

We Are All on the Same Boat

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By Rabbi Megan Brumer

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches a powerful parable in Vayikra Rabbah (4:6). A group of passengers set out together on a boat. As the journey began, one passenger opened their bag, pulled out a drill, and started drilling a hole beneath their seat.

Alarmed, the other passengers cried out, "Stop! What are you doing?" The person drilling was puzzled. "Why should you care?" they asked. "I'm only drilling under my own seat, not yours." The others responded, "That may be your seat—but the water will rise and flood the entire boat we're all in."

This story reminds us that no action is truly isolated. We are all in the same boat—what affects one of us, can affect all of us. Even when someone believes they are acting within their rights, their choices can have serious consequences for others.

In a world where policies are passed that harm millions, where environmental decisions threaten our planet, and where inequality persists, we must recognize our shared responsibility to protect one another and our collective future.

This message is especially resonant on July Fourth—a day when we celebrate freedom not only as personal liberty but as a sacred, mutual responsibility. The freedoms we honor today only endure when exercised with care for others and a commitment to the common good.

This is the essence of *achrayut*—the Jewish value of collective responsibility. The person in the boat believed they were acting independently, but their actions put everyone at risk.

Judaism teaches that responsibility isn't only about our own choices; it's about being mindful of how those choices affect others. It's about recognizing that the well-being of each individual is inseparable from the well-being of the community.

Achrayut urges us to ask not just "Is this good for me?" but "How will this affect those around me?" Whether in our families, our synagogues, or our broader society, each of us holds the power to help keep our shared boat afloat.

This midrash challenges us to live with awareness, compassion, and a deep sense of obligation to one another.

On this Independence Day, may we recommit not only to the freedoms we cherish, but to the responsibility that gives those freedoms meaning—working together to ensure that the boat we share remains strong, safe, and just for all.