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BH

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CAN'T GIVE TO CHARITY THE WAY YOU USED TO DO: THE YERUSHALMI'S ANSWER

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Given the economy of the last two years, this story seemed timely.

Once it happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiba went up to the sands of Antioch (on the coast in Syria) to collect funds for the sages.

There was a certain man there, named Abba Judah. He would fulfill this mitzvah generously. One time, he lost all his money and he saw our rabbis and despaired of helping them. He went home and his face was filled with suffering (i.e., went pale, yellow or green).

His wife said to him: Why is your face filled with suffering?

He said to her: Our rabbis are here and I do not now what I can do for them.

His wife, who was even more righteous than he, said to him: You have a single field left. Go and sell half of it and give the proceeds to the sages.

He went and did as she recommended. He came to our rabbis and he gave them the proceeds.

Our rabbis prayed on his behalf. They said to him: Abba Judah, may the Holy One, Blessed be He, make up all the things you lack.

When they went their way, he went down to plough the half-field that remained to him, his cow fell and broke a leg. He went down to bring her up and the Holy One, Blessed be He, opened his eyes, and he found a jewel. He said: It was for my own good that my cow broke its leg.

When our rabbis returned, they asked about him, saying: How are things with Abba Judah?

People said: Who can gaze upon the face of Abba Judah, Abba Judah of the oxen! Abba Judah of the camels! Abba Judah of the asses! So the sages realized that he had recovered his wealth.

Abba Judah went to the sages and asked after their welfare. They said to him: How are you doing?

He said to them: Your prayer on my behalf has yielded fruit and more fruit. They said to him: Even

though, to begin with, other people gave more than you did, you were the one whom we wrote down at the top of the register.

They seated Abbah Judah among them and pronounced the following verse about him, "A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men. (Proverbs 18:16)" (Y. Horayot 3:4//Leviticus Rabbah 5:4)

Discussion Questions: Poor Abba Judah! Every year, he was used to giving a generous amount and now he's struggling to find a way to greet these great men with the news that he just can't give them what he used to give them. The turnaround in his fortune follows three things. (1) Providentially, his wife is even more righteous than he is and urges him to give something, even if it is much less than he would normally give. (2) The sages offer a blessing on his behalf (one that you could use today to express your hopes for someone whose fortunes have taken a turn for the worse. And (3) he goes out and plants his field; she doesn't give up hope.

1. Do you know people who are in a similar prediction to the one that Abba Judah and his wife face, i.e., they have given generously in the past but they just can't do it because of hard times? Do they feel distress the way Abbah Judah does? How do they deal with their situation? If they are married, do they make their decision together?
2. It is notable that Abba Judah takes his wife seriously. Often times, women's philanthropy is seen as secondary to men's. This story seems to suggest that women's philanthropic ideas should be taken seriously. How could we make this more of a reality in our communities?
3. Abba Judah attributes his success to the sages' prayers. However, he had something to do with it: he went out and plowed what little land he had left. What kind of role model does Abba Judah set for those in hard times?

May you have a great Hannukkah!