

Getting What You Wish For: Jewish Professionals and the Emotional Meaning of Money

In 1985, five years after I had been ordained, I moved from Dallas back to my home state of NJ. They did things differently down there in Texas, so I tried to get myself oriented in my new place. When there was a regional meeting of Reform rabbis, I figured that was a good place to begin. I asked what I thought was a simple question, “What do people charge for weddings?” My question was greeted with an uncomfortable silence. Finally someone bravely made a recommendation: “What if we anonymously write down what we charge on pieces of paper and pass the paper up to Don at the front of the room and he can read out the amounts?” And that’s what we did.

When I repeated this story to another colleague, he immediately said, “They are afraid they are undercharging.” The other possibility, I thought, is that they are afraid they are overcharging. Whether the conflict manifests itself as insecurity or grandiosity, the need to keep the fees a secret seems to reflect a conflict. What is this about, I wondered, the unwillingness to name themselves and say the figures aloud in front of colleagues? Is it about competitiveness? Is it about shame? Whatever it is, it doesn’t have anything to do with money. That doesn’t mean that money isn’t real and it doesn’t mean that money isn’t relevant in the lives of Jewish professionals. But it does mean that we have a lot to talk about before we ever get to the *tachlis* issue of salaries and negotiation. And what we have to talk about is in the emotional realm, especially for those of us who have chosen to earn our livelihood by teaching Torah, whether in the rabbinate, the cantorate, Jewish education, communal service or academia.

Being paid to teach Torah has always been an emotional issue in our tradition. We have inherited conflicting attitudes. It isn't that we don't believe other Jews deserve to earn a living. The Talmud tells us that over and over again.¹ We just aren't sure how teachers of Torah are included in that divine plan. For instance, how should we interpret these oft-quoted words from Pirke Avot: "Do not make the Torah into a crown with which to adorn yourself or a spade with which to dig."² Maimonides' commentary on this Mishnah is legendary:

One who decides that instead of working he will occupy himself with Torah study and live from charity, profanes God's name, disgraces the Torah, extinguishes the light of the law, brings harm upon himself, and removes himself from the World to Come, for it is forbidden to derive benefit from the Torah in this world. Hence the sages teach: whoever derives benefit from his Torah knowledge removes himself from the world.³

Maimonides does make a few exceptions, most notably the following:

If it is local custom to receive a salary for teaching children, he may receive a salary. This applies only to the teachings of scripture. As for the Oral Law, it is forbidden to teach it for pay, as it is written, 'See I have taught you statutes and judgments as the Lord as commanded me, etc.' Just as I Moses learned gratis from God, so did you learn gratis from me. Thus in future generations, teach gratis as you learned from me.⁴

The Rambam cites Rav, who says that the payment to teachers is not for teaching Torah per se but for childcare, and Rabbi Yochanan, who says that the payment is for the teaching of cantillation, which again is not teaching Torah per se. To be fair, Maimonides does allow for other benefits that might assist a Torah scholar in earning a

¹ "The divine plan makes it necessary to devote time to providing for one's own material needs."
(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 356)

² Pirke Avot 4:5

³ Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Torah Study, 3:10

⁴ Ibid. 1:7

living: certain specific tax exemptions, preferential treatment in the market place, and investment management.⁵

Maimonides position was widely accepted although not by everyone. The Rashbatz says that our Mishnah “applies to one who studies Torah for the sake of receiving honor and reward. He who has earned the reputation of a Torah scholar, however, is permitted to receive honor from the community. If he is a public servant he may receive a salary...if a high priest is permitted to accept wealth from his fellow priests, how much more so may a Torah scholar, who is considered of higher stature than a high priest, be allowed to receive financial support.”⁶ Since then, many respected scholars have added their arguments to the discussion and most agree that times have changed. If we want Torah taught, our teachers must be paid or we might end up without, particularly in America. In a letter dated July 16, 1920, to M.B. Friedman, one of the leaders of Cleveland’s Jewish community, Cyrus Adler wrote:

The scarcity of rabbis is part of the general scarcity of teachers and professors. Men have drifted away from these professions because they feared they would not have the chance to live in them. The tenure of the rabbi is also very uncertain. Of course, you in Cleveland have large congregations who pay good salaries...but when it comes to the smaller town where men are offered \$1800 or \$2000 a year, are asked to preach in English and Yiddish, superintend and teach a school and in some cases to even act as hazzan, you can readily see that the men get discouraged.⁷

⁵ Ibid. Laws of Vows 4:3 Quoted in Reuven Grodner, “Maimonides’ View of Receiving Compensation for the Teaching and Studying of Torah.” In Chidushei-Torah, p. 44.

⁶ R. Shimon ben Tzemach Duran; 1361-1444, Spain, Algiers. Magen Avot (commentary on Pirke Avot). Quoted in Grodner, p.45.

⁷ Quoted in Kimmy Kaplan “In God we Trust: Salaries and Income of American Orthodox Rabbi, 1881-1934,” in American Jewish History, Vol. 86, 1998.

The Jewish community in which we live and work has inherited these attitudes. That fact in and of itself would make it no surprise that you who have made Judaism your profession are conflicted about the meaning of being paid for teaching Torah. You may have unknowingly internalized these attitudes. To add to the conflict, these attitudes from the tradition might match personal conflicts you already possess. Those conflicts generally lie in the area of self-worth. Parker Palmer, who writes about the nexus of leadership and spirituality, says: “One of the biggest shadows inside a lot of leaders is deep insecurity about their own identity, their own worth. That insecurity is hard to see in extroverted people. But the extroversion is often there precisely because we are insecure about who we are and are trying to prove ourselves in the external world rather than wrestling with our inner identity.”⁷ You might ask; if you feel insecure, why would you possibly put yourself in such a vulnerable position? It may not seem logical but it makes sense emotionally. We human beings often put ourselves in a position where we are forced to confront a part of ourselves that challenges us. I sometimes laugh when I see that pattern in myself. When I left the salaried world of the full-time pulpit, where there was almost no such thing as fee for service, I entered the world of private practice, where every appointment is linked to a fee and has to be negotiated. And yet I feel more comfortable confronting my discomfort this way. It is no accident when an historical conflict matches your personal conflict. If you feel conflicted about your own self-worth, consciously or unconsciously, those conflicts will be reflected in how you relate to money.

⁷ Parker Palmer, “Leading from Within: Reflections on Spirituality and Leadership.” In Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation, John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Ch. 5.

So it is that despite or perhaps because of this conflict, you in this room have chosen to earn your living by becoming professionals within the Jewish community. But it doesn't mean that these issues have been resolved; it just means that you have chosen to live with them, ignore them, fight them or merely complain about them. Presumably, you believe you should be paid for being a Jewish professional, although you are aware that there are pitfalls, both the inherited ones cited by Maimonides and the Rashbatz and others new to our time. But how do you determine how much you should be paid? Who decides how much the job is worth? How much do you want? How much do you need? How do you know how much is enough? What is the relationship between how much you are paid and your professional satisfaction? What is the relationship between your salary and how valued you feel?

I confess that I asked none of these questions in 1980 when I applied for my first rabbinic job, or to be more specific, when I applied for a terrible job that everyone warned me not to take. And I mean everyone, from the placement director on down. The congregation had two senior rabbis who hated each other and made no pretense of hiding it. The previous assistant rabbi had gotten caught in the middle and, I was told, had been eaten alive. So what possessed me to apply? If you had asked me at the time, I think I would have answered pragmatically: I was a woman, I was a mother and I was married to another rabbi who also needed to find a job and already had a possibility in Dallas. When you ask what being a woman had to do with it, you have to remember that this was 1980. No one was beating a path to our doors to hire us. By the time I got to the Dallas interview, I had already had my fill of interviews in which the senior rabbis said things

like, “I would feel very bad if I had to ask you to go out at night and leave your baby” and “I would feel bad calling you at 2 in the morning” and (my favorite) “What we have here is the case of the proverbial female rabbi with the three-month-old.” As far as I know, I was at the time the only female rabbi with a three-month-old. I’m not sure who was considered more of a liability, my baby or me. I walked into the Dallas interview expecting more of the same. Instead, the first question out of the mouth of the search committee chair was, “I see you have a young baby. How could we help you and your family be happy in Dallas?” I took that job.

When I look back, I think of that moment as the moment I realized – if only unconsciously - that it wasn’t about the money. Three years later, I learned that lesson again, but this time it was painful. My job had originally included running the school and being on the pulpit each Shabbat but only preaching every six weeks or so. I had asked not to be on call for lifecycle events like funerals and weddings because I wanted a manageable schedule. While I worked hard, I was home for dinner every night and tucked my baby in. Then I had another baby. When I returned to work after my maternity leave, things between my two seniors had reached a crisis point. By July, one was gone. In August, the other one went on vacation. And there I was, running this 2200 family congregation by myself for the month, officiating at three funerals a week, preaching Friday night and Shabbat morning, hiring the teachers, etc. I would never want to do it again, but I confess I was pretty proud of myself. I had proven that I could do it, although you might wonder what I was proving and to whom. Then, one Friday afternoon, the president and a member of the Executive Committee asked if they could pay me a visit. I

remember having the fantasy that they were going to say thank you for a job well done. Instead, this is what they said: in the next year, we plan to hire in a new senior rabbi and he deserves to have a clean slate. You can stay for the next year and a half, but that will be the end of your tenure here.

So much for fantasies. But by the end of the following week, in that confusing and unpredictable way in which Jewish institutions seem to work, the whole situation had reversed itself. It seems that the original decision to let me go had been an attempt to appease the remaining senior rabbi but they had subsequently changed their minds about that. The co-chairs of the Search Committee came to see me and told me that the first thing they were saying to the senior rabbi applicants was, “We have a great associate rabbi and we plan to keep her.” They had changed their minds, but the damage to me had been done. Some time later, when they realized I was close to taking another position, I was invited to a past-president’s house. In my four years in Dallas, I had never before been invited to this house. I can still picture looking around the room and wondering idly if the Chagall and the Picasso were real. They served wine and cheese. Then a select group of people offered me anything I wanted if I would stay. I admit that now and then it crosses my mind to think about how much money I might have now had I taken their offer, but at the time I wasn’t even tempted. While I couldn’t have verbalized my reason then, I know now that I had to leave that job once I stopped feeling valued.

I tell you the story of Dallas because it was there that I learned three important lessons: what it feels like to be valued, what it feels like not to be valued, and how neither

experience had anything to do with money. Or maybe I should say: what we think money is about is not what money is really about. What is it about? In order to answer that question, I want to start with an assumption. I believe that people have drives of which they are largely unconscious. Freud thought of them as the aggressive drive and the libidinal drive; the rabbis called them the *yetzer ra* and the *yetzer tov*. Everyone likes to think that their *yetzer tov* is more powerful than their *yetzer ra* – in fact, many teachers of Torah would prefer to think that they have no *yetzer ra* at all – but as many of you know, the rabbis have told us that were it not for the *yetzer ra*, no one would marry, build a house, have children or engage in business.⁸ The alternative, then, lies in the arena of accepting both your *yetzer tov* and your *yetzer ra* and getting to know yourself in a more profound way. It is only in the context of knowing yourself that you will ever figure out what money means to you emotionally. When you figure that out, you will either be a happier person and more satisfied with your career choice or you will understand that you need to make a different choice.

Because money is all about emotion; it is about wanting; it is about human appetites. And human appetites have their root in childhood. Children are born wanting and it obviously isn't money that they want. It isn't hard to guess what young children want because they make their needs known so unselfconsciously. Children want to play, eat and sleep. They want to be loved and held. They want their every need responded to immediately and unconditionally. Parents may want their children to feel loved and attended to and they may even enjoy how uninhibited children are in expressing their needs, but parents also want children to be able to live in the world. That means children have to learn that they

⁸ Gen Rabba Bereshit 9:7

can't have everything they want all the time. Parents spend a lot of time civilizing children so that they sublimate or repress those wants, and those appetites may go underground, but those appetites are still there. What happens to those appetites when children grow up? They become wishes. Those childhood wishes live on inside you but they reside in your unconscious. Freud says "we [adults] are only really happy...when we satisfy a childhood wish." And Adam Phillips adds, sometimes we use money to wish with.⁹ If that is the case, then you won't be happy with any amount of money unless you figure out what your wishes are.

No adult remembers those wishes. Since we all have childhood amnesia, all of us have to work in deliberate ways to become more aware of our buried adult wishes. This work, however, presents a particular challenge to those of you who have chosen to earn your living as Jewish professionals. Here I am going to generalize for the sake of discussion, so take the piece that fits you and discard what doesn't. What makes the awareness of wishes a direct challenge to teachers of Torah is that you are people who tend to be more attuned to the needs of others than to your own. You are by and large giving people and you are people with a mission. You may want to make the world a better place, you may want to make the Jewish community a better place, you may want to make a Jewish organization a better place, you may want to inspire, you may want to help others find spiritual wholeness, you may want to teach children to love God, you may simply want to increase Torah study *lishma* – but your focus tends to be more external than internal. All this is admirable but at root it is not entirely altruistic. Behind the desire to love others

⁹ Adam Phillips, Going Sane: Maps of Happiness. HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, p. 160.

lurks the wish to be loved; behind the desire to care for others lies buried the wish to be taken care of; behind the desire to be everything to everybody is hidden the yearning to be recognized for who you truly are. And behind the desire to bring change into the world lies the wish to change the people who brought you into the world. Henri Nouwen calls us wounded healers, “the one who must look after his or her wounds and at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.”¹⁰

What does being a wounded healer have to do with money in this Jewish non-profit world you have chosen to enter? Forget for the moment the financial desires of which you are conscious, like being paid enough to live in the community, being paid enough to cover day school tuition, and being paid enough to cover health care for your family. Think instead about bringing to the negotiating table your unconscious desires to be loved, to be recognized and to be cared for. The only contract that feels “right” from an emotional standpoint will be the one that slakes those thirsts; and no contract is going to do that. Let your employer offer you less and you will see what I mean. The simple emotional equation is this: less money equals less love and more money equals more love. Instead of seeing the process of negotiation as a business transaction, Jewish professionals are particularly prone to personalize the process. Rabbi Arnold Sher, the Director of Placement for the CCAR, described the conflict when he said to me recently that, “Some rabbis define themselves successfully by how much they are getting paid; they judge their self-worth by what they are bringing home. On the other side of the equation, rabbis don’t know how to put a value on money vis-à-vis their time.”¹¹ These

¹⁰ Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer. Random House, 1979.

¹¹ Rabbi Arnold Sher, private communication 12/19/06.

two statements may seem contradictory but they share an unconscious link. If you work tirelessly and devotedly, if you put no limits on your own time, then the wish is that you will be loved and admired and will be paid as unconditionally as you share your time. And if you are not sure how much you are really worth, you had better work hard so that no one can criticize your value. There is a link between how you feel about your salary and your own self-worth. That might explain the vignette with which I began. Asking the question, “How do I decide how much I should be paid?” is really asking, “How much am I worth?”

To complicate this emotional scenario further, of course, you are not the only one sitting at that negotiating table. “No wonder many clergy find the money side of ministry distasteful!” writes Dan Hotchkiss of the Alban Institute: “It is the arena in which it is clearest how much we depend on those we are supposed to lead. It is the locus where sexism, racism, bias against homosexuals, social competition, and sheer anticlerical hostility walk most nearly naked through the church. It is where people express most unambiguously their true evaluation of the place of faith in the “real” (that is the economic) world.”¹² Those people on whom you depend are also the people you are supposed to lead and they, too, have an unconscious. They, too, are probably unaware of how they transfer their personal feelings onto you as an object of their wishes. Their conflicting wishes are perfectly captured by an anonymous parody you might have already seen called: The Perfect Rabbi. Those of you who are not preparing to become the Perfect Rabbi can substitute your own Perfect Parody. The fact that this parody refers

¹² Dan Hotchkiss, “Salary Anxiety,” in Congregations Magazine, Sept/Oct 2002, p. 20.

to the rabbi as “he” is reflective of when it was composed, but I am also not sure that the perfect female rabbi would be parodied the same way. I’ll say more about women in a minute.

THE PERFECT RABBI

1. The results of a computerized survey indicate the perfect Rabbi preaches exactly fifteen minutes. **2.** He condemns sin but never upsets anyone. **3.** He works from 8:00 a.m. until midnight and is also a janitor. **4.** He makes \$50 a week, wears good clothes, buys good books, drives a good car, and gives about \$50 weekly to the poor. **5.** He is 28 years old and has preached 30 years. **6.** He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all of his time with senior citizens. **7.** The perfect rabbi smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work. **8.** He makes 15 calls daily on congregational families, shut-ins and the hospitalized and is always in his office when needed. **9.** He is available to the congregation 24 hours a day and is a role model for how to spend time with your family. **10.** If your rabbi does not measure up, simply send this letter to six other synagogues that are tired of their rabbi, too. **11.** Then bundle up your rabbi and send him to the synagogue on the top of the list. **12.** In one week, you will receive 1643 rabbis and one of them will be perfect. **13.** Have faith in this procedure. **14.** One congregation broke the chain and got its old rabbi back.

So it isn’t as simple as whether your lay leaders or boards or tenure committees like you or don’t like you. They might “love” you in the way that a child loves a teacher or a child loves a parent, but that doesn’t mean they want to pay you. It may even mean the opposite.

Children expect to receive from their parents; they don’t want to give. They certainly don’t want to pay for love and neither do those people upon whom you depend for your salary unless they are aware of how their own childhood appetites live on in their psyches. I once took a position in a synagogue located in a wealthy community; my predecessor had been there for 35 years. They told me that he never negotiated a contract; they just came to him every year and told him, “This is what we are going to give you

this year.” He retired making such a low salary that the congregation had to supplement his retirement. In his final years, he had two heart attacks. During my first year following him in that pulpit, a representative appointed by the board came to me and wanted to discuss my next contract. This man was a very successful Manhattan attorney, at least by economic standards. I was happy to begin the conversation and mentioned that another member of the synagogue would be helping me with the negotiations. To my surprise, this man reacted angrily and said, “We do not negotiate; only blue-collar workers negotiate. We will tell you what we are going to give you.” I can look back now and tell you that in that moment, I represented someone else in that man’s emotional life. I was an object upon which he transferred some old childhood feelings. His anger was clearly inappropriate and disproportionate to the situation. But I didn’t know that at the time. My response was to take it personally; I experienced his anger as a narcissistic wound. Hadn’t I worked hard enough? Hadn’t I met their needs? Shouldn’t they be showing their appreciation?

The greatest danger in discussing money occurs when you find sitting at the table two children thinly disguised as adults, both operating out of those early unconscious appetites, both “using money to wish with.” Hindsight tells me that in that negotiation I just mentioned, we both would have been better off if he had reacted with less *yetzer ra* and I had responded with more access to my own. Negotiations for money always involve a combination of aggression and appreciation, *yetzer ra* and *yetzer tov*, so we are back to those fundamental drives of which Freud spoke. Freud calls this the “psychopathology of everyday life” because we all have those drives. But those of you

who are wounded healers tend not to be so good at using your *yetzer ra* appropriately. Your discomfort with aggressive feelings can lead you to repress them, suppress them or, at the other extreme, indulge them. I once had a conversation with a colleague who described himself as a very aggressive negotiator. He told me that he negotiated his own contracts so effectively that he always got what he wanted, but the victory was a Pyrrhic one. His board left the table feeling resentful and angry. Eventually he decided to have someone else represent him in contract negotiations. I don't know if he received less money as a result but I know he came to value a good working relationship more than winning everything he could.

Earlier tonight I mentioned that this conflict over money can manifest itself as insecurity or grandiosity. So far, I've focused on insecurity; let me say a few words about grandiosity. If you were to define grandiosity, you might call simply it an "unrealistic notion of superiority."¹³ But the roots of that apparent superiority lie in the same childhood place as the roots of insecurity. Both lie in those lingering childhood yearnings for love and admiration. Grandiosity is just a different attempt at compensating for what you didn't get. Instead of saying to yourself, "I am defective," you compensate by saying to yourself, "I am perfect."¹⁴ I first noticed this grandiosity in action about twenty years ago, when the interfaith clergy association in my community decided to sponsor a fundraiser. They arranged to bring in a team called the Harlem Wizards. They were like the Harlem Globetrotters, professional ballplayers who performed all kinds of antics on the court. We the clergy were to play them in a basketball game. I naively

¹³ Nancy McWilliams, Psychoanalytic Diagnosis. Guilford Press, 1994, p. 158

¹⁴ Kohut, H. The Analysis of the Self. New York: International Universities Press, 1971, p. 27. .

signed up, only to arrive at the first practice and discover that I would be the only player out of forty using the Girls' Locker Room. Having gone to HUC in the 70's, I was used to that by then. What I wasn't used to was being ignored by my own teammates; even in practice, they wouldn't pass to me. Instead of our being able to practice together and develop a sense of camaraderie and teamwork, these mild-mannered ministers had become competitive monsters. They played against these professionals as if they actually thought they could win. They were so viciously competitive during the game that the Wizards left the court, took them aside and told them to lighten up. Despite my team's grandiose hopes, we lost, of course; I was the only one to score a basket because the opposing team passed me the ball, guarded me from my own teammates and waited patiently for me to shoot - and they gave me ten points for my basket. I admit to feeling a little grandiose satisfaction when I recall that story.

I tell this story because the problem of The Perfect Rabbi or cantor or educator or professor or communal service worker doesn't just rest with a Board or a committee; it arises when you start to confuse your own fantasies with the reality of the working world. The way that grandiosity manifests itself when you get to the negotiating table is that you expect too much. That is a perception held by senior colleagues and laypeople about recent graduates; "When I graduated, I didn't even have a contract, but these new graduates want everything spelled out." I don't advocate returning to the days of no written contracts, no days off, no parental leave, inadequate pensions and being underpaid, but there is also a danger in being too specific if that desire comes from the grandiose part of you. The best results in salary negotiations occur when they are

conducted in the context of a respectful relationship, not when you are seen as demanding and they feel they are responding to those demands. I don't imagine that any of you have chosen your profession because you think of it as "just a job." Becoming a Jewish professional means more than that to you or you would be working at Goldman-Sachs earning those million dollar bonuses. There has to be some amount of trust in the beginning of the professional relationships you will have. Even if an initial contract doesn't include everything you want, that doesn't mean that the next contract won't. It helps to have patience and remember that developing a professional relationship takes time. And frankly, as a lawyer-friend once told me, those contracts aren't worth the paper they are written on when it comes to holding up in court, not that you would want to take an issue to court. When you negotiate, it will help to remember that grandiosity like insecurity stems from a sense of childhood deprivation. Even an extravagant contract won't satisfy that childhood wish.

Sometimes I find it hard to believe that I am still doing congregational work after almost twenty-seven years. For the last thirteen years, I have been the rabbi of a small congregation in rural northwest New Jersey. Our website refers to my job as "part-time but full-service." Among my responsibilities, I lead services every-other weekend and I teach Religious School every week. Although the congregation has only seventy-five families, they have done their best to pay me well. We have figured out a good *modus operandi* over the years, but some years ago, I was feeling worn out and was thinking seriously of leaving. When I discussed this in supervision, my supervisor asked me, "What do you want? Is there any circumstance under which you would want to stay?" I

realized then that what I wanted didn't involve only making more money. I felt selfish when I admitted that I wanted more time off. When my congregation came to me and wanted to talk about a new contract, I felt emotionally prepared. I said I didn't want to sign another contract until we discussed the job itself, that I felt like the job had become too big in some ways. "What do you want?" they asked. I wanted to make my schedule more efficient and I wanted more weekend time off. They listened to my concerns and they proposed some scheduling changes that didn't alter my responsibilities but consolidated them. They asked how many weekends off I wanted and when I wanted them. It didn't cost either of us anything. We both gave up a little and got more as a result. They know that I could make more money someplace else, but I know that working someplace else for more money would offer no guarantee of my professional satisfaction.

No matter how much money you make, most of you are going to work in communities where you make less money than the people who decide on your salary. That can be an emotional trap if you measure your self-worth by what you make. I read a recent magazine article about happiness that said, "Although many economists agree that money doesn't make people happy, disparities in income make people miserable, according to most happiness literature. Happiness, in other words, 'is less a function of absolute income than of comparative income,' as [Harvard professor Daniel] Gilbert puts it. 'Now, if you live in Hallelujah, Arkansas...the odds are good that most of the people you know do something like you do and earn something like you earn and live in houses something like yours. New York, on the other hand, is the most varied most

heterogeneous place on earth. No matter how hard you try, you really can't avoid walking by restaurants where people drop your monthly rent on a bottle of wine and store windows where shoes sit like museum pieces on gold pedestals. You can't help but feel trumped. As it were.”¹⁵ Being less satisfied because your neighbor has more hearkens back to that old bane of childhood existence, sibling rivalry. What children want to share their parents' love?

Even among those of you in this room, there will be a financial hierarchy. A few weeks ago, in response to a question from me, I received an email from a Jewish Studies professor at a major research institution. His response to this financial disparity was: “Professors... make less than rabbis, and let the rabbis know that. A starting salary ... now is in the 50's for an assistant professor in the humanities. Senior professors often are at something like 120- way below where senior rabbis or heads of day schools are. Better benefits and pensions, maybe, but not salary. So they should adjust their sights. Lawyers make money because they work endless hours making money for others who share a bit of it with them. Physicians do not make money anymore in some fields.”¹⁶ And those among you who plan to work in Jewish education or communal service? As a colleague said to me recently, “Some of the smartest people in this country are underpaid. It has nothing to do with Jewish life. Education in general is underpaid. Compared to other ministers, rabbis are well paid, but not compared to private industry.”¹⁷ You are not

¹⁵ Jennifer Senior, “Dark Thoughts on Happiness.” In New York Magazine, July 17, 2006, p. 32.

¹⁶ Private communication.

¹⁷ Private communication 12/22/06.

alone. Just last week, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. of the Supreme Court said that the low level of judicial pay has reached the level of a constitutional crisis.¹⁸

None of you will be paid what you are worth if you measure in dollars. I have a friend who is a financial manager at major financial institution. She says that people never think they have enough money. When couples sit in her office to discuss their money, often one of them storms out of the office before they are through. She says it's only the people who have their personal act together who don't act out around money; the more secure they are, the less they act out. The rabbinate was once a vehicle for upward mobility. It was a way of making a good salary, a better salary than your parents and your constituents, as well as a way of garnering instant respect. Now, instead, you find yourself interfacing with board members who are wealthy beyond your wildest dreams. My friend the financial manager and I were discussing the recent articles about the size of those famous bonuses given out at Goldman Sachs last year. Since this particular friend has also been the president of a synagogue and has raised millions of dollars to renovate their building, she has insight from both angles. She says it is important to remember, "These people might be your congregants or constituents. They may be jerks. But you have to come to terms with what they make vs. what you make."¹⁹

In other words, none of this is fair. It is also not fair that how much you are paid may be influenced by your gender, sexual orientation, where you live, or whether you are older

¹⁸ "[The failure to raise judicial pay] has now reached the level of a constitutional crisis and threatens to undermine the strength independence of the federal judiciary." As reported Jan 1, 2007, NJ Star Ledger p. 3.

¹⁹ Private communication, 12/17/06.

and in a second career. But think for a minute about what it means emotionally to feel that something is not fair. It's something adults may think, but children say out loud. "Why did you give him the bigger piece? How come she gets to stay up late and I don't?" Again, it is all about that unquenched childhood thirst called, "Why do you love him more? Why can't I get all the love I need?" There are a number of healthy responses to the unfair distribution of moneys in our society. One is to try to change the system. That is admirable; isn't it what the prophets tried to do? We do believe in speaking truth to power. Our basic goal is the pursuit of justice. Admirable though it might be, however, beware the emotional pitfalls if your motivation falls under the heading called, "Marry the man to change him." If trying to change the system for you is a repetition of trying to change your parents, it will be frustrating and unhealthy. If it is about achieving justice as an act separate from your self, it will be a satisfying challenge. Another response is to distinguish between your sense of personal injustice and what we might call social injustice. In other words, it isn't fair on a societal level that teachers are paid so little, but the injustice isn't personally directed anymore than sub-standard wages are personally directed at third world workers. Perhaps the most important way of responding is to be aware that you have made a choice. When you become a Jewish professional, you give up the possibility of the million-dollar bonus.

And speaking of fairness. Jewish professional choices are not the same for women as for men even though we have made progress in the years since I was ordained. I want to say a word here about gender and money. We know that women in our society are paid less than men. We know that where there are no unions, female teachers may be paid less

than men. We know that female rabbis in the Conservative movement are paid less than men; we know it in the Reform movement, too, although I don't know that we have as clear data. We know that the top twenty Federations have no women at the top and so they can't be paid top dollar; we know that the women in the lower echelons are paid less than their male colleagues. The reality of financial inequity struck my female classmates early on. As we entered the placement process almost three decades ago, I recall my male classmates reassuring us, "Don't worry, you're smart, you're good, you will get hired." When you sit by the phone and wait for the call that doesn't come, you learn the painful way that it doesn't matter how smart or how good you are. We weren't even guaranteed a job. We certainly weren't guaranteed a salary commensurate with those of our male colleagues nor did we even think about it. The financial plot thickens when it comes to women for reasons that are complex. First, we women take actions that often reflect our sense of inadequacy. My impression is that women are too quick to give up salary and benefits in exchange for working fewer hours and feeling less guilt, but then work harder in those hours to compensate. Second, women continue to be viewed differently by lay leaders, whether in the rabbinate, the cantorate, as the Executive Director of the Federation or as a member of the university faculty. I used to joke with a rabbi in my community that when his congregants ran into him in the supermarket, they walked out thinking, "What a terrific husband and father!" But if he had been a woman, they would have walked out thinking, "What's she doing at the store instead of being at the synagogue?" People feel deprived if they think the rabbi loves someone else more, even if that someone else is your own family, but they seem to feel more deprived if the rabbi is a woman. My male classmates were well intended but wrong; it doesn't always matter

how smart you are or how good you are. Financial negotiations are still more complicated for women.

You may have noticed in all this discussion that I haven't mentioned the relationship between money and how smart you are. That's because it doesn't matter. In fact, being smart can sometimes be a disadvantage. I don't mean just because you might be smarter or have a better education than your constituents. I mean that you can use being smart to defend against your feelings. And money is all about feelings. The key is to become emotionally smart and have access to those feelings. You might ask; how do I do that? While I was invited here to stimulate your thinking and not to offer practical solutions, I can make some general recommendations. You have already begun to go in the right direction by being part of Wexner and learning to talk to each other. You can't talk too much. Talking demythologizes many taboos including the sacred cow of money. I also recommend that you talk in supervision and you talk in therapy and that you do that for your entire career. What you want to work on all the time is being aware of your choices, broadening your options and thinking creatively so that your responses don't emanate from some remote childhood fantasy. There is no such thing as knowing yourself once and for all because you will change and your needs will change. And even if you feel like you are in touch with those childhood wishes, it doesn't mean those wishes will disappear. But if you continually prepare yourself for that fact, then when you feel a twinge you will understand why and will have the choice of deciding how you want to respond.

As I worked on this presentation, I wondered how I at your stage in training would have responded to what I am saying. I feel the same hesitation I sometimes feel in premarital counseling; the couple has no idea what it feels like to be married yet you are trying to meet a need in them that doesn't yet exist. My goal is not to discourage you – the opposite, in fact. I want to encourage you to do the emotional work necessary to make you feel happy with your choices. You are among the fortunate; you are being educated to think about these choices now. You have all kinds of skills. Most of you are accustomed to being self-sufficient and self-starters. That is what has gotten you to where you are. But as with all assets, the flip side is a potential liability. In this case, the potential downside is what Parker Palmer calls “functional atheism,” the idea that “the ultimate responsibility for everything rests with [you].”²⁰ I am suggesting that in order to feel comfortable with money, you rethink how you relate to your work. Marshall Breger observes that at one point in time “traditional Jews never invested significant meaning in their jobs. Such meaning came from activities completely outside of work: Religious study, charity and family life. The relevant question about a job was whether it provided enough to support one's family and afforded one the time to study. Work was a means, not an end. It was a part of the journey, not the entire journey. One was not, therefore, defined by one's job.”²¹ You have an opportunity not to be defined by your job, your employers, your salary or your unconscious wishes if you are prepared to do the emotional work. Remember, too, that this endeavor is a sacred one. As Rabbi Yishmael

²⁰ Palmer, p. 12.

²¹ Quoted in Jeffrey K. Salkin, Being God's Partner: How to Find the Hidden Link Between Spirituality And Your Work. Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994, p. 45.

counsels, “One who wishes to acquire wisdom should study the way money works, for there is no greater area of Torah-study than this.”²²

Rabbi Ellen Lewis
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²² Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra 175b.