

There is a Sentence in this weeks Torah portion, in fact its just a few words, but they contain a world of meaning among them.

עִמָּךְ, אָחִיךָ וְחִי' ...and your brother shall live WITH you.

The meaning behind these few, yet powerful words, is that while life may be good to you and your family, we must always be thinking of our brothers around us. It is our obligation to make sure that those who are in need, are taken care of and are able to live their best life. And, when lending support to others in our community, it should not be in order to obtain rewards or to avoid punishment, but in a sincere manner because it is the right thing to do. Often we wait until we have a reason to focus on helping others, but the words... ...and your brother shall live with you... reminds us that we need to make this a priority in our lives. Make it so your brother will live with you, not beneath you, or above you, but beside you.

Seems simple, but with that, life consists of many interconnected people and it's in finding that balance of taking care of yourself, while at the same time making sure that you're helping others that becomes the good deed or the mitzvah.

One example of finding this balance between ourselves and others comes from a debate in the talmud between Rabbi Akiva

and Ben Peturah.

There were two men all alone in the desert. One of them had enough water to get to the next city or to the next source of water and the other man was unprepared and had no water at all. Should the man who came prepared share his water, and at the same time endanger his own survival, or should he keep the water for himself and ensure that he lives, even though his companion will die?

In this situation Rabbi Akivah would say that the man with the water should protect his own life and keep the water for himself. He uses the verse

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to emphasize someone can only live with you, if you yourself are alive. In other words, the pasuk teaches that you must protect your own life first and you are not allowed to put your own life in danger to save another.

On the other hand, Ben Petura says that the person with the water SHOULD share with his brother, even though the prepared man endangers his own life by doing so. Rabbi Akiva and Ben

Peturah both stand for helping others. They only argue about the details of WHO to protect first-...leaving us with no real answer. So Making choices about how one should live their life often will come down to who you are as a person, the responsibilities you take on and what you believe in.

Over the last year, while becoming a Bar Mitzvah, I have been learning lessons from the Hebrew word אחריות. RESPONSIBILITY. This word has proven to be very meaningful, as I am embarking on a higher level of responsibility to both myself and to my community. As if life isn't complicated enough... Embarking on this new responsibility can really throw you for a loop! While we have our own personal needs that seem difficult at times to handle, we also have to figure out how to take the focus away from ourselves and feed the souls of others with love, friendship, a sense of community and truth. These tasks are often challenging to manage and often take a lifetime to pursuit. But the phrase "and your brother shall live with you," seems to make it easier for me to understand my responsibilities. Basically wanting the same for others, as I would want for myself is a goal and a responsibility of mine now that I have become a Bar Mitzvah. My parsha today talks about these fundamental responsibilities. And In my opinion, I know how great I feel after helping a friend and that is taking care of myself, while at the

same time taking care of others. The words

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also teaches us that we must extend the loans to the poor. A loan in Jewish law is not a loan you would get from the bank. According to Jewish law you may not charge interest. You shall just loan the money and in return the borrower will return the exact amount of money he received. In fact a loan in Jewish law is a form of Tzedakah. It is different than giving regular charity, it's even better. This is because a loan is a gift that keeps on giving. Regular tzedakah, or charity, gives a person money to buy food, rent, or clothing. However, tomorrow he is left again with nothing. On the other hand, if I lend a man some money to help build his store, it would give him the chance to succeed in business so that he will continue to make money each day and no longer need charity for his rent, food and other needs. This wonderful success starts from that loan that was extended to him, which the lender gets back entirely! The money is then available for the next person who might need a loan.

Sharing your wealth with another is a perfect way to allow “your

brother” to live with you”

When we talk about the laws of saving a life in the desert, we tend to think of it as heroic, but never being a part of our real life.

However, there are people in need that are all around us and we have the opportunity to do a similarly heroic act when we extend a loan to a person without a financial lifeline. Saving a life financially may not make the headlines like saving another’s life in the desert, but it is every bit as important. *We should all learn to live with less, so we as a community could live with more.*

These lessons became very clear to me, when a few weeks ago, my school, together with a catholic and an Ismaili day school recognized the many needs of the people living in the downtown east side . We set up stations throughout the East Hastings area and handed out food and drinks. I witnessed first hand what it meant to them to provide basic needs. I realized how much we had helped them through their gestures of gratitude and thankfulness.

I felt truly grateful for being allowed to enter their world and “live with my brothers” This was an amazing experience that accurately reflects the lessons taught in my torah portion.

Another project that I am involved in speaks volumes about thinking of others. It is called MVP- the Mitzvah Valued Philanthropy Program. For this project, each student in the grade raises money, then chooses a non profit agency that will benefit from these funds. I have chosen The Children's Wish Foundation as my agency. The Children's Wish Foundation grants wishes to kids who are severely disabled or have a life threatening illness. Each child is granted a wish, and with the funds we will raise through the MVP program, it will help a child's wish come true.

This act of tzedakah began with individuals that recognized the need to help those in often helpless situations with the gift of hope and happiness. This is a true mitzvah. "and your brother shall live with you" is the foundation on which the Children's Wish stands. There are many great charities and causes out there and our class MVP will no doubt highlight many in our community, however the take home message is all the same, "your brother shall live with you"... take care of those who are need in whatever capacity that may be.

I know what it feels like to have my community live "with me" and it is a feeling that is kept close to my heart. As I become a bar mitzvah and go out into this world, I hope to take the many lessons that I have learned and use them to help guide me.

I would like to thank Rev Marciano. Without you, this day wouldn't be reality. Your patience while teaching me my Bar Mitzvah, is so much appreciated. Thank you. Rabbi Rosenblatt, it was a real pleasure learning about my Parahsa with you.

Thank you for making learning fun over the past year.

Bubby Lola, Zaida Norman, bubba Dee Dee and Zaida Richard, thank you so much for everything you have done for me in my life. You have taught me so many important life lessons that I will keep with me forever. Thank you so much for being with me today.

To my brother Matthew, you are a true inspiration in every way. Your strength motivates me everyday. And now since you've been away for the year, I really enjoy hanging out with you again. Jordan you're a one of a kind brother. There really is no one else like you. I love how you make me laugh and your passion for life is contagious. Although I hate to admit it, I feel very lucky to have you both as my big brothers guiding the way.

And finally to my parents. Mom and Dad, you are the greatest parents anyone could wish for. You have opened so many doors for me in my life and I thank you for that. Over the past years you have allowed me to meet new cousins that are all here celebrating with me today

.You are so supportive of everything I do and somehow you

make it all happen! You make us all feel like we are truly number one in your lives. Dad your guidance and devotion is endless and Mom, your unconditional love has allowed me to be who I am. Mom, thank you for working so hard to make my Bar Mitzvah happen. I know I will never forget this day.

And Thank you to all of our family and friends from near and far, who have come to help me celebrate this very special day.

Shabbat Shalom