

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the sponsors of this week's drasha:

- Chaim and Sherry Berlin and Dr. Bruce and Julie Fried, in memory of Mrs. Vera Gradon, mother of Dr. Jeremy Gradon. May her memory be for a blessing for her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.
- Brian Sporn, in memory of his father, Cantor Lawrence Sporn, whose *yahrzeit* will be the 22nd of Teves.

May the *neshamos* have an *aliya* and may all the sponsors be rewarded for their generosity and dedication to the shul with *bracha* and *hatzacha* and good health.

This week, the Baltimore Jewish community mourned the loss of a truly great woman, a pillar of our community, Rebbetzin Dr. Aviva Weisbord, *a"h*. I first met her when I was a talmid of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, where she stood by her husband the Mashgiach. As his devoted Rebbetzin, she took an active role in creating a warm and nurturing environment for the Yeshiva students. Later, I watched in awe, as she served on committees and boards for numerous community organizations, gaining the admiration of everyone she met; observant and non-observant, Jew and non-Jew alike. She was a walking *kiddush Hashem*, with her wonderful *midos*, wisdom, and humility and the way she faithfully carried on the legacy of the esteemed Ruderman and Weinberg families. She balanced traditional and broadminded ways of thinking, and was a passionate advocate for every member of our community.

She was interviewed in 2016 about the topic of leadership by the Orthodox Union's *Jewish Action* magazine and began as follows:

"My leadership training began around age five. That's when my mother, Rebbetzin Chana Weinberg, a"h, recruited me to participate in a Ner Israel Ladies Luncheon. Did I know that watching her present a vision to the group, making sure they took responsibility for the implementation of that vision, and then give them all the credit for the final product was leadership at its best? Not a clue! But by the time I was fifteen, my heart and head had absorbed these basic principles; everything else was commentary."

And indeed, our community was fortunate to have her leading in so many ways, for so many years, always making those around her better, never looking for the credit for herself. The enormous magnitude of the loss will be felt for years to come. May her memory be a blessing.

Sefer Breishis is the story of the creation of the world and of human beings. Commentators suggest that the world was created first with one human being—the ultimate in *achdus*, and our mission is to continue that sense of *achdus* in the way we relate to others, seeing ourselves all linked to Hashem and that first unified moment of creation.

Rav Hirsch comments on the Pasuk *זה ספר תולדות אדם* *This book is of the development of Adam...*

על פי זה נבין את דברי חכמינו: "ר' עקיבא אומר, ואהבת לרעך כמוך, זה כלל גדול בתורה" (ויקרא יט, יח, תורת כהנים). אכן, **לאמתו של דבר יש רק עבירה אחת: האנוכיות**. משנשתחרר האדם מן האנוכיות, וחברו חביב עליו כגופו, יכול הוא למלא את כל תפקידיו ולקיים את כל המצוות. ואילו בן עזאי אומר: "זה ספר תולדות אדם, זה כלל גדול מזה". פסוק זה מביע את אחדות המין האנושי.

Rabbi Akiva says that love your neighbor as yourself is a great all embracing principle of the Torah. Indeed, the truth is that there is only one sin, selfishness, egoism. Once a person has freed himself from egoism, and his fellow man is as dear to him as his own soul, he is capable of performing all his duties and fulfilling all the Mitzvos. Ben Azai, however, said that sefer toldos adam, is still greater, more comprehensive principle. This sentence expresses the unity of the human species...

But as we reflect on the major themes in Sefer Bereishis, which we finished reading this morning, the recurring theme is just the opposite of unity. It is one of conflict and division—hatred between brothers and families. In contrast, the next Sefer, Shemos, begins with a description of the Jewish people as a close-knit family unit of 70 members—all living together with a sense of *achdus*, in the Egyptian town of Goshen.

שמות פרק א

(ה) וַיְהִי כִּלְנֶפֶשׁ יִצְחָק יָרְדוּ יַעֲקֹב שְׁבַע עִיִּים גִּפְשׁ וַיֹּסֵף הֵיךְ בְּמִצְרָיִם:

The **Kli Yakar** notes that the pattern of conflict began at the beginning; with Kayin and Hevel, continuing with Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Esav, and ended, finally, with Yosef and his brothers as they come down to Mitzrayim.

בראשית פרשת ויגש פרק מו פסוק כו - כז

(כו) כָּל־הַנְּפֹשׁ הַבָּאָה לִיעֲקֹב מִצְרַיִמָּה יִצְחָק יָרְכוּ מִלְבָּד נָשִׂי בְנֵי־יעֲקֹב כָּל־נְפֹשׁ שְׁשִׁים וְשֵׁשׁ:
(כז) וּבְנֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדוּ־לוֹ בְּמִצְרָיִם גִּפְשׁ שְׁנָיִם כָּל־הַנְּפֹשׁ לְבֵית־יעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרַיִמָּה שְׁבַע־עִיִּים: פ

כלי יקר בראשית פרשת ויגש פרק מו פסוק כו

(כו) כל הנפש הבאה ליעקב. אף על פי שהיו נפשות רבות מכל מקום קראם כולם נפש לפי שקודם זה היו האחים מתקנאים ביוסף והיו נפשות חלוקות ועכשיו נעשו לאחדים וסרה קנאתם, וגם יוסף לא היה לו לב עליהם. . .

The “nefesh” (person) that came with Yaakov. Even though there were many “nefashos,” (persons) nevertheless, the Torah calls them “nefesh” (person), because previously the brothers were jealous of Yosef and were separate “nefashos,”(persons), but now they united as their jealousy ended...

This long-running pattern of familial strife leads us to ask: What was the real problem? And what eventually brought them all together at the end of the Sefer?

Let us go back and analyze the story of **Yosef**, which we have read for the past several weeks. Yosef's brothers resented him because their father, Yaakov, gave Yosef a *kesones passim*, a special striped coat—to represent the special bond he felt with him.

בראשית פרק לז

(ג) וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו כִּי בֶן זָקֵנִים הוּא לּוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לּוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:
(ד) וַיִּרְאוּ אֲחָיו כִּי אֶתוֹ אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל אֲחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֵם:

(יא) וַיִּקְנָאוּ בּוֹ אֲחָיו וַאֲבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת הַדָּבָר

This led to hatred and jealousy, and the story played out with the brothers plotting to kill Yosef...and eventually selling him to a caravan that transported him to Mitzrayim.

No matter Yaakov Avinu's original intentions in giving the special coat to Yosef, he certainly saw how this favoritism caused a major disruption in the relationship between Yosef and his brothers. So, it seems quite puzzling that, at the end of his life, Yaakov seems to make the same error again...twice.

The first occurs when Yaakov is ready to give *brachos* to Yosef's sons, Efraim and Menashe. Yosef places them in front of his father, with Menashe, the *bechor*, next to Yaakov's right hand, as was the custom. Yaakov switches his hands to give the greater prestige to Efraim, the younger brother, something that had the potential to cause great sibling rivalry and conflict.

בראשית פרק מח

(יג) וַיִּקַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת שְׁנֵיהֶם אֶת אֶפְרַיִם בִּימֵינוּ מִשְׁמָאל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת מְנַשֶּׁה בְּשִׁמְאֵלוֹ מִימֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו:
(יד) וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת יְמֵינוּ וַיִּשֶׁת׀ עַל רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וְהוּא הַצְעִיר וְאֶת שְׁמָאלוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה שְׁכַל אֶת יָדָיו כִּי מְנַשֶּׁה הַבְּכוֹר:
(טו) וַיְבָרֵךְ אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר תִּהְלַכְוּ אִתִּי לִפְנֵי אֲבֹתַי לִפְנֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם וַיִּצְחַק הָאֱלֹהִים הָרַעָה אֶתִּי מֵעוּדֵי עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:
(יח) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֲבִיו לֹא כֵן אָבִי כִּי זֶה הַבְּכֹר שִׁים יְמִינְךָ עַל רֹאשׁוֹ:

(יט) וימאן אביו ויאמר ידעתי בני ידעתי גם הוא יהיה לעם וגם הוא יגדל ואולם אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו וזרעו יהיה מלא הגוים:

The second occurs when Yaakov is ready to give the twelve *shevatim* their *brachos*. He calls them all in together, to hear the praise and criticism of one another.

בראשית פרק מט

(א) ויקרא יעקב אל בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם את

אשר יקרא אתכם באחרית הימים:

(ב) הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב ושמעו אל ישראל אביכם:

Was it important for each of them to hear, right then, Yaakov's praise and criticism for all of them?

Wouldn't this whole episode just make it harder for the brothers to get along after their great father passes on? Wouldn't it cause more unnecessary jealousy and strife?

The **Benei Yissaschar** gives a fascinating explanation regarding why, traditionally, on Friday night, we bless our sons to be like Ephraim and Menashe. Why were they chosen over everyone else in Tanach? What is the message we are trying to impart?

He suggests that they were the first brothers in the Torah to have no strife. Even when Yaakov switches his hands, thus elevating Ephraim over his older brother Menashe, we do not hear them object.

אפרים ומנשה הם האחים הראשונים במקרא שאינם רבים, ושוררים ביניהם אחווה ושלוש. גם כאשר יעקב אבינו שיכל את ידיו ונתן העדפה לאפרים על מנשה, אין קנאה ביניהם, והאחים נשארים מאוחדים. לכן ברכת האבות מזכירה את אפרים ומנשה דווקא. האב והאם המברכים מצפים, מקווים ומתפללים שתשרור תמיד אחווה בין ילדיהם, ולכן הם מברכים אותם בברכה זו. . האזכור של אפרים ומנשה מבקש למנוע זאת.

They are the model for unity. But what was their secret?

Ephraim and Menashe show us that the secret to unity is not in pretending that everyone is the same. It is about understanding that we are all connected, and that we need one another for our success, and that we must help one another. Chazal in *Vayikra Rabba* present the imagery that the Jewish people are rowing together in the same boat. We need each other to get to our ultimate destination.

I think the fact that Ephraim and Menashe were the first brothers to grow up in a foreign land, away from their extended family, contributed to their feelings of solidarity with one another. When you grow up in a foreign land, as the underdog, the minority—when you can depend only on your own family—you understand that you need to look out for one another—you cannot afford the luxury of *machlokes*. They took responsibility for one another. They looked out for one another. They were invested in one another. They understood that they were sailing in the same boat.

I believe that is why unity was finally achieved only when the brothers came down to Mitzrayim...when they were unsettled—arriving in a new land—together. They realized at that moment that they needed one another—that they were responsible for one another.

And in that context—seeing themselves as a unified family—Yaakov Avinu was able to give them *brachos* in front of one another. In that way, they can hear about another brother's talents, which can help them all. And they can learn about another brother's struggles and challenges—which they can help him with. Yaakov understood that *achdus* is not achieved by pretending that everyone is the same. It comes about from people joining together—understanding that they are a team—that they are connected. He brought Ephraim and Menashe together. He brought the brothers together. And they got the message.

Rav Hirsch explains the peculiar grammar in the Torah's account of Yaakov's blessings to his sons. The Torah says:

בראשית פרשת ויחי פרק מט פסוק כח

(כח) כָּל־אֵלֶּה שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁנִים עָשָׂר וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר־דָּבַר לָהֶם אָבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כִּבְרָכְתּוּ בְּרַךְ אוֹתָם:

*All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to **each** a parting word appropriate to him, as he blessed **them**.*

רש"ר הירש בראשית פרק מט פסוק כח

ואומרים חז"ל: לא היה לו לומר אלא איש כברכתו ברך אותו, מה ת"ל בירך אותם? "לפי שנתן ליהודה גבורת ארי, ולבנימין חטיפתו של זאב, ולנפתלי קלותה של אילה, יכול שלא כללן כולם בתוך הברכות ת"ל ברך אותם" - ברכת הכלל הועילה לכל פרט, וברכת כל פרט זיכתה את הכלל (עי' ילקוט שמעוני, ויחי קסא).

Our Sages say "Do not think that, because he assigned to Yehuda the strength of a lion, to Binyamin the boldness of a wolf, to Naftali the swiftness of a gazelle, etc., Yaakov did not include them all in all the blessings. For this reason Scripture does not say אִתּוֹ but rather אותם בְּרַךְ אותם. Each one benefitted from the general blessing of the community, exile the special blessing of each one enhanced the community."

Rav Hirsch writes that for this reason the Torah says he blessed each one individually, but concluded with the plural איש כברכתו בירך אותם.

The grammatical change from singular to plural implies that each individual received his blessing as part of the group...with the expectation that he would help others achieve their potential, and that he, in turn, will be helped by others, as well. Each individual--if sees himself as part of the *klal* and dedicates his talents to the betterment of society as a whole--can have a positive effect on the larger group. Taking responsibility for others is the secret of unity.

Rebbetzin Dr. Weisbord ended her *Jewish Action* interview by saying

"Leadership starts with a sense of responsibility, seeing something missing or off course and then stepping in to create or fix. That willingness to assume a burden, to make a commitment, is the beginning of leadership.

Once it's not about "me," many issues that we find challenging fade away: Is there someone who can do a better job with this than I can? No problem—let's give her the responsibility. . .In fact, I can be objective enough to know when it's time to hand the baton to the next generation and can do so gladly.

Leadership is also about believing in others. Community leaders get to see the best and worst of community members. We don't live in denial, but we do focus on the best. John Quincy Adams said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." Often our leadership is about making a positive impact on one person at a time, with no public fanfare or credit. And sometimes, the most important things we do are completely behind the scenes. There have been many opportunities for me to intervene and help settle a machlokes, simply because I had worked for and with the people and organizations involved. Helping someone get a job interview, being able to pinpoint community resources and offering assistance to newcomers navigating the search for a home and school are all unanticipated bonuses of committing myself to the community.

May we all take this lesson to heart, and learn from her example, to find ways to can contribute to Am Yisrael, using our unique gifts and abilities, to help everyone around us achieve their potential, and may we continue to move forward during this challenging time in this long *galus* with hope and faith. And by doing our part and working together, may we soon bring the days of redemption, and see the return of the Holy Beis Hamikdash, *bimhera viyamenu*...amen.