



Our family. The one we grew up in. The one we currently are a part of. The one we aspire to. Are our family relationships ones of choice or ones that are forced upon us? Sometimes our closest relationships are those we most take for granted. Sometimes they are fraught with criticism and tension. How do we develop and express gratitude within our family relationships? In this text study, we will explore the internal workings of gratitude in the context of our family relationships.

Gratitude expresses itself not mainly in deed but in thought and feeling, in an inner experience, in the establishment of a unique relationship between the benefactor and the I who enjoyed his kindness and friendship. This relationship is essentially ontic. Gratitude means going out of ourselves toward the thou, placing ourselves in a unique relation to our benefactor, and letting him share with us our most precious possession — ourselves.

- Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveichik, in *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, page 140.

*Ontic: Physical, real, or factual existence

1. Gratitude within Relationships of Dependence

In the feeling of gratitude, the experience of ontic* fellowship comes to expression. Not the physical but the human existence of the I is dovetailed with the existence of the thou. The I manifests an awareness of belonging to someone else, a knowledge that my existence is irrevocably tied up with the other self, who stands alongside of me...

Thus, kibbud av va-em [honoring parents] is placed in a new dimension, namely that of gratitude — the experience of existential solidarity with which we are bound together and from which it is impossible to drift away. The child is indebted to his parents out of grateful appreciation for everything that they have done for him selflessly and disinterestedly. He feels that his relationship to them is an indestructible fact and that he belongs to them and cannot break away from them...

Discuss:

- Try to imagine the situation described by Rabbi Soloveitchik, of an existential knowledge that “my existence is irrevocably tied up with the other self”. Have you felt this before? Who are the people in your life with whose existence yours is tied up with?
- Do you identify with the sentiment that is expressed in the above passage, whereby the child feels indebted to their parents and therefore automatically grateful to them?
- What is the relationship between your answers to the two questions above?
- In some of the relationships described above, the two subjects are not on equal footing. One is considered the “benefactor” and the other is the “recipient”. In what areas does this dynamic play out in your family relationships and how does it affect expressions of gratitude?

2. Fate versus Destiny

What is the Covenant of Fate? Fate signifies in the life of the nation, as it does in the life of the individual, an existence of compulsion. A strange force merges all individuals into one unit. The individual is subject and subjugated against his will to the national fate/existence, and it is impossible for him to avoid it and be absorbed into a different reality.

What is the Covenant of Destiny? In the life of a people (as in the life of an individual), destiny signifies an existence that it has chosen of

its own free will and in which it finds the full realization of its historical existence. Instead of a passive, inexorable existence into which a nation is thrust, an Existence of Destiny manifests itself as an active experience full of purposeful, movement, ascension, aspirations, and fulfillment...

The life of destiny is a directed life, the result of conscious direction and free will.

-Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveichik, in Kol Dodi Dofek:
Listen — My Beloved Knocks

Discuss:

- Do your family relationships feel more like covenants of fate or of destiny?
- How can you move from a covenant of fate to one of destiny within your family setting?

3. Praise for All Who Remain



אני רוצה לשיר שיר הלל לכל מה שנשאר
פה אֶתְנוּ וְלֹא עוֹזֵב וְלֹא נוֹדֵד כְּצִפּוֹרֵי הַנְּדוּד
וְלֹא בּוֹרַח צְפוּנָה וְלֹא דְרוֹמָה וְלֹא שֵׁר "לְבִי בַמִּזְרַח
וְאֲנִי בַקְּצָה מֵעֶרֶב". אֲנִי רוצה לשיר לְעֵצִים
שְׂאִינָם מְשֻׁלְּכִים אֶת עֲלֵיהֶם וְסוּבְלִים לְהֵט קִיץ וְקָר הַחֶרֶף
וְלְבָנֵי אָדָם שְׂאִינָם מְשֻׁלְּכִים אֶת זְכָרוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם
וְסוּבְלִים יוֹתֵר מִבְּנֵי אָדָם שְׂמֻשְׁלִיכִים הַכֹּל.
אֲבָל מֵעַל לְכֹל אֲנִי רוצה לשיר שיר הלל
לְאוֹהֲבִים שְׂנֵשְׂאָרִים יְחִדּוּ לְשִׁמְחָה וְלִצְעָר וְלִשְׂמֻחָה.
לְעֵשׂוֹת בֵּית, לְעֵשׂוֹת יְלָדִים, עֲכָשׁוּ וּבָעוֹנוֹת הָאֲחֵרוֹת.

I want to sing a song of praise to all that remains
here with us and doesn't leave, doesn't wander off like migratory birds,
will not flee to the north or the south, will not sing "In the East
is my heart,
and I dwell at the end of the West." I want to sing to the trees
that do not shed their leaves and that suffer
the searing summer heat and the cold of winter,
and to human beings who do not shed their memories
and who suffer more than those who shed everything.
But above all, I want to sing a psalm of praise
to the lovers who stay together for joy, for sorrow and for joy.
To make a home, to make babies, now and in other seasons.

- Yehuda Amichai, from Open, Closed, Open.



Final Reflections:

- How does one take relationships that are forced upon us, taken for granted, sometimes extremely critical and turn them into relationships of choice? Of destiny, not fate?
- How can you find gratitude within those relationships and how can you express it?

- יהודה עמיחי, מתוך "סתו, אהבה, פרסומת" בספר "פתוח סגור פתוח".

Discuss:

- Try to describe: What is Amichai praising and appreciative of?
- Can you identify with this sentiment?