



Learning

think about reflection

Jewish learning

service opportunities

Judaism and Affordable Housing

By the Reform Action Committee

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Example #1) Jewish Tradition teaches that it is more valuable to help a person become self-supporting than it is to give the person a handout of food or money. “Rabbi Abba said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish: the person who lends money [to a poor person] is greater than the person who gives charity; and the one who throws money into a common purse [to form a partnership with the poor person] is greater than either (Talmud, Shabbat 63b).”

We are commanded to help those less fortunate on the path to self-sufficiency so that one day they will not need assistance. Housing is a foundation upon which self-sufficiency can be built. Without a place to live, a person cannot begin to take charge of his or her life.

Example #2) According to one *midrash*, Abraham is judged to be greater than Job because while Job, “opened his doors to the road (Job 31:32), Abraham left his tent to seek guest among the passers-by (Genesis 18:1-8). Furthermore, Abraham “got busy and built spacious mansions along the highways, and stocked them with food and drink, so that whoever entered ate, drank, and blessed Heaven (Avot 1:5; Avot d’Rabbi Natan 7).”

Clearly both Abraham surpassed Job because he sought after opportunities to improve lives by taking needy people into his home, rather than waiting until the needy approached him.

Example #3) When Rabbi Joshua ben Levi went to Rome, he saw marble pillars covered with sheets, so they wouldn’t crack with heat, nor freeze from the cold. He also saw a poor person with only a reed mat under him and a reed mat over him (Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 9:1).

This observation points out a prioritization of marble over humanity in ancient Roman society. In contrast, Jewish tradition highlights the supremacy of caring for fellow human beings. Isaiah the prophet proclaims that even the service of God is devoid of meaning if the worshippers have not demonstrated compassion for people here on earth. Israel is commanded:

“Share your bread with the hungry, and take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, clothe him and do not ignore your own kin (Isaiah 58:7).”