

# RESPONSIBILITY

# עֲבֹרָה



# Learning about *Responsibility*

*There are those who sing the song of their own lives,  
and in themselves find full spiritual satisfaction.*

*There are others who sing the song of their people.  
They leave the circle of individual selfhood  
because they find it without sufficient breadth.  
They attach themselves with a gentle love to the whole community of Israel.*

*There are others who reach towards more distant realms,  
and go beyond the boundary of Israel to sing the song of humankind.  
Their spirit extends to the wider vistas of humanity.*

*Then there are those who rise towards higher horizons,  
linking themselves with all existence,  
with all God's creatures, with all worlds.  
They sing their song with all of them.  
Tradition says that they who sing a portion of song each day  
are assured a share in the world to come.*

*And then there are those who rise with all these songs in one ensemble.  
The song of the self, the song of the people,  
the song of humanity, the song of the world  
all merge in them at all times in every hour.*

*And this completeness is the song of holiness,  
the song of God, the song of Israel ...*

Adapted from Abraham Isaac Kook (1864–1935)  
first Chief Rabbi of Mandatory Palestine

Responsibility. Surely this is such a central Jewish concept! But actually defining it is not so easy or straightforward. There is not even a single Hebrew word for responsibility in our tradition. In section two of our Chavruta book you will study the oft-quoted "classic" text on the theme; *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*. This is often translated as 'all Israel are responsible for each other'. But in fact *arevim* means 'sureties' or 'guarantors' in a specific legal sense. We are bound to each other by legal ties. The other word – *acharayut* – which is used in a modern context to mean responsibility, is also derived from a more limited legal idea.

So where does this leave us? It seems that responsibility is not

quite as simple as it might first appear. It is a subtle, multi-layered concept. Taking Rav Kook's poetic inspiration we invited our teams to explore different aspects of responsibility – both intimately close to home and of a global and universal nature. It seems that responsibility is, literally, a response to the other – sometimes a surprising response – and it is also about the ties that bind us together. Responsibility is wrapped in our complex web of relationships and it is these relationships we will be studying in this Chavruta project.

Each of our teams has undertaken a journey themselves. They invite you to join them on their path of learning in the following introduction:

## The World

In which we explore what it means for each of us to be a unique individual, created "in the image of God". We learn about our responsibilities towards both the natural world and the world of other human beings. We look at responsibility in the widest possible sense. We see how the fact that human beings are created in the image of God means that we are endowed with morality and the capacity for understanding. We see how human beings are given responsibility for all of Creation, its inhabitants, its animal members and natural resources. We also look at the fascinating ways in which our tradition treats our responsibility for people who are not Jewish, the responsibility we have for the stranger and the responsibility our tradition says we have for all the wrongs that are in our power to prevent.

**Gideon Rabinowitz, Daniel Reisel,  
Tamra Wright**

## Israel and the Jewish People

What are the limits of responsibility – between Jewish communities around the world and the modern State of Israel? Can we be at peace while our brothers and sisters are under threat? Does Israel have a responsibility to the wider Jewish community? Where do we stand as Jews in the Diaspora or as Israelis abroad? These questions have guided our journey of discovery. We found some answers and more questions as we followed the Bible, the Talmud, the Israeli Declaration of Independence and modern and ancient Jewish texts. We invite you to join us on this journey; we hope it will take you to

new understandings of your own responsibility towards the different communities you might belong to and to some sense of Jewish peoplehood.

**Yuval Keren, Shlomit Naor,  
Clare Rees**

### **Family and Community**

Duty, honour, obligation, practical/financial commitment ... what does responsibility include, what doesn't it? At the outset of the 21st century, when a previously traditional nuclear Jewish family is no longer necessarily the norm, nor easily definable, where does family begin and end? And once defined, what is the flow of mutual responsibility between a family's different "players"? Finally, how, both from within our own family, and as individuals, do we fulfil our responsibility towards our immediate community? By the same token, what do our sages and contemporary thinkers suggest we can expect from our community and its leaders? The challenge was to distil a world of sources into a morning's learning: much heated discussion and coffee was enjoyed in the process; we hope you enjoy tasting the results.

**Julie Apfel, Benjamin Ellis, Nicola Feuchtwang, Judy Weiner**

### **Self and God**

Section Four is about our responsibility to God. Thinking about our day, we ask why we might have responsibility to God at all. Why should we have a responsibility to God? Did we ever accept responsibility, or was it thrust upon us? And assuming that we do have some responsibility towards God ... what does this

mean? What is involved, what things must we do, and how far does it go? And what should our motivation be for fulfilling our responsibilities? These texts have been chosen to present these issues. We hope you enjoy learning the texts, discussing some of our questions and asking some more of your own.

**Adina Gamse, Andrew Margolis**

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**Maureen Kendler and Steve Miller**