

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO NEW MODELS OF FAMILY LIFE?

Yom Kippur 5784 | Rabbi Dr Deborah Kahn-Harris and Rabbi Dr Elliott Karstadt

Definitions

1. Dyadic relationships
2. Monogamy
3. CNM (Consensual Non-Monogamy) / ENM (Ethical Non-Monogamy)
4. Polyamory
5. Polygamy / Polyandry
6. Open vs Closed Relationships
7. Polyfidelity
8. Adultery
9. Polycule
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11. Metamour
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Biblical and Talmudic Case Studies

1. Abraham, Sarah, Hagar

Genesis 16:1-6

א וְשָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָהּ לוֹ וְלֵהָ שִׁפְחָהּ מִצְרַיִת וּשְׁמָהּ הָגָר: ב וּתְאֹמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל-אַבְרָם הִנֵּה-נָא עֲצָרָנִי יְיָ מִלֵּדֶת בֶּא-נָא אֶל-שִׁפְחָתִי אוּלַי אֲבֵנָה מִמֶּנָּה וְיִשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרַי: ג וּתְקַח שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם אֶת-הָגָר הַמִּצְרַיִת שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִקֵּץ עֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים לְשִׁבְתּוֹ אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִשָּׁה לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: ד וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָגָר וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָהּ וַתִּקַּל גְּבִרְתָּהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ: ה וּתְאֹמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל-אַבְרָם חֲמָסִי עָלֶיךָ אֲנֹכִי נָתַתִּי שִׁפְחָתִי בְּחִיקְךָ וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָהּ וְאֶקַּל בְּעֵינֶיהָ יִשְׁפֹּט יְיָ בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ: ו וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל-שָׂרַי הִנֵּה שִׁפְחָתְךָ בְּיָדֶךָ עֲשִׂי-לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּעֲנֶה שָׂרַי וַתִּבְרַח מִפָּנֶיהָ:

¹ Sarai, Avram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Avram, "Look, the Eternal has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a child through her." And Avram heeded Sarai's request. ³ So Sarai, Avram's wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—after Avram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years—and gave her to her husband Abram as wife. ⁴ He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. ⁵ And Sarai said to Abram, "The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The Eternal decide between you and me!" ⁶ Avram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right." Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.

Genesis 30:1-24

א וַתֵּרָא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יֵלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתִּקְנֶה רָחֵל בְּאֶחָתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הִבֵּה־לִּי בָנִים וְאִם־אֵין מִתָּה אֲנֹכִי: ב וַיַּחֲרֶאֱף יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר הִתַּחַת אֱלֹהִים אֲנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר־מִנַּע מִמֶּךָ פְּרִי־בֶטֶן: ג וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אִמָּתִי בִלְהָה בְּנָא אֵלֶיהָ וְתִלְדַּל עַל־בְּרָכִי וְאֶבְנָה גַם־אֲנֹכִי מִמֶּנָּה: ד וַתִּתֵּן־לוֹ אֶת־בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ יַעֲקֹב: ה וַתֵּהָר בִּלְהָה וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן: ו וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל דְּנִנִּי אֱלֹהִים וְגַם שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּתֵּן־לִי בֶן עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ דָּן: ז וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחַת רָחֵל בֶּן שְׁנֵי לְיַעֲקֹב: ח וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל נִפְתָּלִי אֱלֹהִים | נִפְתָּלְתִּי עִם־אֶחָתִי גַם־יָכַלְתִּי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ נִפְתָּלִי: ט וַתֵּרָא לֵאָה כִּי עֲמָדָה מִלְּדַת וַתִּקַּח אֶת־זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחָתָהּ וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְיַעֲקֹב לְאִשָּׁה: י וַתֵּלֶד זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחַת לֵאָה לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן: יא וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה בְּגַד [בָּא גֹד] וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גָּד: יב וַתֵּלֶד זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחַת לֵאָה בֶּן שְׁנֵי לְיַעֲקֹב: יג וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה בְּאִשְׁרִי כִּי אֲשֶׁרוֹנִי בָנוֹת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר:

¹ When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." ² Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" ³ She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children." ⁴ So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob cohabited with her. ⁵ Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ And Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; indeed, [God] has heeded my plea and given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan. ⁷ Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ And Rachel said, "A fateful contest I waged with my sister; yes, and I have prevailed." So she named him Naphtali. ⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as wife. ¹⁰ And when Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son, ¹¹ Leah said, "What luck!" So she named him Gad. ¹² When Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, ¹³ Leah declared, "What fortune!" meaning, "Women will deem me fortunate." So she named him Asher.

יד וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בִּימֵי קְצִיר־חֹטִים וַיִּמְצָא דּוֹדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּבֹא אֹתָם אֶל־לֵאָה וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל אֶל־לֵאָה תְּנִי־נָא לִי מִדּוֹדָאִי בְּנֹד: טו וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הִמָּעַט קַחְתְּךָ אֶת־אִישִׁי וְלָקַחְתְּ גַּם אֶת־דּוֹדָאִי בְנִי וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלֵּילָה תַּחַת דּוֹדָאִי בְּנֹד: טז וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה בְּעֶרְבַּי וַתֵּצֵא לֵאָה לְקִרְיָתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלַי תָּבוֹא כִּי שָׁכַר שְׂכָרְתִּיךָ בְּדּוֹדָאִי בְנִי וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא: יז וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־לֵאָה וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן חֲמִישִׁי: יח וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה נָתַן אֱלֹהִים שְׂכָרִי אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי שִׁפְחָתִי לְאִישִׁי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁשָׁכָר: יט וַתֵּהָר עוֹד לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן־שְׁשִׁי לְיַעֲקֹב: כ וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה זָבַדְנִי אֱלֹהִים | אֶתִּי זָבַד טוֹב הַפֶּעַם יִזְבְּלֵנִי אִישִׁי כִּי־יִלְדַתִּי לוֹ שְׁשֶׁה בָנִים וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ זְבֻלֹן: כא וְאַחַר יֵלְדָה בֵּת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ דִּינָה: כב וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רִחְמָהּ: כג וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסָּף אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חֲרָפְתִּי: כד וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יוֹסֵף לִי בֶן אַחֵר:

¹⁴ Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." ¹⁵ But she said to her, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" Rachel replied, "I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes." ¹⁶ When Jacob came home from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. ¹⁷ God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore him a fifth son. ¹⁸ And Leah said, "God has given me my reward for having given my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar. ¹⁹ When Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son, ²⁰ Leah said, "God has given me a choice gift; this time my husband will exalt me, for I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. ²¹ Last, she bore him a daughter, and named her Dinah. ²² Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. ²³ She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." ²⁴ So she named him Joseph, which is to say, "May the Eternal add another son for me."

3. Elkanah, Peninah, Hannah

1 Samuel 1:1-7

א וַיְהִי אִישׁ אֶחָד מִן־הֶרְמָתִים צוּפִים מִהָר אֶפְרַיִם וּשְׁמוֹ אֶלְקָנָה בֶּן־יִרְחָם בֶּן־אֵלִיהוּא בֶּן־תְּחוּ בֶן־צוּף אֶפְרַתִּי: ב וְלוֹ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם אַחַת חַנָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פִּנְנָה וַיְהִי לַפִּנְנָה יְלָדִים וּלְחַנָּה אֵין יְלָדִים: ג וְעַלָּה הָאִישׁ הָהוּא מַעֲרִירוֹ מִיָּמִים | יְמִימָה לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת וּלְזָבַח לַיהוָה צִבְאוֹת בְּשִׁלָּה וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־עָלִי חֲפְנִי וּפְנִיחָס כִּהְנִים לִי: ד וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיִּזְבַּח אֶלְקָנָה וְנָתַן לַפִּנְנָה אֲשֶׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל־בְּנֵיהָ וּבָנוֹתֶיהָ מְנוֹת: ה וּלְחַנָּה יָתֵן מְנָה אַחַת אֲפִים כִּי אֶת־חַנָּה אָהֵב וַיִּי סָגַר רַחֲמָהּ: ו וְכַעֲסָתָה צָרָתָהּ גַּם־כָּעַס בַּעֲבוּר הָרַעְמָה כִּי־סָגַר יְיָ בְּעַד רַחֲמָהּ: ז וְכֵן יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה מִדֵּי עֲלֹתָהּ בְּבֵית יְיָ כִּן תִּכְעַסְנָה וְתִבְכְּנָה וְלֹא תֹאכַל:

¹ There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives, one named Hannah and the other Peninnah; Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. ³ This man used to go up from his town every year to worship and to offer sacrifice to the Eternal of Hosts at Shiloh. Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Eternal there. ⁴ One such day, Elkanah offered a sacrifice. He used to give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; ⁵ but to Hannah he would give one portion only—though Hannah was his favourite—for the Eternal had closed her womb. ⁶ Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the Eternal had closed her womb. ⁷ This happened year after year: Every time she went up to the House of the Eternal, the other would taunt her, so that she wept and would not eat.

4. David et al, including Jonathan

1 Samuel 18:1-5

א וַיְהִי כִכְלֹתוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶל־שָׁאוּל וְנָפֶשׁ יְהוֹנָתָן נִקְשְׁרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ דָּוִד וַיֵּאָהֲבוּ [וַיֵּאָהֲבוּ] יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ: ב וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שָׁאוּל בְּיוֹם הַהוּא וְלֹא נָתַנוּ לָשׁוּב בֵּית אָבִיו: ג וַיִּכְרֹת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאֵהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ: ד וַיִּתְּפֹשֶׁט יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־הַמַּעֲיֵל אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ לְדָוִד וּמִדָּיו וְעַד־חֲרָבּוֹ וְעַד־קֶשֶׁתוֹ וְעַד־חֲגָרוֹ: ה וַיֵּצֵא דָוִד בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַחֵנוּ שָׁאוּל יִשְׁכָּלִל וַיִּשְׁמָהוּ שָׁאוּל עַל אַנְשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה וַיִּיטַב בְּעֵינָי כָּל־הָעָם וְגַם בְּעֵינָי עַבְדֵי שָׁאוּל:

¹ When [David] finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself. ² Saul took him [into his service] that day and would not let him return to his father's house. ³ Jonathan and David made a pact, because [Jonathan] loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing and gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt. ⁵ David went out [with the troops], and he was successful in every mission on which Saul sent him, and Saul put him in command of all the soldiers; this pleased all the troops and Saul's courtiers as well.

טז וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיהוּדָה אָהֲבָה אֶת־דָּוִד כִּי־הָיָה יוֹצֵא וּבָא לִפְנֵיהֶם:

¹⁶ All Israel and Judah loved David, for he marched at their head.

כ וַתֵּאֱהָב מִיכָל בַּת־שָׁאוּל אֶת־דָּוִד וַיִּגְדּוּ לְשָׁאוּל וַיִּשָּׂר הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינָיו: כֹּא וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶתְנַנֶּה לוֹ וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְמוֹקֵשׁ וַתְּהִי־בּוֹ יַד־פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל־דָּוִד בְּשָׂתִים תִּתְּחַתֵּן בִּי הַיּוֹם:

²⁰ Michal daughter of Saul had fallen in love with David; and when this was reported to Saul, he was pleased.

²¹ Saul thought: "I will give her to him, and she can serve as a snare for him, so that the Philistines may kill him." So Saul said to David, "You can become my son-in-law even now through the second one."

2 Samuel 3:2-5

ב וַיֵּלְדוּ [וַיִּוָּלְדוּ] לְדָוִד בָּנִים בְּחֶבְרוֹן וַיְהִי בְּכוֹרוֹ אֲמֹנֹן לְאֲחִינוֹעַם הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִית: ^ג וּמִשְׁנֵהוּ כָלָאֵב לְאֲבִיגַיִל [לְאֲבִיגַיִל] אִשְׁתּוֹ נָבָל הַכַּרְמֶלִי וְהַשְּׁלִשִׁי אַבְשָׁלוֹם בֶּן־מַעַכָּה בַת־תַּלְמִי מֶלֶךְ גִּשּׁוּר: ^ד וְהָרְבִיעִי אֲדֹנִיָּה בֶן־חַגִּית וְהַחֲמִישִׁי שְׁפָטִיָּה בֶן־אֲבִיטָל: ^ה וְהַשְּׁשִׁי יִתְרֵעַם לַעֲגִלָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ דָּוִד אֵלֶּה יָלְדוּ לְדָוִד בְּחֶבְרוֹן:

² Sons were born to David in Hebron: His first-born was Amnon, by Ahinoam of Jezreel; ³ his second was Chileab, by Abigail wife of Nabal the Carmelite; the third was Absalom son of Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; ⁴ the fourth was Adonijah son of Haggith; the fifth was Shephatiah son of Abital; ⁵ and the sixth was Ithream, by David's wife Eglah.

2 Samuel 11:2-6

ב וַיְהִי אֲלֵי לַעֲזַת הָעָרֶב וַיָּקָם דָּוִד מֵעַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹ וַיֵּתֶהֱלֶךְ עַל־גֹּג בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֵּרָא אִשָּׁה רֹחֶצֶת מַעַל הַגֹּג וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת מְרֹאֶה מְאֹד: ^ג וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד וַיְדַרְשׁ לָאִשָּׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלוֹא־זֹאת בַּת־שֶׁבַע בַּת־אֵלִיעָזֶר אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲוִרְיָה הַחַתִּי: ^ד וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד מַלְאָכִים וַיִּקְחָהּ וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ וְהִיא מִטְּמָאָתָהּ וַתֵּשֶׁב אֶל־בֵּיתָהּ: ^ה וַתַּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתַּגִּד לְדָוִד וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי: ^ו וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד אֶל־יוֹאָב שְׁלַח אֵלַי אֶת־אֲוִרְיָה הַחַתִּי וַיִּשְׁלַח יוֹאָב אֶת־אֲוִרְיָה אֶל־דָּוִד:

² Late one afternoon, David rose from his couch and strolled on the roof of the royal palace; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³ and the king sent someone to make inquiries about the woman. He reported, "She is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam [and] wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴ David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her—she had just purified herself after her period—and she went back home. ⁵ The woman conceived, and she sent word to David, "I am pregnant." ⁶ Thereupon David sent a message to Joab, "Send Uriah the Hittite to me"; and Joab sent Uriah to David.

7. Rabbi Yochanan, Reish Lakish

Babylonian Talmud, Bava M'tzia 84a

יומא חד הוה קא סחי ר' יוחנן בירדנא חזייה ריש לקיש ושוור לירדנא אבתריה אמר ליה חילך לאורייתא אמר ליה שופרך לנשי א"ל אי הדרת בך יהיבנא לך אחותי דשפירא מינאי קביל עליה בעי למיהדר לאתיי מאניה ולא מצי הדר

One day, Rabbi Yochanan was bathing in the Jordan, when Reish Lakish saw him and jumped into the Jordan after him. He [Rabbi Yochanan] said to him, 'Your strength should be for the Torah.' He replied, 'Your beauty should be for women.' He said to him, If you repent, I will give you my sister [in marriage], who is even more beautiful than me.' He undertook [to repent]; then he wished to return to collect his weapons, but could not.

אקרייה ואתנייה ושויה גברא רבא יומא חד הוה מפלגי בי מדרשא הסיף והסכין והפגיון והרומח ומגל יד ומגל קציר מאימתי מקבלין טומאה משעת גמר מלאכתן

[Rabbi Yochanan] taught him Bible, taught him Mishnah, and turned him into a great man. One day in the House of Study they were engaging in a dispute [regarding]: the sword, the knife, the dagger, the spear, a hand sickle and a harvest sickle, from what point are they susceptible to ritual impurity? From the time of the completion of their manufacture.

ומאימתי גמר מלאכתן רבי יוחנן אמר משיצרפם בכבשן ריש לקיש אמר משיצחצחן במים א"ל לסטאה בלסטיותיה ידע אמר ליה ומאי אהנת לי התם רבי קרו לי הכא רבי קרו לי אמר ליה אהנאי לך דאקרבינך תחת כנפי השכינה

And when is the completion of their manufacture? Rabbi Yochanan said, 'From when one fires it in the furnace.' Reish Lakish said, 'From when it has been furbished in water.' [Rabbi Yochanan] said to him, 'A robber understands his trade.' [Reish Lakish] replied, 'And how have you benefited me? There [before] I was called "master" and here I am called "master".' [Rabbi Yochanan replied,] , By bringing you under the wings of the *Shechinah*.'

חלש דעתיה דרבי יוחנן חלש ריש לקיש אתאי אחתיה קא בכיא אמרה ליה עשה בשביל בני אמר לה (ירמיהו מט, יא) עזבה יתומיך אני אחיה עשה בשביל אלמנותי אמר לה (ירמיהו מט, יא) ואלמנותיך עלי תבטחו

Rabbi Yochanan was offended, [and as a result] Reish Lakish fell ill. [Rabbi Yochanan's] sister came and wept before him. She said to him, 'Forgive him, for the sake of my son.' He replied, 'Leave your fatherless children. I will keep them alive' (Jeremiah 49:11). [She said,] 'For the sake of my widowhood then.' [He replied,] 'And let your widows trust in me' (Jeremiah 49:11).

8. Rabban Gamliel and Tuv

Mishnah Brachot 2:7

וכשמת טבי עבדו, קבל עליו תנחומין. אמרו לו תלמידיו, לא למדתנו רבנו, שאין מקבלין תנחומין על העבדים. אמר להם, אין טבי עבדי כשאר כל העבדים, כשר היה:

When his slave Tavi died, [Rabban Gamliel] accepted condolences. His students said to him, 'Have you not taught us, rabbi, that we do not accept condolences for slaves?' He replied, 'Tavi was not just any old slave to me; he was kosher*.'