

## “HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED?”

How much do we need?

I know people whose homes are so large most of the rooms sit unused from one year to the next. They own more cars than they drive, more clothes than they wear, make more money than they can spend. Whatever security or exhilaration this affords, it is a painful commentary on the grandiosity that overrides generosity and empathy.

Tolstoy wrote a short story entitled: “How much land does a man need?” It tells of a Russian who travels to Bashkirs, a tribe in hinterlands. They offer to give him as much land as he can cover on foot in one day. Impatiently, the man starts a frenetic journey. He covers as much ground as he can, never pausing, never resting. As the sun sets, he dies of exhaustion. In the end, the amount of land he gets is a six foot plot of earth as a final resting place.

The Rabbis of the Midrash teach us that a baby is born with a closed fist, as if to say, “there is so much to grasp in this world.” The old man dies with his hand open, as if to say, “I can take nothing with me.” Wisdom and goodness lie in opening our hands before death opens them for us.