



Rosh Hashanah - 5768

## ON HAVING ENOUGH

This is a story about nobody you know, but she is somebody you may recognize. It is a typical morning in her life. She wakes before dawn, her stomach knotted with worry. Except for the quiet hum of the refrigerator, the house is silent. Her two children dream peacefully in their beds and her husband sleeps beside her. She tries to extinguish the worry creeping into consciousness – but in just a few moments, she is fully awake, her heart pounding.

She gets out of bed, goes downstairs to the kitchen, and puts the Starbucks coffee on to brew. The computer in the den is on stand-by mode, so she jiggles the mouse. The screen comes to life and she double-clicks on the household accounting program. As she scrutinizes the figures on the screen, the knot in her stomach tightens, and her head begins to ache. The car payments are coming due, and the credit card bill is a big one this month, with their vacation and back-to-school expenses on it. She knows she owes religious school fees, and the mortgage on their three-bedroom house is always a little tricky to meet – they don't live in a cheap neighborhood. As she looks at the figures on the screen, she worries to herself: "We just don't have enough."

Right down the road in her pleasant leafy suburb, money worries have also awakened her neighbor. His bank account is more robust than hers. His job pays well and he has no trouble paying his bills each month. But recently, he has seen signs of trouble in his industry. Sure, he might be all right now – but what if his company decides to reduce payroll expenses by eliminating his job? What then? How will he manage without health insurance? And what about all the volatility in the stock market – will his investments retain their value? Will he be able to retire without becoming a burden to his children? How will he have enough?

These two neighbors are not the only ones to have money worries disturb their slumber. If the research<sup>1</sup> is correct, most of us worry about money, even more than we do about possibility of another violent terrorist attack. In fact, according

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, August 2007 – 72% of Americans often or sometimes worry about money, 63% making over 100K often or sometimes worry; MSNBC, August 2006 – half of New Yorkers and Washingtonians fear another terrorist attack.

to one study, only ten percent of Americans never worry about money. Yes, even here -- where most of us live in comfortable homes and can easily buy groceries each week – even here, we worry that we or the people we love will not have enough.

In fact, actual material wealth doesn't necessarily liberate us from money worries. The NY Times recently published an article<sup>2</sup> featuring a multi-millionaire who doesn't have enough. He has over \$2 million in the bank, and other assets establishing his net worth at roughly \$3.5 million, placing him in the top two percent of families in the United States.

But, as this multi-millionaire says, "a few million doesn't go as far as it used to." So he works over twelve hours a day, and logs more hours on the weekend. He spends much of his time working because he doesn't believe he has a choice. In his affluent community other people have more wealth than he does. Compared to them, he doesn't have enough.

How many of us look at what others have and say: "We don't have enough." Other people have nicer house, newer cars, more fashionable clothing. When we look at what others have, we notice what we lack.

This morning we read a story about Hannah, who also didn't have enough. Hannah is the favorite wife of a prosperous man. Her husband Elkanah loves her and gives her everything she needs. But Hannah doesn't have what she most desires: a son.

Every day, she notices what she lacks. Elkanah's other wife, Penina, has several children. In the ancient world, children, especially sons, represented economic security for women. Penina has plenty and Hannah has none. So Penina taunts Hannah relentlessly, until Hannah weeps and will not eat.

Her husband Elkanah tries to comfort her by asking "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" In other words, Elkanah says: "Hannah, you have everything you need. I'm providing you with a good life, with food and shelter. I am devoted to you, even if you haven't given me sons. So why do you want something more?"

But is Hannah really concerned with her material security, as Elkanah seems to assume? Or is she longing for something else?

In the imagination of our earliest rabbis, Hannah pleads with God: "Sovereign of the Universe, all the things that You have created in a woman have a purpose: eyes to see, ears to hear, a nose to smell, a mouth to speak, hands to do work, legs to walk with, and breasts to feed babies. These breasts that you have put

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<sup>2</sup> Sunday, August 5, 2007 "The Millionaires Who Don't Feel Rich."

upon my heart, are they not for the purpose of feeding? Give me a child, then, that I may use them for their intended purpose.”<sup>3</sup>

Hannah’s prayer reflects her belief that God created her for a purpose. And she wanted to fulfill that purpose. She didn’t desire children in order to have greater status in the household, or to have the economic security that sons would bring her. She wanted something far deeper, something reflected in the surprising promise she makes to God.

Hannah promises that if she bears a son, she will dedicate him to God’s service. She will give her life’s greatest treasure back to God. Her son will live in the sanctuary and serve the priests there.

Hannah’s prayer changed. It changed from a plea for something she wanted to receive, to a plea for something she wanted to give. And with this change, Hannah herself changes. She leaves the holy sanctuary in peace -- in the peace that comes from her renewed sense of purpose.

Our early rabbis knew about the power of giving. They taught that each one of us has an obligation to give *tzedakah* – charity -- even the poorest among us who support themselves entirely on the *tzedakah* given by others.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps our rabbis wished to teach us that we all do have enough – and that we realize our wealth most fully when we think about what we can give to others.

In the act of giving, we discover spiritual and material resources that we may not have known we possess. We discover that we have enough to ease another’s hunger. We have enough to soothe another’s loneliness. We have enough to relieve suffering and to bring a smile to a face furrowed with pain. There is no greater purpose for our life.

We know the end of Hannah’s story. She bears a son, Samuel, and she keeps her promise.

But we don’t know the end of the story of the woman in the leafy suburb, the woman awakened by her worry about money. In the days to come she will be asked to give. She will be asked to prepare a meal for a member of her synagogue who is ill. She will be asked to donate a grocery bag of food for a local soup kitchen. She will be asked to write a check to help victims of terror.

How will she respond? Will she say: “Yes, I have enough! I have enough to ease another’s hunger. I have enough to soothe another’s loneliness. I have enough to bring a smile to one who suffers.”

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<sup>3</sup> Berachot 31b

<sup>4</sup> Gitten 7b: Mar Zutra said, Even a poor man who himself subsists on charity should give charity.

Because only if she says: “Yes, I have enough to give” – only then will she recognize all the richness that she already has, and all the material, spiritual and emotional wealth that she has to share. Through the act of giving, she will know that she has enough.

Let this be our hope in this New Year. May we recognize all the richness that surrounds us, and all the richness that is within us. May we, like Hannah, fulfill our life’s purpose by giving the very best of ourselves to God’s world.

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2<sup>nd</sup> of Tishrei, 5768