



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT BEHAR

Real Relatives

There was a famous 1980s joke about an advertising campaign in New York. Throughout the city, posters read, "You have a friend at the Chase Manhattan Bank." Underneath one, an Israeli had scribbled the words: "But in Bank Leumi, you have mishpacha [family]."

R' Jonathan Sacks once shared in one of his talks that the Jewish Nation is more than an ethnicity; it's a large extended family. This Parsha is full of *pesukim* about social legislation that convey this sentiment through its choice of words. "When you sell property to your neighbor... do not wrong *your brother*" (25:14). "If *your brother* becomes impoverished and his hand falters in your proximity... let *your brother* live with you" (25:35-36). "If *your brother* is sold to you... do not work him with slave labor" (25:39). "With your brethren, the Children of Israel – a man *with his brother* – you shall not subjugate him through hard labor" (25:46). These are just a few of the many examples throughout the Torah where fellow Jews are referred to as "brothers." This is a distinctive way of viewing our society and obligations to others; we aren't just fellow citizens or adherents of the same faith – we are a large family. As R' Shimon bar Yochai stated,¹ "When one Jew is injured, all the Jews feel the pain."

In fact, the whole concept of family is absolutely fundamental to Judaism. Hashem Himself defines His relationship with us in terms of family – as that of a parent to His children. The entire book of Bereshit – the Torah's starting point – isn't about Jewish law, but rather revolves around husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters. We are all intertwined by connections that reach deep into our collective being. How else is it possible to explain the bond that Jews worldwide share today after centuries of separation?

As R' Sacks beautifully articulated: "The family is the most powerful vehicle of continuity, and the kinds of changes Jews were expected to make to the world could not be achieved in a single generation – hence the importance of a family as a place of education." We may be divided and argumentative as a nation, but that will never extricate us of our bond as a family. "Argue with your friend, and tomorrow, he may no longer be your friend. But argue with your brother, and tomorrow, he is still your brother."

1. Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Shemot 19:6

A Solitary Journey

R' Shaul Wertheimer recounted a fascinating insight on a mishnah in Pirkei Avot, the subject of study during the weeks between Pesach and Shavuot. "חנינא בן חכניאי אומר הניעור בלילה והמהלך בדרך יחידי ומפנה לבו לבטלה הרי זה מתחייב בנפשו - *R' Chanina ben Chachinai says: one who stays awake at night, or walks on the road alone, or clears his heart to idle matters, has forfeited his life*" (3:4).

Understood simply, the mishnah is warning against subjecting oneself to a dangerous situation, but the *Likutei Moharan* uncovers a whole new dimension to the timeless depth of this teaching. Read in a different light, the mishnah can actually be understood as encouraging positive activities. "הניעור בלילה" – one *should* stay up at night, when one isn't busy with daily tasks, to seclude oneself and talk to Hashem, making a *cheshbon hanefesh* (accounting for one's spiritual progress). "והמהלך בדרך יחידי" – one should isolate from people who would distract him from his *tefillot*, traveling outside the city to have the ability to converse with one's Creator in tranquility and focus. "ומפנה לבו לבטלה" – and at that point, one can clear his heart from anxiety and worldly concerns, reaching a sublime state of "בטלה" – a total suspension of self, a state of oneness where the body and soul are aligned, totally subservient to one's Creator. Then, after all these spiritually uplifting exercises, "הרי זה מתחייב בנפשו" – he attaches himself to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, Who is also referred to as the "מחוייב / *mechuyav*," on a fundamental level [in Jewish wisdom, G-d is alluded to as the *המציאות* – the only necessary, unquestionable Being, as opposed to everything else, which is known as *אפשרי* אפשרי, a dubious reality].

As everything else in our holy Torah, the Ethics of our Fathers is no exception to the incredible depths that lay behind the sacred words. We are reminded here of the significance attached to true meditation – conversing with and pouring one's heart out to Boreh Olam – and its role in reaching the lofty, humbling, and exhilarating experience of true oneness.

Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:

Ariel Ben Frida	Frida Bat Yaffa	Rahamim Ben Shifra	Chana Bat Malka
Miriam Bat Bakol	Yitzchak Ben Naama	Heleni Orna Bat Chen Chana	
Noach Yisrael Ben Yaffah	Itai Avraham Biton Ben Rachel	Gal Bani Ben Iris	

"We are not born winners. We are not born losers. We are born choosers!" (R' Avigdor Miller)