

# You Are Your Parents' Keepers

Rabbi Reuven Becker

Reviewed by Dr. Yitzhak Berger

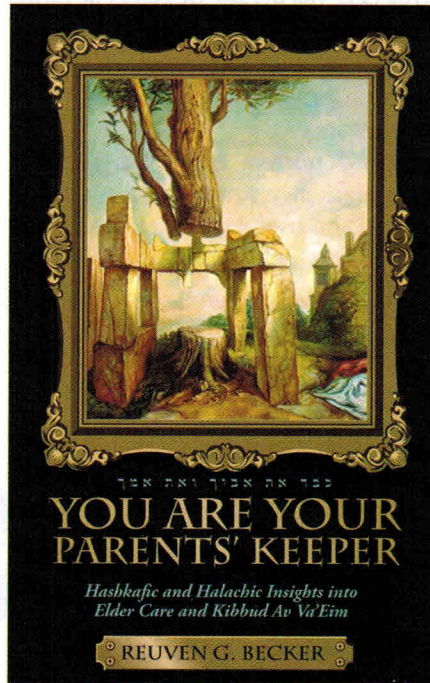
**Rabbi Reuven Becker is an expert in the field of elder care and has devoted himself to the study and dissemination of information related to the mitzvah of kibur av v'eim. The author is a veteran caregiver, Bikur Cholim volunteer, and has designed and developed Jewish hospice programming, quality assurance of long term care services, and graduate student training in geriatrics. He has dedicated himself to encouraging and strengthening the mitzvah of kibur av v'eim by organizing informative public forums and serving as a personal resource through his L'orech Yomim foundation.**

“**Y**ou are Your Parents' Keeper” follows his earlier sefer, “L'orech Yomim,” a

compendium of the halachos of kibur av v'eim. His latest effort, although focused on kibur av v'eim, deals with issues connected to illness and end of life related to all people. The topics covered include: caring for a frail and sick parent, care management, end of life issues, aveilus, honoring parents after their petirah, and confronting the challenges of life, death, and illness. As Rabbi Becker states in his introduction, he hopes, through his work, to bring solace to caregivers and others who find themselves dealing with end of life issues.

People today are living longer. It's wonderful to have the zchus of caring for one's elderly parents; it also presents a variety of challenges. Particularly for Jewish households, the challenges are epic. The issues may range from the halachic, emotional, and financial, to the medical, legal, and logistical. The halachos dealt with in this book, particularly those relating to aveilus, are generally not studied or taught in yeshiva.

The sefer is well organized, with easy to read print. Accessibility is enhanced by a comprehensive table of contents and index that make it user friendly and easy to access relevant material. I par-



ticularly found the chapter endnotes helpful. They allow both the casual user, as well as the serious scholar, the opportunity to study any aspect of the text in greater depth by providing easy access to the source documents. Also very helpful and informative, are the extras provided, such as documents for advanced directives and health proxies, as well as instructions on how to best utilize them. There's also an “aveilus worksheet” that can be very helpful.

What is perhaps most impressive is the scope of the sefer. It lays out and

describes the mitzvos and minhagim, and provides practical tips on how to accomplish them. This sort of advice could only be provided by someone with lots of hands-on experience in addition to their halachic expertise. On a different level, it provides a philosophical and hashkafic framework, enhanced by sources from the Gemorah, Rishonim, and Achronim, and by the inclusion of in-depth teshuvos from a variety of sources. It deals with esoteric topics such as the neshama, tumah, and kedusha, in a way that makes them comprehensible to the lay person.

The sefer is enhanced by material from such eminent Torah scholars as Rabbis Moshe Sternbuch, Shlomo Brevda, Yisroel Reisman, and Mordechai Willig. Bringing Rabbi Sternbuch's depth of insight to the English language readership is of itself a great public service. Indeed, how he deliberates the sensitive question, “If a parent is old and frail, is there an obligation to have him move in to live with you?” provides an understanding of the torah values on the matter.

Rabbi Becker includes many halachos and minhagim that are not widely known or understood within their proper context. For example, when one makes hamotzi on Shabbos, the challa should be placed on a plate to pass around, and not be passed from hand to hand, an act reserved for the aveil.

A recurring theme in the sefer is the

concept of bera mizakeh abba, a son brings benefit to his father. This important principle is explained in the context of how the individual can maintain a relationship with, and provide benefit to, a deceased parent. The many halachic and Midrashic sources cited provide a deeper understanding of this essential topic.

Rabbi Becker, rightfully, often includes a reminder that when it comes to an individual issue or question, one should check with one's personal posek. Many of the issues detailed in the book are complex and sensitive and require advice based on individual situations and needs. It's not possible to provide this in any book. One example of this is the issue of whether to inform a patient with a poor prognosis of his true situation. This is a very complex issue, with an answer that may vary depending on the specifics of the situation, as well as the latest medical/psychological knowledge related to death and dying. No one can argue with the responsa of the gedolim of previous generations, yet one needs

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to review the data with a current posek in order to ensure that the situation is being viewed in its proper context. The necessity of checking with one's rabbi or posek can't be emphasized enough. In the instance where multiple family members are involved, it becomes especially necessary to select a rabbi whose direction will be accepted by all in order to reduce family tensions that are often provoked by the nature of the circumstances.

Writing from a Torah perspective, Rabbi Becker has provided us with an original and useful text that can be utilized as a learning tool, resource, and

reference work for all Jewish households, counselors, rabbis, educators, physicians and related healthcare professionals. "You are Your Parents' Keeper" provides a clear methodical framework that allows all readers to face these challenges in an organized, compassionate, and informed manner.

"You Are Your Parents' Keeper" is available at Jewish bookstores and online from Feldheim.com

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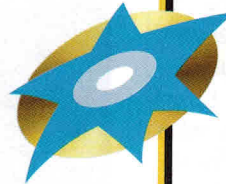
*Dr. Yitzhak Berger is a licensed psychologist who has been in practice for close to 40 years. He has worked in a wide variety of settings, many of them with geriatric populations. He is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Applied Psychology Department at New York University. He is a member of the Young Israel of Jamaica Estates.*

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