

“Tied to One Another”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

As powerful a bond as that which tied the Jewish people to God was the bond that tied the Jewish people to one another. Although Jews certainly quarreled — at times viciously — there was a depth to the care that Jews took of one another in ages past that should still touch and inspire us. In his memoirs, the great Yiddish writer Y.L. Peretz expresses it by capping a sad story with one, memorable line.

He writes of his grandfather: “He had been a merchant in the city of Danzig, and the story is told that he came home one Shabbat eve, went through all the ritual devotions without a sign of agitation and, on the following evening, called his creditors together and said to them: ‘Gentlemen, I have returned from my trip penniless. I am ruined. Take all the valuable belongings in my house as payment of my debts.’

“He said to my grandmother: ‘Channele, give them everything,’ and she stripped the jewelry from her person and placed it on the table. Then she opened the cupboard, took out the silver and the gold plates, brought in from the adjoining rooms all the other household treasures and put them on the table.”

Now Peretz ends this story with a single line, without any additional comment: “But the creditors would not take them.”