

Through the eyes of the Talmud Yerushalmi

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“Do not turn away from your own flesh” (Isaiah 58:7)

All of us aspire to have those ideal families which we read about in stories. Accepting, forgiving, social and always there for each other.

All too often our families fall short of this ideal, often quite short. We may disdain our family members, hold grudges against them, dread at the thought of family gatherings. We often find that we are there for total strangers before our own family members.

The Talmud Yerushalmi teaches us of the importance of keeping loyalty and giving priority to one’s kin. It tells us a story about Rabbi Yossi Hagelili who divorced his wife because she gave him extreme aggravation and did not treat him with proper respect. The wife remarried a man who could not make ends meet and would beat and degrade her. Rabbi Yossi Hagelili gave them a house and provided for them for the rest of their lives because of the verse: “Do not turn away from your own flesh” (Isaiah 58:7). (Kethuboth 11:3)

Rabbi Yossi HaGelili’s ex-wife, is no longer his wife and the wife’s husband had never even been related to him. Yet Rabbi Yossi HaGelili’s provisions for them are not minimal (as one would expect his aggravating ex-wife would deserve); on the contrary, they are quite lavish and generous. Familial bonds, whether by prior relation or by mere association can not be dissolved!

The prohibition to turn away from a relative is a negative commandment precluding one from letting one’s kin fall, but we see from Rabbi Yossi HaGelili’s actions that it also carries with it a positive undertone, the expectation that you give your kin grace and abundance. In a sense, “Do not turn away” means “Do not treat him unlike a relative”

May the commandment of “Do not turn away” compel us not just to aspire for ideal families as mere nice-to-have, but to actually achieve them as must-haves! (Adapted from Rabbi Y.G. Bechhofer’s lecture: Ayeleth HashaHar : www.talmudyerushalmi.org/lectures)

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