

Family First?

Source Sheet

Are we allowed to “care” more for our family or chosen family than for others?

Read the texts and answer the questions at the bottom of each text.

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 251

Background: The Shulchan Aruch is a code of Jewish law written by Rabbi Joseph Caro in the 1560s. This source is in the context of deciding where to give charity.

קרובו צריך להקדימו לכל אדם ואחיו מאביו קודם לאחיו מאמו ועניי ביתו קודמין לעניי עירו ועניי עירו קודמין לעניי עיר אחרת ויושבי ארץ ישראל קודמין ליושבי חוצה לארץ

“Any relative should be given preference to a stranger; a brother of one’s father, to a brother of one’s mother; the poor of his own house to the poor of the city at large; the poor of his own city to the poor of other cities; and the poor that dwell in the Holy Land to those that dwell in other lands.”

Questions to consider:

- How do you feel about this text? Does it resonate with you? Why or why not?
- What values do you see in this text?
- How does the Shulchan Aruch define family?

Andrés Spokoiny, November 14, 2023

[link to article](#)

“Solidarity works in concentric circles or not at all. Without caring for your own, you can’t care for others. You may believe you do, but you don’t. Caring for your family helps you learn about caring in general. You care about your children, then about your friends, then about your tribe, then about your people and then about the world. It doesn’t work the other way around.”

Questions to consider:

- Is there tension for you in this source? Where? Why?
- Do you agree with Spokoiny’s definition of family?
- What is the value of family here?

Rabbi Rachel Timoner (Senior Rabbi of Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn)

Excerpt from sermon given on October 14, 2023

“We live in concentric circles of love, concentric circles of care, concentric circles of obligation, and that is OK. It is OK, it is human, it is right, it is good to care first and most about those closest to you and then outward in widening circles. It is OK to prioritize our own grief before we focus on the grief of others. It is right to rise to save our own people before rising to save others. I understand why our ancestors said that to save a single life among Israel is to save an entire world, when obviously the meaning of the larger text is that every human life has equal value, and every life is worth the life of the whole world. Both are true. We start with us, but we must not ever end with us...Balancing this set of concentric and widening circles is a way to do that.”

Questions to consider:

- Which pieces of this text do you relate to the most?
- Who belongs in each rung of your concentric circles?
- How do you balance giving of your time, energy, mental capacity, and charity to your “set of concentric and widening circles”?