

“What’s Your Share?”
Loving with a Double Portion

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Over a year ago when I began my time at the GRJC, I sent out an email that described how we (you and I) were in a relationship – that we were kind of “dating,” if you will. I know that there was nothing wrong with this place when I first got here and I’m sure that you thought to yourself: “wow...she’s our soul mate. She’s meant to be with us.” I can say that with great humility, right?

But, let’s face it, it’s been a year...the honeymoon is over. You can feel free to share with me what you *really* think (some of you already have) and I can begin to share with you what I really think. The excitement of a new relationship has worn off, perhaps...because that’s what happens when time progresses in a relationship, right? So where does that leave us?

The haftarah that we read from this morning comes from the first book of Samuel. It tells the story of a man named Elkanah and his two wives: Penina, who had children, and Chanah, who was unable to conceive a child. Each year, Elkanah offered sacrifices to God. And from those sacrifices were shares of food remaining, which he distributed to his family. But the question, of course, was how much he would give to each of his two wives.

The haftarah is very clear about what Elkanah gives to Penina. He gives Penina and her sons each a share of food. But the haftarah is not at all clear about what Elkanah gives to Chanah, his childless wife. The haftarah says: - וְלַחַנָּה, יָתֵן מִנְּהָ אֶחָת אַפָּיִם: כִּי אֶת-חַנָּה אָהַב, וְהָ סָגַר בְּרַחֲמָהּ - And to Chanah he gave because he loved her, even though God closed up her womb.

Now one of the questions that might come to mind regarding Elkanah's gift to Chanah is well...what came first – did the love come first and therefore Elkanah automatically just gave to her – even though she was not able to conceive? Or, did he give to her first, helping to establish and build that love even though she was not able to help build the ideal family that he wanted?

Well, let's think about that...how does it work in our own relationships? Can we think of a time when we fell in love? Let me guess – it just clicked, right? You didn't even need to work at it because it happened on its own. Well, that's what "falling in love" is all about – just happening, just working --- all on its own. And because of that love we are motivated to give to the other person. We write sweet notes to them. We surprise them, just because. We call them just to say "hello" because we want to hear their voice. But what happens, months and years down the road? What happens when we lose that spark, when we begin to see different parts of the person before us that we honestly don't like? Is it even possible to fall in love with the person all over again? I actually don't think so...because now you know and see all of the baggage of the person before you.

According to an article about relationships by Dr. Bjarne Holmes in Psychology Today, believing in destiny or saying "either we're meant to be together or not" can be extremely detrimental to a relationship. He argues that having this mentality encourages us to be on auto-pilot – to not work hard at our relationships, because if someone is meant for us, it shouldn't take any effort, right?

So, if we can't fall in love again...or if we can't believe in fate...just what do we do to build a relationship?

We do what Elkanah did. We give. We give because just as love motivates us to give to someone when we initially fall in love, the opposite is also true: Giving to someone motivates love when falling in love is no longer an option. We give.

Now I know that not everyone here is partnered. But even for those of us in the room who are single or divorced or widowed or even for those of us who feel alone, this isn't merely about intimate love. This is also about relationships in general and connecting with another person. Perhaps we want to connect better with our family – our parents, our distant relatives. Perhaps we want to relate better to colleagues at work. Perhaps you want to feel a stronger connection to others in our Glen Rock Jewish Center community. What do we do? We give.

So what do we give? Well, that's easy, right? We give people gifts. We might buy a colleague a cup of coffee or bring home flowers. We might set the table or give someone a note of appreciation for all that they've done. Our gifts don't need to be extravagant or overboard. It's the thought that counts, right?

But let's face it. As much as those gifts melt our hearts, the real gifts that connect us with others are the most valuable gifts that anyone can give to you and they're not "things." What are these gifts?

Well, let's look at what the haftarah says that Elkanah gives to Chanah: It reads: וְלִחְנָה, יָתֵן מְנָה אֶחָת אֶפְיָיִם

Now there are actually a couple of different ways to translate this verse, to describe what Elkanah's gift actually was. One understanding of this verse is that Elkanah gave Chanah, not a share of food, but rather a share of his anger – or a portion of sadness. In other words, Elkanah was angry and disappointed that Chanah was unable to conceive a child and he was upset with how this affected their relationship. And, of course, his anger and sadness was not something that he could control, so he let it all out. He shared his feelings. Sound familiar?

Now you might think that this type of reaction – an angry one – is a bad thing. I'm not so sure. Now, don't get me wrong, anger can lead to some troubling types of behavior. At the same time, sharing our anger or our sadness is a way of expressing feeling to something gone awry. When

we express anger or sadness in the context of a relationship what we are saying is that we care, because if we didn't care, we would be indifferent. We chant the prayer "*Adonai, Adonai, El rachum v'chanun erech apayim...*" which tells us that even God can be angry or show disappointment with us.

Anger, you see, is a form of truth-telling; it's a form of being honest with ourselves and the person who wronged us without covering it up or trying to act nice when inside we are in pain. In a relationship that is being challenged like Elkanah and Chanah's relationship, responding in an honest way builds trust as we work together to build a better relationship. It's not the anger or sadness, per say, that's important to the relationship, it's the honesty that is behind those feelings. Honesty helps build a relationship into something even better.

Let me ask you something:

Have you ever seen someone come out of the bathroom and they have toilet paper stuck to their foot? What do you do? Well, for some of us, that's an easy one, we kind of step on the paper, get it off with our own feet...and maybe say something like "here, let me help you out a bit..."

But here's a more difficult one:

What if, you're going out to lunch with someone and they have a giant, dark piece of cooked spinach stuck right in between their teeth? You can't do for them what you did with the toilet paper incident. So you say to yourself: "Do I tell them and risk them feeling embarrassed? Do I not tell them and potentially let them go the rest of the day looking at everyone else they will see with spinach stuck in their teeth?"

Love and connectedness require honesty. Being connected with someone means being able to tell that person without any qualms in your mind, that they have a little schmutz in between their teeth. Why? Because you care about them and you're willing to take the risk of knowing that they might get a little embarrassed...but ultimately, you have in mind their

well-being. And, because telling them about the schmutz in their teeth represents a strong relationship where you are not afraid to deal with all of the schmutz of life...together, in a truly honest way.

The passion between two lovers does not fade just because. It fades when we stop being honest with each other and act like our conflict does not exist. The passion or the significance of a relationship fades when we accept the status quo and don't challenge each other or share with each other what our needs are, what our hopes are, how we are changing, how we need and want to grow and evolve as a person and in our relationship. Honesty means going to a deep place with someone – even in anger, sometimes - and knowing that sometimes the honesty may hurt or cause a little pain, but ultimately, we'd be stagnant and disingenuous if we didn't make ourselves vulnerable and go to those scary places. Have you ever had an argument with someone and then somehow... even after all of that, you feel *more connected* with the person? That's because honesty can lead to vulnerability, and vulnerability breaks down the walls that we erect to protect ourselves from getting too close with someone. Connectedness can be built out of the messiness.

And so, ironically, that's the gift that Elkanah gives to Chanah. Although it's out of anger, it's the gift of honesty, the gift of being real. And that honesty and realness is important as we build and improve any relationship in our lives. Elkanah gives Chanah the gift of honesty.

What else does Elkanah give to Chanah? Well, it depends who you ask.

וּלְחֶנֶה, יָתֵן מְנָה אַחַת אֶפְיָיִם

According to some commentators, this verse means that Elkanah gave Chanah only one share of food because God closed up her womb. In other words, even though he's disappointed that she is unable to have children with him, he gives her one share of food anyway. Now that's nice and all, but I prefer still a different way of interpreting this verse.

Instead of only giving Chanah one share of food, another way to interpret this verse is that Elkanah gave to Chanah one share large enough for two people. Or, in simpler terms, he gave Chanah a double portion of food. He gives her more than the minimum. He gives her a double share because he sees the promise in their future together and his hope and his faith in a brighter tomorrow is represented in a tangible way by giving – and giving abundantly. Instead of saying – you can't give me what I want, so you're only going to get this one measly share, Elkanah recognizes the pain in the relationship, the brokenness that comes from not being able to conceive a child, and instead of responding with the bare minimum, he gives even more. He gives abundantly. How do we give abundantly?

We could give gifts, as I mentioned earlier. But let's face it. As much as those gifts melt our hearts, the real gifts that connect us with others are the most valuable gifts that anyone can give to us and they're not "things" – they are our time and our presence. To stop in the office of a colleague and have a real conversation with them instead of a quick "hi, how are you?" while passing by--- that's the gift of time. To show up early one night after work because you want to be with your family is to give them the gift of time. To schedule vacations and getaways and date nights and coffee dates and lunch breaks with those around you – that is giving the gift of time. But is that giving abundantly?

Nope. Time, even our most valuable resource, is not enough my friends. Time is only one share. We could sit with our family and eat dinner together while one of us stares at our phone, answering emails. We could take a colleague out to lunch and still be totally preoccupied in our minds about everything that's going on back at the office. We could take the time to put our child to bed at night or call a parent to say hello, but make them feel rushed because there is something else that we want to do. Time is only half of the gift because what we really do if we want to connect with others and give them abundantly is give them a double share. We give time and our presence - our attention, our focus, our ability to be in the moment and hear them, experience them. And those are the best gifts that we can

give anyone to repair a broken relationship, to build connectedness out of messiness, to respond to a woman like Chanah when God closes up her womb – to respond to that – with not just one share of our time, but a double share – our time and our presence.

To build a relationship, to make it even better, like Elkanah, we don't just give, we give abundantly.

This is my prayer for everyone in this room today - to go out and love someone a little more, to give them a little more. The world is full of so much hate and so many conflicts and debates and political arguments. What the world really needs is love...(sing) *what the world needs now, is love, sweet love...*

I digress. But really, go out and love someone more. Give them these gifts – the gift of honesty and a double share of your time and your presence.

And that, my friends, is also my prayer for this community, our Glen Rock Jewish Center community.

Some of you may have noticed a large apple tree display when you came in. Well, today, here at the Glen Rock Jewish Center, we launch our first ever: GRJC Community Tree. I want to thank Shira Hochman for putting so much of her time into making this display and Judi Forer for the idea behind our GRJC Community Tree. You see, like Elkanah, we believe that our relationship together has so much potential, has so much hope. We believe that we can all feel more love for each other, we can all connect with each other in a more significant way...but it all starts with these two gifts as well: honesty and a double share of your time and presence.

We know that our community at the Glen Rock Jewish Center is not perfect. We know that we can improve. I know that I can improve. So we ask you to be honest. Share with us your challenges, your hope, your dreams for our community – and please don't share it anonymously. Share

it with me personally so that we can build a relationship together out of something that's been bothering you. Help us give you the share that you deserve, the community we all could love even more, because you care about our future together. So please, make our relationship stronger by being honest.

And, please, make our relationship stronger by giving abundantly a double share of your time and your presence.

The theme of our services today and of our Glen Rock Jewish Center Community Tree campaign is "What's your share?" This is our way of asking you what you might be able to do to give your time to our community. A community is based on a relationship but a relationship, as we've learned, is based on giving. And our relationship is stronger when the community gives to you *and* when you give to the community. So "what's your share?" Maybe you could help us by hosting an adult educational event in your home or a social wine-and-cheese night? What's your share? Maybe you could chair an event which hosts an Israel-related speaker? You have received a "Guide to Synagogue Life" and a personalized name card is on the table in the lobby. We ask that you please take a few minutes to review the Guide, and then choose one area of interest on the Community Tree where you could contribute your share, your time. Then, drop your name card into the corresponding jar next to the tree. We thank you, in advance, for giving us your share of time.

But we want you to be like Elkanah and give a double portion – not just your time, but your presence. So, just as we ask "What's your share?" – that is, where can you give us your time, we also ask "What's your share?" – where can you give your presence – that is, what programs or events or relationships might you want to enjoy for yourself as part of this community? Could you pick four weekends throughout the year – just four – and attend Shabbat services just because – to rejuvenate your soul a bit and help us build our relationship with your presence? Could you join me and others for one of our new educational experiences – either my "Mindful Music" class where we explore modern songs from artists like Bruce

Springsteen through a modern lens or my Torah on Tap class at a local pub? (I know, right? She's going to teach in a *bar*?? Well, here's a more traditional one): Or maybe you join us for a Family Shabbat dinner one Friday night. What's your share for yourself? What shared experience can you take away from the community? We hope that the share that you receive is abundant as well.

I wanted to share with you a story told by Rabbi Robert Alper about his parents. He shares the following:

My mother and father observed an unusual ritual throughout their nearly 49 years of marriage. Whenever they left home together, just before walking through the door, they would kiss each other. Usually it was a perfunctory kiss, a force of habit kind of thing, but without question, it was mandatory for them, almost like paying homage to a superstition, which it was not.

Apparently, they had kissed at the door ever since they were newlyweds, and the custom held. Even if they were in the midst of a quarrel, there would be that brief pause, the kiss, and the discussion would continue as they walked outside. As a kid, I thought all couples kissed whenever they left their home.

In the final years of their marriage, though, my parents experienced an increase in tension, sniping, impatience and anger. I stood by the side, sad.

One day, shortly after their anger grew for each other, my father entered the hospital for a surgery and when he awoke, I saw one of the most wonderful scenes I have ever witnessed taking place. Carefully, lovingly, Mom handed Dad his dentures which, in his vanity, he had never before been without. He fitted them into his mouth, and his face brightened. And then she returned his glasses. His hearing aid. She dabbed his cheek and combed his hair. And then at last, she replaced the wedding ring on his finger.

Despite the pain and anger that they had experienced in recent months, she brought him back to her in love by giving.

Certain memories surrounding my father's death remain especially clear in my mind. But most of all, I remember watching my mother leaving the apartment on the way to the funeral. When she reached the front door she paused for a moment, only a moment, and sighed.

וּלְחַנּוּהָ, יֵתֵן מְנַה אַחַת אֶפְיָיִם

Let us go out and love – and go out and give, and please, join us in giving your share to build this community, a place that so many of us already love, but know we can love even more. Shanah tovah.