

Peoplehood Worksheet 6B: Peoplehood and Responsibility – Texts

עַנִּי שֶׁהוּא קָרוֹבָּךְ, קָזִין לְכָל אֶذְכָּר ; וְעַנִּי בֵּיתְךָ, קָזִין לְעַנִּי עִירָךְ ;
וְעַנִּי עִירָךְ, קָזִין לְעַנִּי עִיר אַחֲרָתָךְ

The needy who is your relative should be helped before all others; the needy in your neighborhood come before the needy in your city; the needy in your city come before the needy around the world.

--Rambam, Gifts to the Poor, 7:13

- *Do you agree with the Rambam?*
 - *Are there times when this hierarchy doesn't apply?*
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There's a famous Talmudic text that tries to understand the different circles of responsibility for tzedakah. According to this text, if the choice is between a family member and someone not in your family, you take care of your family. If it's a choice between somebody with more need and somebody with less need, you take care of the person with more need. If it's between a Jew and a non-Jew, you take care of the Jew. If it's between someone from your own town or someone from another, you take care of the person from your town. The text is wrestling with the question of how we prioritize Jews without only prioritizing Jews. When we have a situation in which we have a Jew and a non-Jew who are both asking for help, all other factors being equal, we prioritize the need of the Jew; on the other hand, we don't shut out the rest of world--we also prioritize people in our town even if they're not Jewish. And we prioritize those with more need, even if they're not Jewish. There's always a balancing act.

--Rabbi Jill Jacobs (<http://www.momentmag.com/is-there-such-a-thing-as-the-jewish-people/>)

- *Do you believe Jews should always be prioritized?*
 - *Which community (Jewish, neighborhood, American, other) do you feel most responsible to? Which do you feel most connected to?*
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הוּא הָלֶה אָמַר, אִם אֵין אָנִי לִי, מַי לִי. וְכֹשֶׁאָנִי לְעַצְמִי, מַה אָנִי. וְאִם לֹא עֲכַשְׂיוֹן, אִימַּתִּי

[Hillel] used to say:

If I am not for myself, who is for me?

When I am for myself, what am I?

If not now, when?

--Pirkei Avot 1:14

- *How do you balance your responsibilities to yourself and to others?*
- *What are the dangers of being "out of balance"?*

טו ותאמר רות אל-תפָגַע-בִּי, לְעֵזֶךְ לְשׁוֹב מִאַחֲרֵךְ כִּי אֶל-אָשֶׁר תָּלַכְיָ אֶלְךָ, וּבְאָשֶׁר תָּלַיָּנִי אֶלְיוֹן-עַמְךָ עַמְּךָ, וְאֱלֹהִיךָ אֱלֹהִי. יְזִ בְּאָשֶׁר תִּמְוֹתִי אֶמוֹת, וְשָׁם אֲקָבֵר; כִּי יִעָשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי, וְכֵה יוֹסִיף--כִּי הַמִּوتָּה, יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ.

Ruth replied [to Naomi, her mother-in-law], “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. This and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you.”

-- *Book of Ruth, 1:16-17*

- *How does Ruth define what it takes to join Naomi and the Jewish people? What does her statement suggest about our responsibility toward other Jews?*
- *Why do you think our sages bestowed upon Ruth the privilege of King David descending from her?*