The Field of Brotherly Love
Acharei Mot/Kedoshim
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There were two brothers, both farmers, who tilled the field they had inherited from their father. The younger brother was unmarried and lived alone at one end of the field; the older brother lived with his wife and four children at the other end. The brothers loved each other dearly. Together, they plowed, planted, and harvested their wheat and shared the fruits of their labor equally.

One night during the harvest, the younger brother lay down to sleep, but his thoughts were troubled. "Here I am," he said to himself, "all alone, with no wife and no children. I don't need to feed or clothe anyone else. But my brother has the responsibility of a family. Is it right that we share our harvest equally? After all, he needs so much more than I do." At midnight, he arose and took an armful of sheaves from his crop, carried them to his brother's storehouse, and left them there. Then he hurried home for more.

That same night, the older brother also could not sleep. He was thinking about his younger brother. "Here I am," he thought, "surrounded by my family. When I grow old, my children will take care of me. But what will happen to my brother in his old age? Who will take care of him? His needs are so much greater than mine. It isn't fair to divide the crop equally." So, he arose and took an armload of sheaves to his brother's storehouse and left them there. Then he hurried home for more.

Each brother, upon returning to his storehouse, was shocked to find just as much grain as had been there before he had taken some away. Wondering how that could be possible, each man filled his arms with yet another load of sheaves and journeyed back across the field. And, so, it continued all night long, with each brother giving to the other but neither noticing the other in the darkness.

The first rays of the sun appeared on the horizon. Only then, while crossing the field on the way to the other's storehouse, did the brothers finally see each other in the shadows. Suddenly, they understood. They dropped their sheaves and embraced, weeping with gratitude and happiness.

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This story reminds me of my favorite *mitzvah* from this week's Torah portion, one that stands out even among the many powerful commandments: *V'ahavta l'reicha kamocha*—"Love your neighbor as yourself." Interestingly, I first came across this story in a book where rabbis share their favorite tales, and this one was chosen by Rabbi Josh Davidson.

Each brother in the story lives out this commandment so wholeheartedly. Instead of focusing on what they deserved, they each thought about what the other might need. They asked themselves, "If I were in his shoes, what would I hope someone would do for me?" and then they acted on it. Their actions weren't dramatic or public, they were quiet, private, and full of love. They didn't do it for recognition

or reward. They did it simply because they cared. That's what *v'ahavta l'reicha kamocha* looks like—not just loving in theory, but taking real, empathetic action, even when no one is watching.

We live in a world where it can be easy to feel disconnected from each other. Society often separates us, by race, by gender, by religion, by wealth, by background. Sometimes we even overlook the people closest to us, caught up in our own routines. But the brothers in the story didn't let differences or circumstances divide them. In fact, their differences became the very reason they gave more and cared more. The Torah reminds us that every person is created *b'tzelem elohim*, in the image of God. That means that everyone we meet is worthy of dignity, compassion, and respect, regardless of who they are or what they're going through.

I carry this *mitzvah* with me, literally. I wear it on a bracelet that I have on every day. It's a reminder that how I treat people matters. Even if I'm having a hard day, that doesn't give me the right to treat others unkindly. And if someone else is struggling or seems upset, I try to remind myself that they may be having a bad day, too. *V'ahavta l'reicha kamocha* challenges us to rise above the moment, to offer kindness and patience not just when it's easy, but especially when it's hard.

[1] Story from *Three Times Chai* edited by Laney Katz Becker