

“THE POSSIBILITIES OF PARTNERSHIP”

What do the following Jewish figures have in common: Jacob, Moses, Ruth, Hillel, Rava? Each is paired: Jacob and Esau, Moses and Aaron, Ruth and Naomi, Hillel and Shammai, Rava and Abbaye. There are countless other examples. No human being is adequate alone.

Even apart from marriage and family, we all need partners. In “The Open Society” Karl Popper leads with this epigraph, from Edmund Burke: “In my course I have known and, according to my measure, have co-operated with great men; and I have never yet seen any plan which has not been mended by the observations of those who were much inferior in understanding to the person who took the lead in the business.” Everyone can benefit from the wisdom of others, whether they are equal in understanding or not.

There is no perfect person, no ideal outlook. Traditional Talmud study is done in pairs, the keenness of one intellect sharpening the other.

Even God accepts partners, in the form of human beings. Judaism encourages us to work together with God to improve the world. Does God really need us? Well, at least God needs to teach us that a person without a partner is not stronger, but diminished.