

Just a few days ago, when as part of the *Simkhat Torah* celebration we were dancing with the Torah scrolls around the Sanctuary, we opened one of the scrolls from Genesis, all the way to the end of the Book of Deuteronomy. This became a wonderful opportunity for those who are not familiar with the way the scroll looks to appreciate and learn how to recognize the different sections within the text.

The opened scroll covered from the left side of the bimah along the windows onto the back wall and then past the entrance to the Sanctuary. The whole Torah! This is what takes one full year to read, from the very beginning to the end. As I was holding the *Bereshit* end, I was so tempted to bring my end across the Sanctuary and meet the other end, and, in this way, show the continuity of Torah.

We don't miss a beat! At the same time as we complete the Book of Deuteronomy, right away, we start from *Bereshit* all over again!

Having completed the full cycle, we are now blessed with the opportunity to go back to the first chapters in the Book of Genesis, one more time, and extract new teachings from these texts.

As part of the foundational stories of *Bereshit*, we have the creation of Adam, as the first human.

The *Talmud*, in a masterful way, uses this opportunity to teach about inclusiveness and diversity.

In *Masekhet* (Tractate) *Sanhedrin* we find the following text:

"Therefore, the first human being, Adam, was created alone, to teach us that whoever destroys a single life, the Torah considers it as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a single life, the Torah considers it as if he saved an entire world.

Furthermore, only one person, Adam, was created for the sake of peace among men, so that no one should say to his fellow, 'My father was greater than yours.'

Also, man [was created singly] to show the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, for if a man strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, made each man in the image of Adam, and yet not one of them resembles his fellow."

Quite fascinating text! The Rabbis are concerned with certain issues and they use this text to teach us about, at least, three very important lessons; all of them contained in this short Talmudic passage.

- a) Social responsibility: Every life is important. Destroying one life is equal to destroying humanity!
- b) Equality: We all come from the same origin; therefore no one can claim preeminence over others based on an erroneous assumption of being born from a superior ancestry.

- c) Diversity: We are all different. No human being looks the same as another human being, the way coins do. Still, in spite of looking differently, we all have the exact same value. Each life is precious!

These three lessons, all coming right out of the *Bereshit* narrative, should speak to us about what is taking place in our society today. All lives matter! No one should be treated as being of less value; no one can claim superiority over another human being!

May we use these lessons from *Bereshit* for the healing and improvement of our society.

Shabbat Shalom!

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