**Rabbinical Fundraising Epistles as Reflections of Inter-Community Mutual Assistance in Morocco**

**Tamar Lavi**

The custom of writing epistles for fundraising purposes emerged against the background of severe riots and decrees against Jews in the Middle Ages. Even earlier, grim living conditions caused the stratum of the indigent to grow steadily and made roving paupers who circulated among the Jewish communities a common spectacle. Fundraising epistles that rabbis placed in needy wayfarers’ hands are called “sojourn epistles,” “compassion epistles,” and even “collection-epistles.” Another kind of solicitation epistle was given to *shadarim,* rabbinical emissaries from the Land of Israel; these were authored by rabbis as well.

Roving paupers and shadarim also made their way to the Jewish communities of Morocco, where no few impoverished and hardscrabble Jews needed aid and relief even though sources of livelihood were usually available. Concern for the poor was central in these communities’ social endeavors; synagogues installed community chests where donations for the town’s indigent could be placed. However, since it was uncommon to tap these community resources for wayfarers, town rabbis equipped random visiting paupers with epistles that urged the public to donate to their bearers generously. As for shadarim, every town had special rules that determined the size of the donations and when they should be collected for each of the holy cities in the Land of Israel.

Segregated from their host society, the Moroccan Jewish communities enjoyed autonomy in all aspects of managing community and religious life. Outwardly, the authorized leadership maintained sound relations between the community and the authorities; internally, it satisfied various public needs and acted strictly to uphold religious and moral values and appropriate social relations. The power of those in charge to determine the community’s ways was treated with much importance, given that the public was schooled to honor them and heed their words.

In my lecture, I will cite the epistles to demonstrate the responsibility of Jews for each other along two paths: support for wayfarers and support for communities in Eretz Israel. I will show how this sense of mutual responsibility, which crossed borders, abetted both internal community resilience and national resilience. I will also dwell on the rhetorical manipulations used in the epistles to induce the public to give generously.