

Beyond Patriarchy: Jewish Fathers and Families

Lawrence H. Fuchs



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Is patriarchy necessary to ensure responsible fathering? Lawrence H. Fuchs, author of Family Matters, argues that the link between male dominance and fatherhood is no longer iron-clad. Analyzing the universality of patriarchy and its incentives for cultural fatherhood, Fuchs concedes that the importance of biological differences between the sexes was a possible, even plausible, basis for the evolution of patriarchy. But in this timely work he imagines a new paradigm of fatherhood for a post-patriarchal age, one inspired by the history of Jewish patriarchy. Two millennia ago the rabbis established the strategies to curb the extreme abuses of patriarchy found in all civilizations. They did so by according wives significant sexual and economic rights. In the last two centuries as Jews became more integrated into the societies in which they lived, their unique variation of patriarchy was disrupted. Fuchs argues that the Jewish story sets the precedent for fundamental change in the nature of patriarchy today, thus breaking what may have been the evolutionary connection between male dominance and incentives for fatherhood. It is Fuchs's startling conclusion that the Jewish precedent points to the next step in evolution: fathers without patriarchy.

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