

“If I Were a Rich Man”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In the Talmud we read, "There was a flute in the Temple which was smooth, fine, made of a reed, and from the days of Moses. The king issued an order that it be plated with gold, and its sound was no longer pleasant. They removed the plate, and its sound was pleasant, as it had once been."
(Arachin 10b)

The darkness of Egypt is called 'thick as a *dinar*' (dinar — an ancient coin.) A window is transparent; cover it with silver, and one has a mirror in which one sees not the other, but oneself. These examples from the Jewish tradition teach an ever relevant truth: wealth is not only an opportunity but also an obstacle. It can block our vision of the other and detract rather than enhance.

Judaism is unique as a tradition in which, for a whole day each week, one is not even permitted to touch money. Wealth, as any power given to human beings, is double edged; it can create or destroy. The Yiddish proverb teaches: "Shrouds are made without pockets." Gold stops at the grave and what remains is not how much we made, but what it made of us.