and sadly, a very real modern-day problem in contemporary Israel.

Discussion Questions:

1. Latet reports that 93% of their organization's budget comes from public donations; more than two million Israelis have donated food and goods. Over 100,000 volunteers have participated in activities. To what extent should the government rely on the charity of Israeli citizens? Should feeding the hungry be a duty for private citizens and groups or do you think governments should take primary responsibility for meeting immediate social needs?

2. How is the transition away from the early Labor Zionist philosophy of [Kibbush Avodah](#) responsible for the challenging economic conditions many Jewish families face in Israel?

3. Should Jewish over Arab citizens be given priority in terms of job opportunities and charitable giving? As a Jewish State, is Israel obliged to open the doors to all who are hungry and in need?

4. Consider the Jews of the Old Yishuv, prior to modern Zionism, who lived off [halukah](#) and those early Zionists who started the kibbutzim and moshavim supported by the Rothschilds and other wealthy Jews. Reflect on the current scenario of Israel continuing to receive from the diaspora millions of dollars in contributions to worthy causes.



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