

Elections 2012 -A Jewish Perspective

Social Security **Medicaid** **Environment** **Welfare** **Justice** **War** **Liberal** **Billionaires** **Lobbyists 1%** **Free Trade**

Separation of Church & State **Progressive** **Capitalist** **Wages** **UNDOCUMENTED** **REGRESSIVE** **CAPITAL GAINS** **President** **Lobbyists**

Medicaid **Subsidy** **Wall Street** **School Choice** **Poverty** **9.9.9** **Socialism** **Tax Policy** **Republican** **Justice** **Legislation**

Finance Reform **Medicaid** **B'H** **Environment** **Welfare** **Tax Cuts** **Justice** **War** **Liberal** **Billionaires** **Lobbyists 1%** **Free Trade**

Nation-Building **Welfare** **Redistribution** **Income** **War**

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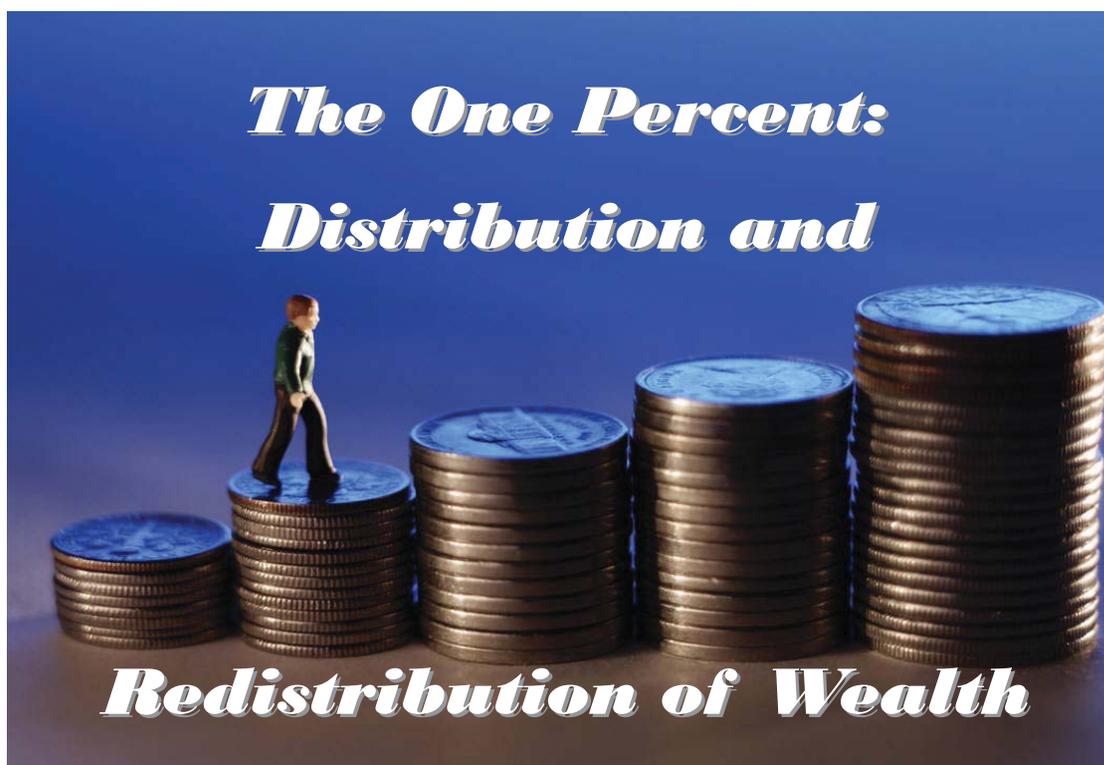
Unions **Conservative** **Deductions** **TAX** **Law** **Wall Street** **Nation-Building** **State's Rights** **Regulation** **Immigration** **Vouchers** **Poverty** **Defense** **Entitlements** **Unemployment** **Benefits** **Undocumented**

Government **Illegal Alien** **Subsidy** **Medicaid** **Social Security** **WAGES** **Forced Vaccination** **Border** **Border** **Bureaucracy** **Loopholes** **Moderate** **Capitalism** **REGRESSIVE** **Defense** **Entitlements** **Unemployment** **Benefits** **Undocumented**

Economy **Fair Tax** **War** **Military** **Deficits** **WAGES** **Forced Vaccination** **Border** **Border** **Bureaucracy** **Loopholes** **Moderate** **Capitalism** **REGRESSIVE** **Defense** **Entitlements** **Unemployment** **Benefits** **Undocumented**

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The One Percent:
Distribution and
Redistribution of Wealth



Introduction

Data tells us that, in many ways, there are greater gaps than ever between the rich and the poor. In these difficult economic times, this is seen by some as a glaring injustice that must be remedied. There should not be a 1% that lives so much better than the other 99%. Wealth must be redistributed.

On the other hand, there are those who say that it is no one's business what anyone does with their legally-gained assets. Anyone who wants can work harder. Prosperity depends on people finding ways to work harder and better; redistributing wealth destroys the incentive to work hard. Why bother to work hard when prosperity will be delivered to one's doorstep anyway.

What wisdom does Judaism have to offer on the issue of the distribution of wealth? Is wealth a mark of sin, a sign that a person has greedily taken too much and necessarily impoverished others? Is poverty a sign of laziness or ineptitude, an outer indication of a poor character? Let us explore together why there is inequality in wealth and what should we do about it.

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Opening Question

Successful entrepreneurs-turned-philanthropists typically say they feel a responsibility to “give back” to society. But ‘giving back’ implies they have taken something. What, exactly, have they taken? Yes, they have amassed great sums of wealth. But that wealth is the reward they have earned for investing their time and talent in creating products and services that others value. They haven’t taken from society, but rather enriched us in ways that were previously unimaginable.

Kimberly O. Dennis, “Gates and Buffet Take the Pledge,” Wall Street Journal, Aug. 20, 2010, p. A15

Question for discussion:

Do you agree with the point of this paragraph?

Have the wealthy taken something away from the community that they must now restore?

If so, what would that be?

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Section I

The Source of Wealth

Exercise:

What do the prohibitions of working on Shabbat, of not working one's field during shemitta (the Sabbatical year), of charging interest on loans and of stealing have in common?

1. *Be careful not to forget G-d, your G-d, refraining from keeping His commandments, statutes and ordinances with which I am charging you today. Lest you eat and be satisfied, build good houses and live in them, your herds and flocks increase, your silver and gold accumulate, and everything you have prosper and your heart become arrogant and you forget G-d... You would say in your heart, "My own ability and the strength of my own hand have accumulated this wealth for me." You should remember G-d, your G-d, for it is He who gives you the ability to make wealth.*

Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17-18

2. *A Jew who believes in G-d needs to recognize the absolute truth that it is not through one's own strength that one overcomes (see I Samuel 2:9) but it is G-d's blessing that makes one wealthy (Proverbs 10:22). A person's sustenance – aside*

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from expenses for Shabbat and yom tov and tuition for Torah education for one's own children and for other children in the community – is all set for him from Rosh Hashana. Even if he were to put in a profound effort, working twenty of twenty-four hours, employing every shrewd stratagem in the world, he would not succeed in adding on even a penny more than that sum that was set for him at Rosh Hashana. Similarly, if someone has several competitors but he keeps his business closed on Shabbat and yom tov, the sum set for him on Rosh Hashana will not be reduced by a penny.

Rebbe Rayatz, Igrot Kodesh, 2411

3. *It is written, “Honor G-d from your possessions...” — from that with which He has graced you (mei-chananacha). If you have a pleasant voice, lead the communal prayers.*

Rabbi Elazar Hakappar's sister's son, Chiyya, had a pleasant voice. He would say to him, “Chiyya, arise and honor G-d with what He has graced you.”

Yalkut Shimoni, I Kings, Remez 221

4. *How is the baby formed? Rabbi Yochanan said: What is the meaning of the verse “Who does great things beyond our ability to discover?” These are the great things that the blessed Holy One does in forming the baby...*

The angel in charge of conception takes the seminal drop in his hand and brings it before the One Who Spoke and the World

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Came to Be and says before Him: “Master of the Universe! I have done all that you asked of me. What will be its future? What do You decree regarding it?”

Immediately, the blessed Holy One decrees whether it should be weak or strong, male or female, rich or poor, of pleasing appearance or ugly, tall or short...

Tractate Semachot, Sefer Chibut Hakever, Chapter 1

Meaningful choice

5. *But whether [the drop] will be a wicked or righteous person, He does not say. This accords with Rabbi Chanina, for Rabbi Chanina said: “All is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven; as it says, ‘And now what does G-d your G-d ask of you save to fear Him.?’” Nida 16b*

6. *Thus says G-d: Let not the wise man glorify himself with his wisdom and let not the strong man glorify himself with his strength and let not the rich man glorify himself with his wealth. For only with this may one glorify himself – contemplating and knowing Me, for I am G-d, who does kindness, justice and righteousness in the land, for in these is My desire.*

Jeremiah 9:22-23

So why work? (optional)

7. *G-d your G-d will bless you in all that you will do.*

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(Deuteronomy 15:18) You might think that one may just sit by idly. Therefore, the text states, In all that you will do.

Sifrei, Re'eh

8. *G-d wishes man to have complete good. Human nature is such that one only has true delight when one is a participant in the achievement obtained through one's own hard, exhausting work. On the contrary: if one receives this as a gift, it is demeaning; it is called "the bread of shame."*

Therefore, the most complete delight is only when one's attainments are through hard work – the harder the work is, the greater is the enjoyment of its fruits.

Rebbe, Igrot Kodesh 27:377

Section II

Distribution and Redistribution of Wealth

9. *We find in a Midrash (Tanchuma, Mishpatim 9), "David said before the blessed Holy One, 'Master of the Universe! "Let the world be settled and equal before G-d." Set Your world straight and divide it equally between the rich and the poor.'*

"G-d replied to him, 'If so, "Who would preserve kindness and truth?" If all will be either wealthy or poor, who will be able to do acts of kindness?"'

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King David's complaint is that there is no need for the division between the wealthy and the poor. The poor should not have to receive their life-force through the rich, but all should receive directly from the blessed Holy One, as we all pray in the Grace After Meals, including the poor man begging in doorways: "Do not cause us to need the handouts or loans of flesh and blood, but only Your full, open holy and generous hand." That being so, the question must be asked: Why did G-d make it so that the poor must receive their life-force from the rich?

To this G-d replies: "If so, 'Who would preserve kindness and truth?' If all will be either wealthy or poor, who will be able to do acts of kindness?" That is to say, the division between rich and poor is necessary in order for there to be acts of kindness.

King David accepted this answer and it became a part of the eternal Torah.

One may connect this to the Mishna in Pirkei Avot: "The world stands on three things [one of which is] acts of kindness." This tells us that the ongoing existence of the world depends upon acts of kindness.

10. *You shall surely open your hand to the poor man and give him enough for all that he lacks. Deuteronomy 15: 8*

For all that he lacks – you are not obliged to make him rich. – Sifrei

For all that he lacks – all is according to his honor. – Midrash Tan-naim