

## Religious Materialism? What are we supposed to spend on religious life?

### Zevachim 88a-b

The Gemara mentions the concept of עניות במקום עשירות - there is no poverty in a place of wealth - in context of the Mikdash (Temple). This generally means that it is better to spend more money than to be thrifty when it comes to the Mikdash. This is a fascinating concept and raises questions about the value of spending - and also the value of saving - in Jewish life. What are its implications for Jewish life today?

Questions? Comments? Email [dinanddaf@gmail.com](mailto:dinanddaf@gmail.com)

#### 1. זבחים פח.:-

תנו רבנן: כלי קדש שניקבו - אין מתיבין אותן, ואין מתיבין לתוכן אבר. נפגמו - אין מתקנין אותן. סכין שנפגמה - אין משחזרין את פגמתה. נשמטה - אין מחזירין אותה. אבא שאול אומר: סכין מטרת היתה במקדש, ונמנו עליה כהנים וגזירה.

With regard to perforated vessels, the Sages taught: In the case of sacred vessels that were perforated, one may not melt them in order to seal the perforation, and one may not melt lead into them for such a purpose. If the vessels were damaged, one may not repair them. Concerning a knife that was damaged, one may not sharpen the spot of its damage. If the blade separated from the handle, one may not restore it. Abba Shaul says: There was a certain knife in the Temple whose metal was soft and easily damaged, such that when used it would often render animals prohibited, thereby disqualifying them. Accordingly, the priests voted concerning it, and elected to hide it.

תנו רבנן: בגדי כהונה, אין עושין אותם מעשה מחט אלא מעשה אורג, שנאמר: "מעשה ארג". נתגלו, אין מכבסין [אותן] לא בנתר ולא באהל.

The Sages taught: Priestly vestments are not fashioned by needlework, i.e., by stitching various parts together, but rather through woven work, whereby the entire garment is initially woven into one entity, as it is stated: "Woven work" (Exodus 28:32). If the garments were soiled one may not launder them, neither with natron nor with soap, two common detergents.

הא במים - מכבסין? אמר אבאי, הכי קאמר: הוגעו במים - מכבסין אותן בנתר ואהל;

The Gemara asks: But may it be inferred from this that with water one may launder the priestly vestments? Abaye said: This is what the *baraita* is saying: If the dirtied garments have only

reached the point where laundering them with water alone would suffice, one may launder them with natron and soap, as they are not considered soiled.

הוֹגְעוּ לְנֶתֶר וְאֵהָל - אֶף בְּמִים אֵין מְכַבְּסִים. וְיֵשׁ אוֹמְרִים: אֵין מְכַבְּסִין אוֹתָן כָּל עֵיקָר, שְׂאֵין עֲנִיּוֹת בְּמָקוֹם עֲשִׂירוֹת.

But if the garments became so dirty that they reached a point that laundering them would require the use of natron or soap, then one may not launder them, even with water. And some say: One may not launder the priestly vestments at all, even if laundering them with water would suffice, because there is no poverty in a place of wealth, i.e., only priestly vestments that were clean as new should be worn, as is befitting the Temple service, and those that were laundered should not be worn.

## 2. תלמוד בבלי מנחות פט.

שלשה ומחצה למנורה חצי לוג לכל נר: מנא הני מילי דתנו רבנן (שמות כז) מערב עד בקר תן לה מדתה שתהא דולקת והולכת מערב עד בקר... ושיערו חכמים חצי לוג מאורתא ועד צפרא איכא דאמרי מלמעלה למטה שיערו ואיכא דאמרי ממטה למעלה שיערו התורה חסה על ממונן של ישראל ומאן דאמר ממעלה למטה שיערו אין עניות במקום עשירות:

Three and a half *log* for the menorah, half a *log* for each lamp: Whence is this derived? – Our Rabbis taught: [It is written.] To burn from evening to morning: provide it with its requisite measure so that it may burn from evening to morning... And the Sages have calculated that a half-log of oil [will burn] from evening to morning. Some say that they calculated it by reducing [the original quantity of oil]; while others say that they calculated it by increasing it. Those who say that they calculated it by increasing [the quantity of oil adopt the principle that] the Torah protects the money of Israel; and those who say that they calculated it by reducing it [adopt the principle that] there is no poverty in the place of wealth.

## 3. משנה נגעים יב:ה

כִּיצַד רְאִיתָ הַבֵּית. וְבָא אֲשֶׁר לוֹ הַבֵּית וְהִגִּיד לַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר כָּנַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבֵּית (ויקרא יד). אֶפְלוּ תִלְמִיד חֶכֶם וְיֹדֵעַ שֶׁהוּא נָגַע וְדָאִי, לֹא יִגְזֹר וְיֹאמַר נָגַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבֵּית, אֶלָּא כָּנַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבֵּית. וְצוּהָ הַכֹּהֵן וּפָנוּ אֶת הַבֵּית (בְּטָרָם) בָּא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַנָּגַע וְלֹא יִטְמֵא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבֵּית וְאַחֵר כֵּן בָּא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַבֵּית) (שם), וְאֶפְלוּ חֲבִילֵי עֲצִים, וְאֶפְלוּ חֲבִילֵי קָנִים, דְּבָרֵי רַבִּי יְהוּדָה. רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אוֹמֵר, עֶסֶק הוּא לִפְנוּי! אָמַר רַבִּי מֵאִיר, וְכִי מָה מִטְמֵא לוֹ. אִם תֹּאמַר, כָּלִי עֲצִיו וּבִגְדָיו וּמִתְכוּתָיו, מִטְבִּילָן וְהֵן טְהוֹרִים. עַל מָה חֲסָה הַתּוֹרָה. עַל כָּלִי חֲרָסוֹ וְעַל פִּכּוֹ וְעַל טָפְיוֹ. אִם כֵּן חֲסָה הַתּוֹרָה עַל מְמוֹנוֹ הַבְּזוּי, קֵל וְחֹמֶר עַל מְמוֹנוֹ הַחֲבִיב. אִם כֵּן עַל מְמוֹנוֹ, קֵל וְחֹמֶר עַל נֶפֶשׁ בְּנֵיו וּבְנוֹתָיו. אִם כֵּן עַל שֶׁל רְשָׁע, קֵל וְחֹמֶר עַל שֶׁל צַדִּיק:

What is the procedure for the inspection of a house? "The owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, "Something like a plague has appeared upon my house" (Leviticus 14:35). Even if he is a learned sage and knows that it is definitely a *nega*, he may not speak with certainty saying, "A plague has appeared upon my house," but rather, "Something like a plague has appeared upon my house." "The priest shall order the house cleared before the priest enters to examine the plague, so that nothing in the house may become unclean; after that the priest shall enter to examine the house." Even bundles of wood and even bundles of reeds [must be removed], the words of Rabbi Judah. Rabbi Shimon said: clearing keeps him occupied?! Rabbi Meir said: But which [of his goods] could become unclean? If you were to say, his articles of wood, of cloth or of metal, he could immerse them and they will become clean. What is it that the Torah has spared? His earthenware, even his cruse and his bucket. If the Torah thus spared a man's humble possessions, how much more so would it spare his cherished possessions! If for his material possessions, how much more so for the life of his sons and daughters! If for the possessions of a wicked man, how much more so for the possessions of a righteous one!

### 3. תלמוד בבלי יומא לד:-לה:

**מתני'** הביאוהו לבית הפרוה ובקדש היתה פרסו סדין של בוץ בינו לבין העם קדש ידיו ורגליו ופשט ר"מ אומר פשט קדש ידיו ורגליו ירד וטבל עלה ונסתפג הביאו לו בגדי לבן לבש וקדש ידיו ורגליו בשחר היה לובש פלוסין של שנים עשר מנה בין הערבים הנדויין של שמונה מאות זוז דברי ר' מאיר וחכמים אומרים בשחר היה לובש של שמונה עשר מנה ובין הערבים של שנים עשר מנה הכל שלשים מנה אלו משל ציבור ואם רצה להוסיף מוסיף משלו

**Mishnah:** They brought the High Priest to immerse a second time in the Hall of *Parva*, which was in the sacred area, the Temple courtyard. They spread a sheet of fine linen between him and the people in the interest of modesty. And he sanctified his hands and his feet and removed his garments. Rabbi Meir says that this was the sequence: He first removed his garments and then he sanctified his hands and his feet. He descended and immersed a second time. He ascended and dried himself. And they immediately brought him the white garments, in which he dressed, and he sanctified his hands and his feet. In the morning he would wear linen garments from the Egyptian city of Pelusium worth twelve *maneh*, 1,200 dinars or *zuz*. These garments were very expensive due to their high quality. And in the afternoon he wore linen garments from India, which were slightly less expensive, worth eight hundred *zuz*. This is the statement of Rabbi Meir. And the Rabbis say: In the morning he would wear garments worth eighteen *maneh*, and in the afternoon he would wear garments worth twelve *maneh*. In

total, the clothes were worth thirty *maneh*. These sums for the garments came from the community, and if the High Priest wished to add money to purchase even finer garments, he would add funding of his own.

גמ'...אמרו עליו על רבי ישמעאל בן פאבי שעשתה לו אמו כתונת של מאה מנה ולובשה ועובד בה עבודת יחיד ומסרה לציבור אמרו עליו על ר' אלעזר בן חרסום שעשתה לו אמו כתונת משתי ריבוא ולא הניחוהו אחיו הכהנים ללובשה מפני שנראה כערום ומי מתחזי והאמר מר חוטן כפול ששה אמר אביי כחמרא במזגא

They told about R. Ishmael b. Phabi that his mother made him a tunic worth one hundred minas which he put on to officiate at a 'private' service and then handed it over to the community. They told about R. Eleazar b. Harsum that his mother made him a tunic worth twenty thousand minas and his brethren, the priests, would not suffer him to put it on because he looked like one naked. But how could it be transparent, did not a Master say the thread [of the priestly garments] was six times twisted? – Abaye said: [It was visible] even as wine shines through a [glass] cup.

ת"ר עני ועשיר ורשע באין לדין לעני אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה אם אומר עני הייתי וטרוד במזונותי אומרים לו כלום עני היית יותר מהלל...

The rabbis taught: A poor person, and a wealthy person, and a wicked person come to face judgment before the Heavenly court for their conduct in this world. To the poor person, the members of the court say: Why did you not engage in Torah? If the poor person rationalizes their conduct and says: I was poor and preoccupied with earning enough to pay for my sustenance and that is why I did not engage in Torah study, they say to that person: Were you any poorer than Hillel, who was wretchedly poor and nevertheless attempted to study Torah?

עשיר אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה אם אומר עשיר הייתי וטרוד הייתי בנכסי אומרים לו כלום עשיר היית יותר מרבי אלעזר אמרו עליו על רבי אלעזר בן חרסום שהניח לו אביו אלף עיירות ביבשה וכנגדן אלף ספינות בים ובכל יום ויום נוטל נאד של קמח על כתיפו ומהלך מעיר לעיר וממדינה למדינה ללמוד תורה פעם אחת מצאוהו עבדיו ועשו בו אנגריא אמר להן בבקשה מכם הניחוני ואלך ללמוד תורה אמרו לו חיי רבי אלעזר בן חרסום שאין מניחין אותך ומימיו לא הלך וראה אותן אלא יושב ועוסק בתורה כל היום וכל הלילה

And if a wealthy person comes before the heavenly court, the members of the court say to that person: Why did you not engage in Torah? If the person says: I was wealthy and preoccupied with managing my possessions, they say to that person: Were you any wealthier than Rabbi

Elazar, who was exceedingly wealthy and nevertheless studied Torah? They said about Rabbi Elazar ben Ḥarsum that his father left him an inheritance of one thousand villages on land, and corresponding to them, one thousand ships at sea. And each and every day he takes a leather jug of flour on his shoulder and walks from city to city and from state to state to study Torah from the Torah scholars in each of those places. One time as he passed through the villages in his estate and his servants found him, did not recognize him, and, thinking he was a resident of the town, they pressed him into service [*angarya*] for the master of the estate. He said to them: I beseech you; let me be and I will go study Torah. They said: We swear by the life of Rabbi Elazar ben Ḥarsum that we will not let you be. The Gemara comments: And in all his days, he never went and saw all his possessions and his property; rather, he would sit and engage in the study of Torah all day and all night.

### Complicating the Picture

#### 5. תוספתא יומא א:ו

מצות כהן גדול להיות גדול מאחיו בנוי בכח בעושר בחכמה [ובמראה] אין לו מנין שיגדלוהו אחיו [שנאמר] (ויקרא כא) והכהן הגדול מאחיו שיגדלוהו אמרו עליו על פינחס איש חבתה שעלה גורלו להיות כהן גדול והלכו אחריו גזברין ואמרכלין ומצאוהו כשהוא חוצב ומלאו [אחריו] את המחצב דנרי זהב

It is the religious requirement of the high priest to be greater than his brethren in beauty, strength, wealth, wisdom, and good looks. [If] he is not, how do we know that his brethren should magnify him? Since it says, *And the priest who is higher by reason of his brethren* (Lev. 21.10) - that they should make him great. They said about Pinhas of Habbata, on whom the lot fell to be high priest, that the revenueurs and supervisors came along and found him cutting wood. So they filled up his woodshed with golden *denars*.

#### 6. חולין קלד:

ההוא שקא דדינרי דאתא לבי מדרשא קדים רבי אמי וזכה בהן והיכי עביד הכי והא כתיב ונתן ולא שיטול מעצמו רבי אמי נמי לעניי זכה בהן ואיבעית אימא אדם חשוב שאני דתניא (ויקרא כא) והכהן הגדול מאחיו שיהא גדול מאחיו בנוי בחכמה ובעושר אחרים אומרים מנין שאם אין לו שאחיו הכהנים מגדלין אותו תלמוד לומר והכהן הגדול מאחיו גדלוהו משל אחיו

There once arrived at the Beth Hamidrash [a gift of] a bag of [golden] denars, whereupon R. Ammi came in first and acquired them. But how may he do such a thing? Is it not written. And they shall give, but he shall not take it himself? – R. Ammi acquired them on behalf of the poor. Or, if you wish, you may say that in the case of an eminent person it is different. For it has been taught: The verse: And the priest that is highest among his brethren, implies that he shall be highest among his brethren in beauty, in wisdom and in wealth. Others say: Whence is it proved that if he does not possess any wealth, his brethren, the priests, shall make him

great? Because Scripture says: And the priest that is highest by reason of his brethren, that is, he must be made the highest [by reason of gifts] from his brethren.

#### **8. ר' ברוך הלוי אפשטיין, תורה תמימה שמות כז, הערה כו**

יש להעיר ממה דמצינו בכ"מ בגמרא בענין הכלים שהיו במקדש שהיו עושין היותר יקרים משום דאין עניות במקום עשירות ולא אמרו הסברא דהתורה חסה על ממונם של ישראל. וי"ל דדוקא בדבר של צבור היינו בדבר הבא משל צבור שייך אין עניות במקום עשירות משום דאין צבור מעני משא"כ במנחות שכל יחיד מוציא לבדו מכיסו שייך בזה הסברא התורה חסה על ממונם. ועיין מענין זה בספר תשוב מאהבה למהרא"פ ח"א סי' ג' וד'

It should be noted that which we find in some places in the Gemara regarding the vessels that were in the Temple that they would make them more expensive because there is not poverty in the place of wealth, and they did not use the logic of: the Torah protects the money of Israel: it can be said that specifically regarding an item belonging to the community, meaning something that comes from the monies of the community, do we say "There is no poverty in the place of wealth," because a community does not become impoverished. This is not the case, however, regarding flour offerings which each individual brings on their own out of their own pocket. Regarding this the logic of "The Torah protects their money" applies. And see on this issue the *Teshuva Me-Ahava* of Rabbi Elazar Fleckeles I: 3-4.

#### **9. ר' ישראל ליפשיץ, תפארת ישראל, משנה שקלים ח:ה, בועז ג**

דבכולן אינו רק הפסד מועט, דלא חששו לו במקדש... וגם בהא יש מאן דאמר דגם בהפסד מועט התורה חסה על ממון ישראל... אבל בהפסד מרובה לכולי עלמא גם במקדש חששו לו, דתורה חסה על ממונם של ישראל

That in all of these situations, there is but a little loss, and they did not consider it in the Temple...and even in such situations of little loss the Torah protects the money of Israel...but regarding great loss, everyone agrees that even in the Temple they considered it, for the Torah protects the money of Israel.

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