

א ב י ס ל ת ו ר ה !

March 6, 2026

THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER
OF MAIMONIDES SCHOOL

י"ז אדר תשפ"ו · כי תשא

והרגו איש את אחיו

By Harry Davidoff '28

והרגו איש את אחיו is easily one of the most dramatic in all five books of the תורה. The newly freed Jewish people, believing משה to be dead, erect a golden calf in his place - arguably one of the most defining actions of their entire time in the desert. משה barely saves most of them from death, and in the course of doing so receives the 13 Attributes of Mercy that we use in prayer today. This, however, is not what I want to talk about. It is, admittedly, a topic that definitely warrants discussion, but it has been widely discussed in the past and certainly will be in the future.

Another interesting topic is when משה tells the לויים that have rallied around him to go against the rest of בני ישראל, he puts it in a way that struck me as very odd - "והרגו איש את אחיו" - "and each man should kill their brother" (שמות לב:כד). Isn't the reason that the לויים are allowed to serve in the משכן because none of them went against ה' How, then, could they be killing their brothers?

There are a number of different ways that the commentators answer this question. The most widely used answer is sourced from יומא סו: and is cited by רש"י, ברכת אשר, and משכיל לדוד. This opinion says that the לויים did not actually kill their "brothers," per se. Instead, they killed their half-brothers - they had the same mothers, but had different fathers, meaning that those that were killed did not actually come from the tribe of לוי. Likewise, when it says a few verses later that the לויים also killed their sons, it refers to the

sons of their daughters, who were from the tribes of ישראל.

The אור החיים, on the other hand, offers an entirely different explanation. He begins by noting that the תורה says that the לויים should kill their brothers and then immediately follows by saying that they should kill their close relations (והרגו איש את אחיו... ואיש את). Why, he asks, did the תורה have to say it both ways? In order to resolve this seeming redundancy, the אור החיים puts forth a profound idea. He says that there are two different ways that people can be related to each other. The first is that of familial ties, being related to one another through birth or marriage. The second, however, is that of the soul. According to his opinion, our נשמות are taken before birth from different locations, so to speak, in שמים. People with souls from similar places have similar outlooks and share bonds just as strong, if not stronger, than those between physical relations.

This reading, in my opinion, makes a compelling point about the bonds that we make while moving through our everyday lives. Sometimes, we will meet people and simply hit it off with them, creating friends with whom we will continue to interact for months, years, or sometimes even the rest of our lives. What the אור החיים is saying is that these connections are more than simply a shared interest or sense of humor. These people share with us, on a deep, spiritual level, certain traits which are derived from their נשמות, and can even be regarded as our family. May we all be blessed with loving and supporting families in the years to come.

This month's issue is not sponsored! If you would like to sponsor a future month of A Bisl Torah please visit our website

To read past issues or sponsor future visit
ABISLTORAH.ORG

