

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

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1. One of the most beautiful and popular parts of the Hagadah is the Dayenu hymn. It is the song in which we enumerate the many favors G-d bestowed upon us, and for each of these we say "Dayenu" - enough for us. Had G-d done only this, it would have been enough. We did not really deserve more. And if He has given us more than "Dayenu", more than enough, how much more thankful should we be to Him.

But the essential teaching of this hymn, which is concentrated in the one word "dayenu", is more than an enumeration of ancient favors. It has wider ramifications which have meaning for us of this day and age as well as for people of all times. From out of the brittle and wine-stained pages of the Hagadah, the one word Dayenu seems to leap at us with a challenging command: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. We must recognize certain limits. Dayenu - there comes a time when each of us must realize that he has gone far enough in satisfying his every whim and wish, and must call a halt to his various appetites. Dayenu! Enough!

Of course, this is sound Jewish doctrine. It is the teaching of self-restraint, of discipline, of self-control. The theme of Dayenu lies at the very heart of Torah. It was the great philosopher Maimonides who said, "...all the commandments and exhortations in the Torah aim at conquering the desires of the body." (Guide, Part III Ch.8). Obeying Torah means responding to its call of Dayenu, of saying "enough" to all our desires and appetites and calling a halt to all our overreaching ambitions and lusts.

2. But not only man can practice this great ethical principle of Dayenu. According to Jewish tradition, G-d too practiced Dayenu. When G-d created the world, we are told, the elements knew no limits, each tried to outdo the other and there was conflict in nature. G-d created fire, and fire wanted to dominate all of creation. Water wanted to swamp the earth. The Yabashah, the dry land, wanted to shrink the borders of the oceans so that all should be dry. Each one wanted to expand without limit - and we know the dangers of uncontrolled growth, whether of cells in the human body or wind or water in nature. At this point, Tradition teaches us, G-d said to all His creation, DAY - enough, this far and no further. And that is why one of the names of G-d is SHA-DDAY - SHE'amar l'olam DAY, He is called SH'DY because He said DAY to the world.

So that G-d practiced Dayenu and restricted the expression of His creation. And G-d therefore turns to us on Pesach and says to us, after all I have done for you, you must learn to say that one word, the one word without ~~the~~ which Torah is impossible, DAYENU.

3. And if we are to ask, in which sphere of life is the practice of Dayenu most imperative, the answer is the home. Unrestrained cupidity and uncontrolled selfishness is most dangerous in home-life. No wonder that on the Mezuzah, the special Mitzvah of the Jewish home, there appears no other name of G-d but - SHDDY, the name which implies the principle of DAY or DAYENU. The safety and security and wholesomeness of our homes - and hence of all Jewish life - depends on how we live and practice DAYENU.
4. Pesach with its call of Dayenu, and the Mezuzah with its invocation of SH'DDY, should remind Jewish couples of the dangers of unlimited demands upon each other, and of the importance of saying, each to him or herself: Dayenu, enough is enough. I would say that more than half the young couples who are forced to seek advice in how to prevent the break-up of their home have, as the root of their difficulties, the absence of Dayenu. There are unreasonable demands made upon each other: he doesn't earn enough, she doesn't do her part well enough, he isn't sociable, she isn't independent of her family. People expect perfection from each other, though rarely from themselves. They fail to practice continence and patience and restraint - and so, without Dayenu,

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the home degenerates in the battle between two undisciplined wills, and the home remains unblessed by SH'DDY. He who first enunciated the principle of DAY - enough! How, indeed, can blessing come to a home when a wife appears before me in tears and tells me of how she cannot observe the Shabbos because of the excessive demands placed upon her by her husband -or, as happens so much more often, a man who yearns for the opportunity of Shabbos in Shul, but whose wife cannot say Dayenu to her desire for more and more and more money, and so he is forced to work on the Holy Day. With the absence of Dayenu, homes become cold and unattractive, and people age before their time and go down to the grave prematurely -at least that is what psychologists are trying to tell us. Without Dayenu, the blessings of SH'DDY are absent.

5. But there is an even more urgent need for Dayenu in one other aspect of home life, and that is with regard to relations between parents and children. A profound change has come over the dynamics of the relationship of parents to children, all within our lifetime. Perceptive sociologists have built famous careers by studying this alone. And whatever the technical jargon they employ, this is the gist of what they say: when we were children, the parent -usually the father - was the visible symbol of authority. It was he who would either approve or disapprove our actions. And his authority was made manifest by his use of DAYENU - by denying us what we wanted, by disciplining our whims and controlling our instincts for always having things our own way, so that previous generations grew up with authority being defined by DAYENU - the firm "no" or "enough" - and that authority clearly defined in the person of one or both parents. This parental authority could have been tyrannical - and thus bad - or enlightened, and thus beneficial. But above all, it was clear and well-defined. That situation no longer holds true, by and large, today. Our society is "other-directed". The parent is no longer the authority. The parent no longer makes his decision by the use of his or her own intelligence and common sense or religious and cultural decision. Instead, the authority is vested in the "peer group", that is, in other children. The parent is anxious to learn what other children do at this age, and this they interpret as what their children should do. If other teenagers wear two different colored shoes, then it is quite alright for my son to do so - otherwise, off to the psychiatrist on grounds of suspected insanity. And if others wear this queer arrangement and my son or daughter doesn't, then off to the psychologist because of maladjustment. The hours a child keeps are not dictated by a parent on grounds of health or propriety or even morality. They depend upon the hours the other children keep, and how late they stay at the Center or at the party. And the parent is generally so anxious to follow this authority, that he nervously reads every book he can get his hands on, from Spock to Gessel to government pamphlets. So that, first, the child - being intelligent and discerning - recognizes the fact that father or mother are no longer in real control, they are just the middlemen for the real authority. And that real authority is no longer clearly defined - it is "the others". And second, as a result of this, there is no longer a Dayenu authority. We have learned to reason with our children. But when children are too young, reason is meaningless, and the Dayenu is therefore lacking. And when they are older, they reason back for the opposing point of view, sometimes with greater cogency, and the Dayenu is reversed. So that both elements of the previous generation's training are now missing - the visible or defined symbol of authority, replaced with "the others", and the voice saying Dayenu, enough now.
6. And friends, the reason for mentioning the problem of Dayenu in parent-child relationships in such detail here is not only because it is sound Jewish doctrine which all parents, including myself, must learn and practice, but because this matter of upbringing has a profound effect on the child when he becomes an adult. Our ordinary attitudes towards today's children will determine their Jewishness as adults.



Our Sages long ago understood that the attitude towards a parent shapes the attitude towards religion when they said that there are SHLOSHAH SHUTFIN, three partners in the creation of a person - father, mother and G-d. For when a child is young, his authority is the parent, and when he matures, the respect and love of parents remain, but the center of authority is transferred - to G-d and Torah. Psychologists express that same old truth in different dress when they say that the origin of conscience is the parent, that the child, as he grows, "internalizes" the voice of the father who says Dayenu, and that becomes his conscience or religious discipline.

Now when children were raised by parents who were not afraid of personal responsibility and who said Dayenu or No to the child, with confidence that the child would some later day come to understand the reason for the No; or just desiring the child to learn discipline as such, without elaborate explanations for every decision, the child grew up and accepted Torah, as the voice of G-d, as his authority. It was not the diffuse "others". It was G-d's will and not the majority will that he followed. And if his Torah commanded him to restrain himself, from eating certain things or doing or having whatever it is, he followed out of a sense of discipline to the moral authority which was his. It was not surprising to him that his authority, G-d, often said to him: DAYENU. He accepted restrictions from G-d even as a child he learned to accept them from his parents.

But what is to happen to a generation that has never learned of an authority other than his peers, his friends and society? To whom he is he to look for guidance when he grows up - to his profound religious tradition or to the majority of his fellow men? Will he choose the Torah standard of morality or the Kinsey standard? And what of Dayenu? His parents and society reasoned with him as a child, and never did he learn to submit to the sharp command of Dayenu. Deep down he does not realize that there are certain things he must do even if he does not fully understand and accept. He does not realize - even if his greatest scientists tell him so - that man's mind is limited and there are certain things he will never know. Hence his religion becomes a matter of a few harmless ceremonials which he accepts because "others" do, and which impose absolutely no discipline or control on him, no Dayenu. His religion is now divorced from his life, and there is no Divine voice which will say DAYENU to his lusts and passions and concupiscence. Religion becomes a social grace - a matter of being seen at the right place on Friday nights, but there is no restriction in the way he gets there. He eats Matzah because others do, but refuses to abstain from Chametz, because there is a Dayenu implied in this restriction. And he will not accept any control or restriction he does not fully understand and agree with. His authority is not G-d, and Religion's Dayenu is dead as a door nail.

7. From the concept of Dayenu in Home and Family Life we have, therefore, arrived at the real and immediate religious significance of Dayenu. Just as we thank G-d in the Seder hymn for having given us more than we deserve, though we do not know why, so in our observance of G-d's discipline do we accept His Dayenu and call a halt and say "enough" to certain of our own pleasurable and convenient activities though we do not always fathom the reason for it.

The Orthodox Jew, the genuinely religious Jew through the ages, has never had a closed mind. All of the Talmud is an exercise in free reason, in inquiry and search and a quest for rational enlightenment. With the Orthodox Jew intellectual probing is a Mitzvah. Yet he never presumed to understand G-d or His ways or commandments completely or clearly. He accepted the realistic fact that the human mind is limited by nature. To think otherwise was to him more than a piece of unmitigated arrogance - it was blasphemy. For if we know everything about G-d, then we are His equals, and we are gods, as the serpent in Eden told Adam and Eve in tempting them to taste of the Tree of Knowledge. There comes a time - no, many times - when we must obey G-d just because He is G-d and we are mortal, even if we do not completely understand. We must submit to Dayenu even if our minds do not grasp the reason for it. Not all of us may be fully convinced of the reasons behind the Torah's Dayenu in restraining us from

certain kinds of activity on Shabbos or certain foodstuffs or, let us say, wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur. But the religious Jew, disciplined in DAYENU, has the remarkable quality of INTELLECTUAL MODESTY. He knows that he isn't the cleverest being in the universe, that G-d's wisdom surpasses his. He always uses his mind and his reasoning powers, but he is modest enough to realize that they are limited by nature, and he therefore accepts the Dayenu of His creator and the Creator of his very mind.

It is interesting that to many laymen, the main obvious difference between Orthodox Jews and others is the wearing of the Yarmulke. Of course, this is really a minor point indeed. But symbolically it is true that it presents a major distinction. For just as one of the functions of clothing in general is modesty, to cover the private parts of a person, so is the Yarmulke, in covering the head and its contents, a sign of modesty - intellectual modesty. It is a way of saying - G-d, I want to understand, but I know that my mind is limited and as nothing compared to You. This is an attitude which can emerge only from a background - a childhood background - of Dayenu. When parents act towards each other with the dignity of Dayenu-restraint, and when they raise their children with an enlightened Dayenu, then their children bow their heads before G-d - and keep them covered out of intelligent reverence and intellectual modesty, then they accept G-d's Dayenu, and then the whole home is blessed by G-d SH'DDY, by MI SHE'AMAR L'OLAM DAY, by the G-d Who created all of us with Dayenu.

8. Only when the Jew is ready to say Dayenu to his demands upon G-d, and to submit to G-d's Dayenu to his desires, can he recite with justification the opening verse of that sacred hymn: KAMAH MAALOS TOVOS LAMAKOM ALEINU. For while that means, literally, "how many favors G-d has bestowed upon us", it can also mean something else and something very deep. For the word MAALOS means not only favors, but also steps or rungs. KAMAH MAALOS TOVOS LAMAKOM, how many steps leading to G-d, ALEINU, exist within us!

For every time we say NO to our unbridled passions, we take a step closer to G-d. Every time we say ENOUGH to our lust and appetite, we ascend another rung to our Heavenly Father. Everytime we deny ourselves something, not because we are ascetics, but because G-d asks us to do so, we are ~~meko~~ MEKADESH HASHEM, we allow the noblest rays of humanity to emerge from within us & the Divine image to gain ascendancy over our lower selves.

KAMAH MAALOS TOVOS LAMAKOM ALEINU. When we shall have permitted the best within us to come to the fore by clearly articulating DAYENU, then we ourselves shall become the stairway by which countless others, impressed by the Divine blessing of a Torah life, will climb upwards in an attempt to grasp the welcoming, outstretched hand of SH'DDY, of G-d Almighty.