



SIEBENQUELL

A Path Beyond the Insatiable Heart



/

For several years I witnessed how an elderly woman dealt with her friends and neighbours. She complained loudly, frequently and without pause about her feeling of being isolated and lonely, and these people took her seriously. They invited her into their circle of friends, invited her to dinner, took her on vacations and outings, visited her, took walks with her, called her on the phone and spent a great of time with her and effort on her.

Yet, it was to no avail. After every encounter, meal or conversation, she turned back to her moaning about loneliness. If she spent a wonderful day with these friends, she ended it by complaining that she would go back to her lonely house, while they still had partners and family to whom they would return. She was what my teacher called »an insatiable heart«. After long and exhausting years of offering help, company and time, many of these friends came to the realisation: »No matter what we do, it will never be enough«.

This is a dangerous moment. When we pour ourselves out and start to realise, it will never be enough, it will never suffice, it drains our heart. This is a moment that can give birth to discouragement and resentment. This in turn leads to the resignation that says, »Why bother, when it will never be enough?« And within those subtle movements of the heart from discouragement to resignation, generosity dies. The insatiable heart is a serial killer. First it kills gratitude within itself, then it kills generosity in the hearts of the others.

That raises a deep question: How do we deal with the gifts and graces we have received? In the Jewish tradition of the Passover, we can experience one very powerful response. During the celebration they sing a song entitled »Dayenu«*. The word means »it would have been enough«, or »it would have sufficed«. It has 15 stanzas in which the People of Israel thank God for the 15 gifts he bestowed upon them: five gifts of liberation while they were slaves in Egypt; five gifts of miracles that sustained them for 40 years in the desert, and five gifts of relationship that have kept them in God's presence .

Here are two verses to give you an example of how this song breaks the cycle of the insatiable heart. I will start with Verse 9:

»If He had supplied our needs in the desert for forty years,
and had not fed us the manna – Dayenu, it would have sufficed!«

That is a powerful form of gratitude. This singing heart does not take what is given (forty years of being cared for in the desert) and then ask, »What's next?« Instead, it receives the gift (Manna) and realises that it is in and of itself deeply valuable and to be treasured in a warm and grateful heart. When this heart then says: »Dayenu, it would have sufficed!«, then it appreciates not only the gift, but the giver. It realises that the gift is not to be taken for granted, and thus neither is the giver. Nothing destroys gratitude as swiftly as taking a gift for granted. Then we think that it is our due, that it is owed to us, and that it is our birthright.

Now let us move to Verse 10:

»If He had fed us the manna,
and had not given us the Shabbat – Dayenu, it would have sufficed!«

The singers now deepen the astonishment and joy of the heart. They know that 40 years of care in the desert and the unceasing supply of manna »Dayenu, it would have sufficed!«. But they then tell us and remind themselves that the giver (God) continues to bestow more gifts, lavishing more grace and goodness upon them (in this case the Shabbat).

In just two verses they have made clear that the first gift would have sufficed, the second gift was an additional delight and would have sufficed, and the third gift is an astonishing surprise and would have sufficed.

Imagine writing your own Dayenu. It is like charting the path of God's graciousness and gifts throughout your life. I did it just a few days ago. I started with the first book I read by John Shea and said, »Dayenu, it would have sufficed!«. Then I traced the path forward to the gifts that flowed from or after it, always

repeating the refrain: »Dayenu, it would have sufficed!« 37 stanzas later, I arrived at the last Wellspring Day in Dernbach, saying yet again »Dayenu, it would have sufficed!«

A person who lives, prays and perceives life with God like this, is never in danger of developing an insatiable heart. And where the insatiable heart is conquered, gratitude and generosity are not in danger of being killed.

Erik Riechers SAC
April 14th, 2022

* A small sample of the song Dayenu: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObjjUzWIWJw>