

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

A POOR MAN IS WALKING IN THE FOREST CONVERSING WITH GOD. HE ASKS, "LORD, WHAT IS A MILLION YEARS TO YOU?"

GOD REPLIES, "MY SON, A MILLION YEARS IS LIKE A SECOND TO ME."

THE MAN THEN ASKS, "LORD, WHAT IS A MILLION DOLLARS TO YOU?"

GOD REPLIES, "MY SON, A MILLION DOLLARS IS LESS THAN A PENNY TO ME."

THE MAN STORES UP HIS COURAGE AND ASKS, "SO GOD, CAN I HAVE A MILLION DOLLARS?"

TO WHICH GOD REPLIES: "IN A SECOND."

|| **WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLION-**
aire? A silly question, perhaps. As money wizard Andrew Tobias said, that's like asking who wants to be good-looking. Still, if a genie gave you the choice between riches or beauty, which would you choose? Most people would probably pick wealth. As we all know, beauty fades, but money earns interest with time.

Many of us of us who don't have a lot of money want to get rich, preferably while we're still young and, even better, overnight. Despite the fact that the dot-com money has burned up, a lot of people still think they can strike it rich if only they pick the right stock, the right number, or, last and least preferable, work hard enough.

The idea that anyone can be rich as long as he or she works hard is an old American dream. For many, this has been replaced with the new American dream—to get rich quickly with the least amount of effort. Money no longer represents a job well done. It no longer represents effort or commitment. The possibility of making money—gobs of it—without actually having to work for it is why we have casinos, sweepstakes, and TV shows like *Survivor*. They feed into this frenzied notion that a million dollars is simply a contest away.

Part of our money lust comes from the changing image of what it means to be a millionaire. During the late sixties, young people eschewed materialism for more idealistic pursuits like civil rights, women's rights, and peace. During the eighties, we saw the coke-snorting greed-is-gooders on Wall Street as empty, valueless creatures.

When the Internet boom hit during the early nineties, the dot-comers, whom we viewed as cyber pioneers, became young millionaires. For a time they could thumb their noses at the corporate establishment even as they became consumed by it. Wealth was the talisman that allowed us to strip off our stodgy white shirts and ties in favor of jeans and T-shirts. Money was hip again.

Then came the crash. Shortly after we crossed the threshold into the new millennium, we saw the Internet take a nosedive. Executives from Enron, Imclone, WorldCom, Tyco, Arthur Anderson, and others got caught in the headlights of deceit and corruption. On September 11, 2001, we saw our old world of insulated innocence and comfort crumble as thousands died tragically at the hands of terrorists.

How has this confluence of events changed our worldview? For one, we are reassessing the role that money plays in our lives. Today, we have a more realistic understanding about what it takes to become a millionaire and to what degree we are willing to sacrifice our lives in order to be rich.

The overwhelming desire for wealth is a bit like an average person wanting to be a model or professional athlete. The next time you're at the supermarket checkout line, take a look at the women's magazines. Most feature

models with impossibly perfect figures and articles on how to transform your ordinary self into something worthy of those same magazine covers. And for every woman's magazine with an article on weight loss, there are articles for men on superstar athletes and investors. We measure ourselves against an almost superhuman standard of beauty and physical perfection. What we often forget is that very few people are born with beauty and athletic prowess; the rest of us have to work at it and be satisfied with modest results.

Are you willing to live the way one has to live in order to look like Catherine Zeta-Jones or to compete in the Olympics? Do you want to give up the food you eat, subject yourself to plastic surgery, or train for hours every day? And even if you did, could you really accomplish your goal? Maybe deep down what we all need most is the ability to make peace with what God and DNA have given us.

The same can be said about the pursuit of wealth. Are you willing to invest the time and energy it takes to make more money? For most people, accumulating wealth still means long hours and hard work. Money is difficult to amass in large amounts, and the demands that enable people to make a lot of money are great. If it were easy, everyone would be rich!

Younger people, especially, have been forced to change their perception of money. Prior to the Internet boom, many assumed that they could graduate from college, work for a start-up, get paid in stock options, and convert it all into cash. They could be millionaires, at least on paper. Now, these same eager graduates must put

on business suits, tuck their resumes into their briefcases, and pound the proverbial pavement, often for an entry-level job. The good news, as Michael Lewis, chronicler of young business titans optimistically observed, is that young people might now pursue jobs they enjoy rather than those that will simply make them wealthy. We shall see.

In a speech to a graduating class of high school students, author Robert Fulghum asked how many would like to be an adult—an independent, on-your-own citizen:

All would raise their hands with some enthusiasm. And then I would give them a list of things grown-ups do: Clean the sink strainer. Plunge out the toilet. Clean up babies when they poop and pee. Wipe runny noses and other orifices. Clean ovens and grease traps and roasting pans. Empty the kitty box and scrape up the dog doo. Carry out the garbage. Bury dead animals when they get run over in the street. When you are a kid, you feel that if they really loved you, your folks wouldn't ever ask you to take out the garbage. When you join the ranks of the grown-ups, you take out the garbage because you love them. And by them, I mean not only your own family, but the family of human kind.

Fulghum is right. We must all learn how to do at least some of the dirty work. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*. It comes from the word *karov*, which means to “draw close” or “to come near.” It's true that we feel closest to the things for which we sacrifice: our careers, our home, our children, our parents, our lovers.

If we want more out of life, we must put more in. If we want a better marriage, we have to give more of ourselves. If we want a better world, we have to give more of our money and our time. If we want wisdom, we have to take the time to read and to learn. If we want a more spiritual life, we must take the time for prayer, meditation, church, or synagogue. If we want more money, we have to work and sacrifice for it.

A life that demands nothing from us, that seeks to merely accommodate our laziness, our preoccupation with things shiny and new, and our shallow pursuits—a life devoid of sacrifice—will bring us nothing in return. If we want the dividends that life can bring, we have to invest the emotional capital, the educational capital, and the spiritual capital. We have to do the hard, sweaty, dirty work.

When violinist Isaac Stern concluded a concert recital one evening, he was approached by an ardent fan who gushed: “Oh, Mr. Stern, I would give anything to be able to play the violin as magnificently as you do!” To which the maestro softly replied, “Would you give twelve hours a day?”

MONEY WORSHIP

No matter how much or how little you have at the moment, you must consider whether money is the focal point of your life. We live in a consumer-driven, capitalistic society, so it is difficult to be immune to the desire for wealth. Besides, Americans believe it is their constitutional right as part of the pursuit of happiness.

But this raging materialism has left many, many people spiritually impoverished. There is a difference between wanting to improve our financial situation and wanting to be a multimillionaire. The trouble begins when money is worshiped above all things or is used as a way to fill a void in your life that never can be satisfied.

Harold Kushner used a simple little fairy tale by Shel Silverstein to make a profound point. The fairy tale is about a circle that was missing a piece. A large triangular wedge had been cut out of it. The circle wanted to be whole, with nothing missing, so it went around looking for its missing piece. But because it was incomplete, it could only roll very slowly as it rolled through the world. And as it rolled slowly, it admired the flowers along the way. It chatted with butterflies. It was warmed by the sunshine.

The circle found lots of pieces, but none of them fit. Some were too big and some were too small. Some too square, some too pointy. So it left them all by the side of the road and kept on searching. Then one day it found a piece that fit perfectly. It was so happy. Now it could be whole with nothing missing.

The circle incorporated the missing piece into itself and began to roll once again. But now that it was a perfect circle, so it could roll very fast, too fast to notice the flowers and to talk to the butterflies. When the circle realized how different the world seemed when it rolled through it so quickly, it stopped and left the missing piece by the side of the road. It rolled slowly away, once again, looking for its missing piece.

Kushner concludes, “The lesson is that in some strange

sense, we are more whole when we are incomplete—when we are missing something. There is a wholeness about the person who has come to terms with his limitations, who knows what he can and cannot do, the person who is brave enough to let go of his unrealistic dreams and not feel like a failure for doing so.”

In the book of Genesis, it says that God brought man and woman into paradise. They lacked nothing inwardly or outwardly because they knew God had given them everything they needed. They felt no hunger, sadness, or loneliness. It was only when they became dissatisfied with what God had given them that they felt an inner void, an emptiness that resulted in their going against God’s wishes and their banishment from Eden.

Like succumbing to the temptation of the serpent, the desire for money can get us into deep trouble. Do we spend enough time cultivating a life outside of the material world? Has cash become a replacement for God in our lives? It’s understandable how money can become God-like for many people. After all, money has real power. Money can educate us, makes us safer, healthier, and it can even save our lives on occasion. All of this makes money an excellent false god—an idol of sorts because it possesses some of the power the ancients ascribed to God. Money worship also makes what we acquire with money take on an almost existential, holy meaning for many people. We start to believe that these things we purchase and own, the trappings of success, the outer shell we present to the world, are in fact what constitutes our very being. In other words, as philosopher Jacob Needleman put it,

“Our outer life becomes our inner life.” When that happens, we are headed for trouble.

It is difficult to achieve a sense of wholeness in a world that ascribes God-like attributes to products. Given the barrage of marketing to make us buy, buy, buy, it’s easy to see how money and material goods become our idols. Consider the following slogans from advertisements, and insert the word “God” for the product that is being promoted:

“Don’t leave home without it [God]”

“General Foods International Coffees—It [God] stirs the soul.”

“Shiseido [God]. I am your . . . strength. Rely on me.”

“Ford [God], a better idea.

“You’re in good hands with Allstate [God].”

What has happened in this age of marketing is that products, like money, have become the false idols that we worship. As the ad says, we get our *strength* from the things that we buy. We *rely* on these things (cars, houses, cosmetics, or clothes) to lift us up spiritually. When you feel depressed, if you’ve had a bad day at work, or if you have had an argument with a loved one, do you go on a shopping spree to make yourself feel better? While this may divert your attention for a while, the pleasure that you get from the accumulation of material goods does not last for long. It is not wrong to want to buy nice things, but products will never solve your problems or bring you true contentment.

Likewise, money cannot bring us joy because joy comes from having a balanced life filled with spiritual, as well as material, satisfaction. The Hebrew word *shalom*, which is used to say “hello,” “good-bye,” and “peace,” actually means “wholeness.” It means being able to embrace as well as to let go. This is essential to becoming whole. Money is nice, but balance and wholeness should be our goal.

As clichéd as it may sound, material pleasures cannot guarantee personal satisfaction. Anyone who thinks it can is in for a lifetime of disappointment. Believing money or materialism can sustain our souls is not, as philosopher Jacob Needleman points out, a sin. It’s a mistake. Like trying to eat a picture of food. The truth, which seems equally facile but is difficult to achieve, is that we all should have as rich an inner life as we do an outer life because things will never afford us a rich inner life. Things are imposters of happiness and meaning.

I’m not suggesting that we give up all our worldly possessions in order to find spiritual integrity. At the same time, we do not have to give up our spiritual foundation in order to find financial success. The desire to be prosperous is not a sin, or even a character flaw. As I said, money is neither good nor bad. It’s what we do with it that counts.

When Moses, the man who led the slaves to freedom, went away for forty days without food or water, people were gripped with fear and confusion. They turned to Moses’ brother Aaron, asking him to create another leader. Six hundred thousand frightened people shouted, “Make us a god who will go before us.” They ripped the gold earrings from their ears and Aaron cast them into the

shape of a calf. A dizzying dance of ecstasy began around the golden god.

“This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of Egypt,” the people shouted with reckless conviction. Lost and leaderless, hounded by doubt and fear, these people groped in the spiritual darkness toward a pathetic, little lump of gold.

When Moses finally returned, he discovered that the same people who witnessed God’s power while crossing the Red Sea to safety had suddenly given up on God. For their lack of faith, Moses ground the golden calf into dust, cast it upon the water, and forced the people to drink their own debauchery. Then, three thousand of them were killed in a murderous plague of punishment.

Not much later in the Bible, these same people contributed their gold jewelry once again. But this time it was not to fashion a golden calf, but to decorate a tabernacle, a kind of portable sanctuary wherein they could worship God. This act and the place ultimately led the people to a true sense of their religious faith. It’s not gold that is evil; it’s how we use it. Money today, like gold for our ancestors, is neutral, neither good nor bad. Life is ultimately not about how vast our resources may be, but about how we put our resources—financial, emotional, and spiritual—to use.

Here’s a wonderful example of what I mean. Every week for several years, a mild-mannered clerk who worked at a cemetery received an envelope with a money order and a note instructing him to put fresh flowers on a grave.

One day, a car drove up to the cemetery gates, and a

chauffeur came into the clerk's office to speak to him. "The lady outside is too ill to walk," the driver explained. "Would you mind coming with me to speak to her?"

The shy clerk walked over and looked into the car, where a frail, elderly woman with sad eyes sat in the back seat, a bundle of flowers in her arms. "I am Mrs. Adams," the woman said. "I am the one who has been sending you the money orders for the flowers. I came here today myself because the doctors have told me I have only a few weeks left to live. I'm not sorry really. I have nothing left to live for. But before I die, I wanted to take one last look at my son's grave and put the flowers there myself."

"You know, ma'am, I always was sorry you kept sending the money for the flowers," the clerk told her.

"Sorry?"

"Yes, because flowers last such a short time, and no one ever gets to see them. There are thousands of people in hospitals and nursing homes who would love to see and smell fresh flowers. But there isn't anybody at that grave. Not really."

The old woman sat for a while and left without a word. The clerk was afraid he had offended her. But a few months later, he was surprised with another visit. This time there was no chauffeur. The woman had driven herself to the cemetery.

She went to the clerk's office and said, "I've been taking the flowers to people in hospitals and nursing homes, as you suggested. You were right. It does make them happy. And it makes me happy. The doctors don't understand what's making me well, but I do."

It's a simple, true story about the same woman using

the same money to buy the same flowers for two different purposes. Money itself is neutral—neither good nor bad. How we use it makes all the difference in the world.

NET WORTH AND SELF-WORTH

Consider what we Americans already have today. David Brooks, author of *Bobos in Paradise*, wrote that the average U.S. household makes \$42,000 a year. Factor in a college degree for the major wage earner, and this figure increases to \$71,400. A professional degree can push it up even further to more than \$100,000. If you are among the college educated who earn approximately \$75,000, this means you are richer than 95 percent of the people in the world. Even our poorer citizens live at a higher standard than most of the world, with TVs and VCRs in nearly every home.

And yet, Americans are obsessed with making more because they believe their happiness will increase along with their net worth. Economists who have studied this question found that money only buys us a temporary uptick of happiness. According to one survey conducted by British economist Andrew Oswald, people who came into large amounts of cash unexpectedly reported higher mental well-being during the following year. Their happiness, however, appeared to fade over time. In another study, Oswald found that people with rising incomes became less happy if other people's incomes increased even more.

"Equality reduces happiness," Oswald told a reporter from the *Wall Street Journal*. "So society as a whole

might be getting wealthier, but it won't translate into happiness for many unless they are becoming wealthier faster than everybody else." Unfortunately, the urge to stay one step ahead of the Joneses seems a sad part of human nature and one that ultimately leads to nowhere.

For some who are not wealthy, it helps to believe that "have-nots" are morally superior. As Albert Camus said, "It's a kind of spiritual snobbery that makes people think they can be happy without money." Celebrity magazines and gossip columns are filled with stories about the rich and famous who are going through their third or fourth divorce or are in drug rehab, psychiatric hospitals, or jail. People who revel in these stories are filled with what the Germans call *schadenfreude*, which means deriving pleasure from hearing about the misfortune of others.

Tabloid stories like these confirm our belief that we may not have fame or fortune, but at least we're not miserable—that when you strip away all the glitz and glitter, the rich must *really* be unhappy. It helps us get through the struggles of our day. The truth is, some wealthy people are happy, and some are not. The same is true, of course, for those who are not rich.

Is it wrong to harbor these feelings? Right or wrong, it's unproductive. We tend to gossip about people of equal or higher social standing because there is a certain status given to those who are plugged into powerful people. But it's a false perception because people who gossip and obsess about the rich are merely straining at the velvet ropes while the high and mighty pass them by. We will never be satisfied with what we have as long as we compare the size of our net worth like teenaged boys comparing the

size of their genitals in a locker room. With the exception of the wealthiest person in the world, there will always be someone who is richer.

So how do we curb this desire to equate our self-worth with our net worth? Money does have real power. It can make us more comfortable. It can buy us a better education, but it can't make us better or wiser people. Only a rich inner life can do that. Part of cultivating a rich inner life is knowing where not to be and who not to be around. This includes, of course, hanging around people who define themselves by money.

When I'm performing a bar mitzvah, for example, I tend to skip the extravagant parties afterward. I don't go to the receptions because I am often uncomfortable with the values that are being represented. By not going, I don't put myself in a position where I either will feel disgusted by or covetous of someone's lifestyle. An alcoholic should stay away from bars, and someone who suffers from money lust or wants to cultivate a rich inner life should stay away from people who are crassly materialistic. It's just that simple.

There have been times in my life when I didn't have much money. My wife and I didn't go out to big fancy dinners; we stayed home and cooked instead. We went for bike rides. We walked the baby around in the stroller and went out for ice cream. Life was simple and good.

More than seven centuries ago, the philosopher Maimonides made a simple and important observation about God and nature. The more something is truly needed by human beings, he observed, the more abundant it is in nature. For example, we need air most of all, then water,

then basic food. Air, water, and basic foodstuffs like grains, fruits, and vegetables are exactly what are most common and affordable. The less something is truly necessary, the rarer it will be in nature. And yet, as Maimonides points out, these rare things are the things people often spend their time and money seeking. People haven't changed much in seven centuries. Many of us still chase after the rare, expensive, and unnecessary. Many of us still confuse what we want with what we need, and many of us fail to realize just how abundant nature really is in meeting those needs.

The great rabbi and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "To have more is not to be more," and William James, the psychologist who originated the idea of pragmatism, said, "Lives based on having are less free than lives based either on doing or being." This is why the Jewish tradition of not handling money during the Sabbath can be so liberating. Many who observe the Sabbath in this way say it is their favorite day of the week. You walk, talk, visit friends, and eat together. You can't spend money, so you are forced to form stronger relationships. The Sabbath is the day when each of us can declare an armistice in the battle to have more.

"It is physically impossible," said the nineteenth-century historian John Ruskin, "for a well-educated, intellectual, or brave man to make money the chief object of his thoughts; just as it is for him to make his dinner the principal object of them. All healthy people like their dinners, but their dinner is not the main object of their lives. So all healthily minded people like making money, ought to like it, and to enjoy the sensation of winning it; but the

main object of their life is not money; it is something better than money.” For Ruskin, as it ought to be for us, the pursuit of money is a matter of degree, of balance and of clarity about what money is for and what it can or cannot do.

When I ask them about how much is enough, nearly every wealthy person I know tells me that the answer has changed as their wealth has increased. “I thought at one time that if I had a million dollars in the bank I would really be secure,” one television producer told me. “But after that first million was put away, I felt that I needed more because as my income increased, so did my expenses. The more I make, the more I spend, the more I spend, the more I need to make. At this point, I am honest enough about myself to say that I will never feel like enough is enough.”

It’s hard to feel sorry for someone as wealthy as this man is, but I do. Golden handcuffs are still handcuffs.

Consider King Solomon and the story of three brothers who came to him and asked: “How can we become as wise as you are? May we stay here and serve you and learn?”

The king agreed, but only on the condition that they stay for three years. The brothers accepted. They sat by the king whenever he decided the many cases brought to him, and they watched him discuss complex ideas with other learned men.

A few years passed, but the brothers felt they had not grown any wiser. They said to the king: “Your Majesty, we have decided to return home to our wives because our stay here has not profited us at all.”

“Very well,” replied the king. “In that case, I release you from my service. Because you are leaving, I will offer each of you one hundred gold coins or three wise sayings. Which shall it be?”

The king waited as each brother considered the choice. They decided to take the gold coins. As they rode away from the palace, the youngest brother suddenly regretted his choice and said, “Brothers, I must return to King Solomon. I don’t want the gold. I would rather have the wisdom he offered. Come, let us return to the palace to ask for his wise words. What else did we work and hope for all these years?”

But the brothers insisted that they continue on their way home. “Give up one hundred gold coins for three wise sayings?” they scoffed. “Give us your gold, and we’ll tell you three sayings!” they laughed mockingly as they rode off.

The youngest brother returned to the palace and was brought before the king. “I came here to gain wisdom and not gold. I regret that I did not accept your wise sayings in the first place. Please take back the coins you have given me, and give me your good counsel instead.”

The king was delighted by his request, and said, “Here are the three sayings for you to heed: when you travel, journey only by daylight, and find your place to sleep before darkness falls; when you find a river swollen with water, wait and do not cross; when you meet your wife, confide in her as a friend.”

The youngest brother thanked King Solomon and sped off to catch up with his brothers. But when they met again, the youngest brother said nothing about what

Solomon had told him. The three rode along until they came to an inn. Although it was still daylight, the youngest brother, remembering Solomon's advice, said, "Let's remain here for the night."

The brothers protested, saying, "It will still be light for several more hours. Why waste the time when we could be traveling farther. Is this the kind of wise advice you received from Solomon? Stay here if you wish, but we will continue on our journey."

The youngest brother stayed at the inn and, when darkness fell, he was warm and comfortable. He ate a good dinner, and his horse was cared for and had plenty to eat and drink as well.

Meanwhile, the two brothers who had continued up the mountain got caught in a snowstorm. They became trapped among the ice-covered rocks and froze to death.

At dawn the next day, the youngest brother set out on his journey home. When he reached the mountain pass, he discovered his two brothers' frozen bodies and wept. He buried them as best he could in the frozen ground, taking the gold they had received from the king.

When he reached the other side of the mountain, he saw a river in the distance. It was overflowing with water that rushed and swirled along the banks. Remembering, once again, the words of Solomon, the youngest brother decided to remain on high ground until the waters receded. As he looked down, he saw two men driving several heavily laden mules toward the river. "Wait! Don't cross! It's dangerous," he shouted down to the men struggling against the swollen waters. But they ignored his cries, and soon the men and beasts were drowned.

When the waters returned to their usual level, the youngest brother began to cross. On the way, he found the drowned animals with bags of gold, and he took the gold with him.

When he finally returned home, wealthy and in good health, he embraced his wife. Now, for the third time, he recalled Solomon's advice. He told his wife everything that had happened to him and to his brothers. The brothers' wives came to greet him, and they were distraught to hear about the death of their husbands. Seeing the bags of gold, they shouted, "You murdered them for the gold! That gold belongs to us! We will take you to court, and you shall be tried and hanged."

The family went to the King Solomon, knowing that he would settle the dispute fairly. When Solomon heard the case, he recognized the youngest brother and confirmed his story. He returned the gold he had given the other brothers to their wives, but said: "Remember, always seek wisdom, for wisdom is more precious than gold."

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Comparing ourselves to others is an unavoidable part of human nature. It's not always easy to be happy with what we have. But we all need to incorporate more gratitude into our lives. Some of us remind ourselves by going to church or synagogue that we should be grateful for the riches in our life: our family, friends, work, and daily bread. Sadly, this feeling of gratitude often evaporates as soon as we return to our everyday lives. We move quickly

from grateful to resentful, consumed by petty jealousies, old grudges, and our real or imagined needs.

Perhaps we are a bit like the Hebrew slaves whom Moses led to freedom through the parting seas. After crossing the sea, the people wandered through the desert, where God brought water forth from the rocks and manna fell from heaven like dancing snowflakes. The people gathered, then ground and cooked the seed-like substance into cakes that the Bible tells us tasted like “rich cream.” You would think that after four hundred years of oppression this manna from heaven would have made them happy.

But what did these former slaves do in response to their good fortune? They complained. They whined to God that they had “nothing but this manna.” They complained as if to say, “We are bored, God. We want a little excitement. A little variety.” They were people who had everything, but saw themselves as having nothing.

How many of us have said, “I *need* a new car” or “I *need* a new dress”? How often do we really need what we want? What we really need is to remind ourselves on a daily basis how fortunate we are and how grateful we ought to be. I know that there are some people who don’t have much to be grateful for monetarily. There are many poor people in the world who genuinely *need*. Are you one of them?

The Chassidic rabbi and singer Shlomo Carlbach put it nicely when he said: “You know, when you have no money and you really need a cup of coffee, you pray, ‘God, please give me a quarter for a cup of coffee. I’m really at the end.’ But when you have a thousand dollars,

you don't remember to pray for a quarter. What's so special is when you have the money and you still remember to ask God to give. There was a holy rabbi who, even when the food was on the table in front of him, before he'd eat it, he'd pray, 'Please, God, feed me.'

Whenever I forget how fortunate I am, some member of my congregation who is in need reminds me. Here's just one week's worth of calls. There's Robert, who calls to tell me that he is starting radiation and chemotherapy for a tumor lodged in his brain. Even if he beats it, the experts say the tumor will be back in one to five years. It's a lot for a twenty-five-year-old to take.

Melissa calls to see me. She's forty-four, bright, attractive, wildly successful, and alone. She longs for a man with whom she can share her life, for children, for deep, abiding, human love. "Have you found anyone to fix me up with yet?" she asks hopefully.

Amy calls to tell me that she lost her job. There wasn't enough business to keep her. She's living on unemployment and worried about losing her apartment. Do I know anyone who might be able to help?

David calls. "Rabbi," he trembles through his tears, "yesterday my wife told me she's leaving. What's going to happen to our twenty-month-old son, to me, to my life? Please, will you talk to her, Rabbi?"

The same day, I get a call from the principal of my son's school. One of the families which has a son in my son's class lost their two-year-old the night before. He was acting a little lethargic during the day. Then, in the early evening, while they were holding him in their arms, he suddenly stiffened and died. No one knows why. "They're

a Jewish family with no temple,” the principal tells me. “Their hearts are broken. Could you step in and help them?”

We all long for bigger, better, and more. But we take so much for granted. How desperately all the people with whom I talked within that single week hungered for the manna of work, family, health, life, or love, for the simple good fortune that pours like rich cream upon most of us each day. For this, we should be grateful.