**Machon Peulat Shabbat 7/7**

**Parshat Pinchas – Daughters of Zelophehad – Inequality in America**

5:15-5:20 Split into groups

5:20-5:25 Introduction, Read and discuss the NPR article

5:25-5:35 Read and go over the facts about income inequality

5:35-5:50 Discussion about income inequality in America

**Introduction:** (explain the following about the parsha)

Read this: This week’s parsha focuses on the census and land distribution among the different tribes. The daughters of Zelophehad ask Moses for their father’s portion of the land because he died and did not have any sons. God agrees to this request, making the rule that daughters can receive land if their father does not have any sons. This is a clear example of gender inequality in the Torah. For Peulat Shabbat, we are going to discuss another form of inequality which is extremely important and prevalent in our country today: Income inequality.

**NPR Article:** Each group will have a few copies of the NPR article. Please pass them around and have the kids read it to themselves or have a few chanichim read the article out loud.

**Poverty Facts:**

Next, there is a list of facts below. Read each fact out loud and have the chanichim guess the number that should be in the blank. The correct answers are in parentheses. So, after the chanichim guess the blank, go over the correct answers with them and ask if anyone has any questions, reactions, or comments about the facts.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** of American workers make less than $10 per hour. (One quarter)

In 2012, the top 10 percent of earners took home **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** of all income. (50%)

The wealthiest 85 people on the planet have more money that the poorest **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** people combined. (3.5 billion)

The poorest Americans do come out ahead in one statistic: the bottom 90% of America owns **\_\_\_\_** of the debt. (73%)

In a study of 34 developed countries, the United States had the \_\_\_\_\_\_ highest level of income inequality, after Chile. (second)

The average white American’s median wealth is \_\_\_\_ times higher than the average African American and \_\_\_\_ times the Hispanic American. (first blank: 20, second blank: 18)

**\_\_\_\_\_** Americans have more wealth, $2 trillion, than half of all Americans combined. (400)

**Discussion Questions**

Finally, lead a discussion about income inequality in America. Suggested questions include:

1. How would you define poverty? What do you think causes it?
2. Do you believe that those who are born poor and stay poor are at fault for not removing themselves from the poverty cycle? Or does the systemic nature of poverty prevent people from removing themselves from the cycle?
3. Is poverty relative? Would people who are considered poor in one society be considered rich in another?
4. Do you think it's possible to eradicate poverty in the world? In the US? How?
5. What does it say about our country that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer?
6. How are income inequality and gender inequality correlated?

**One Family's Story Shows How The Cycle Of Poverty Is Hard To Break (NPR)**

Desiree Metcalf's story is heartbreaking, but among the 46 million Americans who are poor today, her story is not unique. Metcalf is 24 years old. She's the mother of three little girls — ages 6, 4 and 2. They all have different fathers.

"That about sums me up, I think," she says.

Metcalf is sitting on the floor of her two-bedroom apartment in the small town of Bath, in western New York. A fish tank gurgles in the background. A tiny kitten peeks out from under the furniture. Her youngest daughter is curled up under a blue blanket, head resting on her mother's lap. Metcalf got married two years ago to a man who isn't the father of any of her children, but he recently left her for someone else.

"I just feel like I get one piece of good news that makes me [think] life isn't gonna be that bad, and then here comes 30 things to basically push me right back down in this hole that I feel like I've been trying to dig myself out of for the last probably 15 years," she says.

Metcalf did not just become poor. A lot of bad things happened to get her there. Like many others who are poor, she doesn't have just one or two problems, but a whole pile of them. She was raised by a single mother, who was also poor. Metcalf says they didn't always get along. And things came to a head when she was 12 years old. That meant moving from home to home to home. Metcalf says she attended 26 different schools.

"Seems I'd just get my bags unpacked and it was time to move again," she says.

**'So Here I Am'**

Like many before her, she carried her poverty into adulthood, doing odd jobs with periods of homelessness and hunger. But more disturbing is that poverty is now starting to take its toll on her children, especially her eldest daughter. Metcalf says she recently tried to run away from home in the middle of the night.

That might lead one to ask: Isn't there some help this family can get?

In fact, there's plenty. The government and charities have spent thousands, if not tens of thousands of dollars on Metcalf and her family already — food stamps, health care, housing, Head Start. Many of the programs Metcalf has participated in emerged almost 50 years ago after President Lyndon Johnson declared a war on poverty.

But the programs clearly haven't been enough to get her up on her own two feet. One reason is that Metcalf can't get a job even though the government spent $3,000 to train her as a certified nursing assistant, something she's always wanted to do.

But she ran into a problem faced by many low-income workers: transportation.Her car was recently totaled by someone backing out of a driveway.

"So now my vehicle is gone and [I] have no way to get back and forth to work reliably, and unfortunately, there's not much in this town as of work," she says. Mass transit is virtually nonexistent in this rural area.

Also, with her husband gone, Metcalf now has something else to worry about. "If you get a job and they take you off public assistance, then they don't pay for day care," she notes, adding that it's an expense that would very likely eat up most of her earnings.

**How To Possibly Come Out Ahead**

Metcalf faces another situation common among low-income workers. She knows if she starts making money, other benefits — like food stamps — will be cut or eliminated. Just recently, the family's food stamp benefit dropped from $700 a month to $200 because her daughter started to receive $744 a month from Social Security to treat her emotional issues and her husband began working part time at McDonald's. Of course, now he's gone.

Muller says some of the limits on government aid are there to prevent people from abusing the system, but she thinks there's also a misperception about the poor. Metcalf could not agree more. She just wishes it wasn't such a struggle getting help. Still, she hopes someday to get back to college.

"I haven't given up my dream yet. I just keep putting it on the back burner until it ain't raining so hard, I guess," she says.