

## How Much Is Enough?

At the beginning of this week's Parshiot, Vayakhel-Pekudei, Moshe calls out to *Am Yisrael* and asks them to donate materials to build the *Mishkan*, its vessels and the priests' splendid ritual clothing. Not just any materials: gold, silver, copper, precious stones and gems, scarlet and turquoise thread and wool, incense and oils, acacia wood, and more.

Moshe added this to those donating: **כָּל אִשָּׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לִבּוֹ** - any person whose heart is moved to do this, freely and with goodwill. Moshe then added one more thing. He called upon the artisans of *Bnei Yisrael*, the craftsmen, the weavers, the jewelers, the carpenters, the goldsmiths to give of their time. And they came. They collected all the material that *Bnei Yisrael* brought, they measured. They weighed. Until there was so much that a proclamation went out in the camp to say STOP! Enough! We have enough and more than enough.

This story has always felt so lovely to me and heartwarming, Bnei Yisrael giving so much of themselves and so freely, especially after they had given so much of their gold to build the golden calf. And so I thought until this week when I had the opportunity to attend Hadar's Rabbinic Yeshiva Intensive, immersing myself in the study of Torah and learning from excellent teachers.

In the morning *shiur* that I chose to learn *aggadeta*, stories from the Talmud, from *Masekhet Ta'anit*. This *masekhet* is about when the sages would institute fast days in response to calamities that befell the Jews such as drought or plague. There is a story on page 24a about a man named Elazar of Birta.

Elazar of Birta was well-known for his compassion and generosity, so much so, that when the *gabaei tzedaka*, the charity collectors saw him, they would cross to the other side of the street because they knew that if they approached him, he would give everything that he had, everything that was in his pockets at the time. And so it was, one day, Elazar of Birta went out to the *shuk*, the marketplace, to get what he needed for his daughter's dowry for her upcoming wedding. And sure enough, the *gabaei tzedakah* saw him and tried to hide but he spied them and crossed the street. He asked them: what are you collecting for today?

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They answered: We are collecting for a *yatom* and *yetoma*, two orphans who are getting married and have nothing for their wedding. Immediately Elazar's heart melted and he said: you must take this money, this is more important than my daughter's wedding. He was left with one dinar with which he brought a few kernels of wheat which he threw into his empty granary and then went off to the Bet Midrash to study.

His wife later asked their daughter: What did your father buy in the *shuk*? She answered: I don't know, but whatever he bought, he threw into the granary. The wife went to check it out. What did she see? She couldn't even open the door to the granary because it was overflowing with wheat, even coming out through the doorknob!

The daughter went to the Bet Midrash to her father and said to him: Look at what happened! Look at the miracle! He said to her: Daughter, we do not deserve more of that wheat than any other poor person in Israel.

Again, I thought of this as a lovely story about a compassionate and generous man. But then my chevruta pointed something out that changed the way I looked at this story a bit. He said: Notice the wording that is in the Gemara. What did our sages write that the daughter said to Elazar when she came to tell him about the granary full of wheat.

**אָמְרָה לִיָּהּ בֵּן אֱלֹהֵי מִי עָשָׂה לִי אֹתְכֶם**

*She said Father come and see what He Who loves You, (meaning God), has performed for you*

Perhaps this was echoing something that was in her heart. Perhaps she was saying: God loves you and gave you so much bounty. But do you love me? What did you do with the money set aside for me? Perhaps she was saying: Father - did you have to give away everything from my dowry?

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Our sages were very thoughtful about the stories that were included in the Talmud and the language that they used when writing these stories. So here's the message I am hearing from this story.

We do need to give. We need to give with an open heart, and freely. But we need to be careful about how **much** we give. We first need to check that we have order in our own home, that we have *seder babyit*, and that we have *shalom bayit*, peace in our home. We have enough in our homes for our own peace of mind and safety. Whether it is time, money, or our resources, we need to check in first with **ourselves** and our families.

This reminded me of two conversations that I had with people in our community. The first with a parent who was deciding whether to join a *chessed* initiative. This parent said to me: this is exactly the kind of thing I would love to do. But this year with the pandemic, I am driving my children to school and driving them home after school. This has taken up all of my free time, and I feel that if I join this initiative, it will be harmful to my family and the time I have to spend with them. And another conversation, with someone who had been on a committee for several years. This person was feeling depleted and said I need to step back, I need someone else to step in, and maybe in the future, when I feel re-energized I will join this committee again.

Elazar of Birta was a very generous and giving individual, But he did not know how to balance this generosity with his own family's needs and maybe even his own personal needs. Because we need to also be mindful of what we need for ourselves.

Are we making time to exercise? Are we creating healthy meals for ourselves and our families? Are we sleeping enough? Are we finding time to do things to relax, to have fun, to rejuvenate ourselves?

When we make a decision to give - let us make sure that we first listen to ourselves and to our families, that our homes are "in order", that we have *shalom bayit* and *seder babayit*, protecting and respecting our time, our resources, and our energies.

**Shabbat Shalom!**