

## Parashat Trumah: Mazal Tov, My Son

Rabbi Elisha Wolfin



Dear Friends,

It is very late. I just returned from the supermarket – the one that prides itself on being the cheapest in the country – where I was just about the last shopper of the night. I spent almost an hour there, as usual, carefully comparing prices, choosing the most cost-effective items. Although I do try to buy food that is healthy and of good quality, I admit that price is an important factor.

The PA system was announcing that the store was closing and that the last shoppers should please come to the check-out counters. I put my purchases on the conveyor belt, filled the shopping bags which I remembered to bring, and paid. I had just thanked the weary cashier and wished her a good night when a young man wearing Breslav-Hassid clothes asked me if I could help him purchase some of his Shabbat food. I don't usually have any cash on me – using a credit card for everything makes it easier to calculate monthly expenses. I asked him how much he needed, and he replied that he would know in a minute.

I looked at the few things he put on the counter and thought to myself "Nu, 25 shekels at most. So be it." But then he went off to bring the rest of the items that he had placed on another counter, where there was no one waiting bewildered, with a credit card in hand... The items piled up.

A noisy Beit Midrash discussion commenced in my mind: on the one hand, I have just spent an entire hour making sure that I end up with a reasonably low shopping bill, and now I have to pay his too?! On the other hand, who knows what his story is – maybe I was just granted an opportunity to feed a starving family. On the one hand, a young, able man – get a life! Go find yourself a job! On the other hand, maybe he has a job but still can't make ends meet. On the one hand, no way! Even a young man who earns minimum wage can afford the basic necessities in the country's cheapest supermarket, and if not, well, that's what the welfare services are for...

I tried not to look at his purchases, because each item that went by added fuel to the Beit Midrash in my mind. On the one hand – what's this??? I would never allow myself to buy that... or that... and now I will fund these treats which I do not buy for my own family? On the other hand, maybe he has children waiting for him at home who will be so happy to have that particular (albeit expensive) treat which their father has just added to the counter... On the one hand – what am I? A sucker? I work hard for my living, get an average wage, and try to act responsibly within my means. Why

should I support this guy's irresponsible behavior and expensive choices? On the other hand, perhaps the Holy One created THIS opportunity for me to help this Breslav family today with their Shabbat shopping? Yes, even that expensive treat that was nicely packed into the guy's bag...

I realized that a decision had been made in my mind and that I was going to pay... therefore, any further mental debate was pointless. But then a new (Jewish) debate began: On the one hand, if you are already doing this, then do it with grace! On the other hand, how can I? I feel I've been taken advantage of! Tricked! On the one hand: get over it! You already opened your wallet, now open your heart! Give generously. Do it happily, in good spirit. On the other hand...

That debate ended too when the cashier gave me my credit card back. I signed, returned to my cart and walked out into the night.

I left the supermarket, which had been until a few minutes quite a cheap place to shop...

Suddenly a strange wave of happiness washed over me. The air was cool and moist, just the way I like it. A great burst of thanksgiving overflowed in my heart. I had been given the opportunity to give, which means that I have. Thank God for this reminder. Thank you for creating the opportunity for this strange man to open my heart. True, I was a sucker; but I was a happy one.

Parashat Truma is all about giving. It tells us something simple: "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him... And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell within them." (Shmot 25: 1-8)

What you give is not yours in any case."... for the land is Mine; you are but alien resident with Me." (Vayikra 25: 23) You are guests in My world, and the gift is Mine to begin with, not yours.

"...whose heart so moves him" - Don't give because you have to. Give with the generosity of your heart, even if it isn't really yours.

"...that I may dwell within them." - Because then you will leave the supermarket into the cool, clear night air and discover that I have settled in your heart, and a wave of happiness will flood its chambers.

Parashat Truma is our son Yehonatan's parasha. He was born on this parasha, and he is undoubtedly the biggest gift we have ever received. The universe gave him to

us. Friends, family, and even strangers whom I have never met made this gift possible. And it was not at all easy for me to accept this gift; not at all! I am not a needy person, I felt. But then Yehonatan came and taught me that everything is a gift, and that we are all needy. It's okay to be needy, because every gift comes from God. My job is simply to open my heart to the generosity that exists in everything: The abundance of products on the supermarket shelves which magically are within my power to attain; the generosity of the tired cashier who caused me to smile when I wished her good night; the generosity of the bank in giving me plenty of credit; my own generosity – I, who got to use my credit card (or rather, the bank's) to pay for the Shabbat shopping of a family I do not know; the generosity of the cool, moist night air; the generosity of my little car which then climbed the hill, bringing me and my groceries back home safely; the generosity of our dog whose enthusiasm always gives me the feeling that I am the most exciting thing that has happened to her all day.

So, Mazal Tov, my dear son. Your parasha carries with it a great responsibility! I wish you the ability to know how to give of yourself generously, completely, and whole- heartedly.

And mazal tov to me for learning how to receive. This week, I understand that this, too, carries a responsibility - the responsibility to give.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Elisha