

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Terry and Sheila Klein,; "In memory of Terry's father, Richard Klein, whose yahrtzeit is on 5 Kislev, and in memory of Sheila's mother, Hilda Irom, whose yahrtzeit is on 8 Kislev."
- William and Paula Sharfman, "In memory of William's father, Label Sharfman, Moshe Leib ben Zev, whose yahrtzeit is on 29 Cheshvan."
- Tommy and Judy Weiss and family, "In gratitude to Kenny Friedman for all your help."

Thank you all for your support of the shul. May you be rewarded with *bracha*, *hatzlacha* and good health.

I want to remind everyone that this Sunday at 9:00 am, **Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon** will be giving a shiur to the Shomrei Emunah community on the interesting and important topic: Covid19 Responsa: Unprecedented Questions. This shiur will kick off our annual campaign to help the *chesed* organization which Rav Rimon founded, called La'Ofek. It is a *zechus* to be his partner. I invite everyone to join in the *shiur*, and participate in the campaign. Zoom information is in the bulletin and shul emails. Thank you.

There is a fundamental concept in Sefer Breishis, which some apply to Tanach in general, called מעשה אבות סימן לבנים, the happenings of the *avos* serve as a sign of things to come for their children. This concept is more than "history repeats itself." It means, as the **Ramban** explains, that our forefathers were unique in that their actions created templates for the rest of Jewish history. Their actions and attitudes laid the groundwork for the future. Their actions and attitudes teach us deep psychological principles about human nature and relationships. For this reason, it is important to carefully study the lives of the *avos*, the forefathers of the Jewish people, who created these templates for us, their descendants.

As I mentioned last week, the Jewish world lost a profound thinker, orator, and statesman of the Jewish people, **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**. This week, I would like to develop an idea found in many his writings about one theme related to מעשה אבות that is found throughout Sefer Breishis and whose סימן לבנים effect, is felt greatly today, namely, a lack of dialogue and communication between people.

In Covenant and Conversation (Genesis pgs. 320-321), Rabbi Sacks points out that "tragic misunderstanding" is found over and over again in Breishis. This affliction plagues us today, maybe more than ever before in our current politicized culture, where close family members who voted for different presidential candidates stop speaking to one another, and deep party lines unfortunately are found within the Jewish community, as well. As **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein** wrote at the end of his review of Rav Aharon Feldman's Eye of the Storm "*Must the walls that separate our communities and our institutions soar quite so high, the interposing moat plunge quite so deep?*"¹

Rabbi Sacks wrote about two episodes in Sefer Breishis where a lack of communication caused significant problems. *The first has to do with Yitzchak and Rivka. Yitzchak, we recall, loved Esav; Rivka loved Yaakov. At least one possible explanation, offered by Abarbanel, is that Rivka had been told "by God," before the twins were born, that "the elder will serve the younger." Hence her attachment to Yaakov, the younger, and her determination that he, not Esav, should have Yitzchak's blessing.*

The other concerns Yaakov and Rachel. Rachel had stolen her father's terafim, "icons" or "household gods," when they left Lavan to return to the land of Canaan. She did not tell Yaakov that she had done so. The text says explicitly, "Yaakov did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods" (Gen. 31:32). When Lavan pursued and caught up with them, he accused Yaakov's party of having stolen them. Yaakov indignantly denies this and says

¹https://jewishaction.com/books/reviews/hands_across_the_ocean_a_review_of_rabbi_aharon_feldmans_the_eye_of_th/

"If you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live." Several chapters later, we read that Rachel died prematurely, on the way. The possibility hinted at by the text, articulated by a midrash and by Rashi, is that, unwittingly, Yaakov had condemned her to death.

In both cases, misunderstanding flowed from a failure of communication. Had Rivka told Yitzchak about the oracle and had Rachel told Yaakov about the terafim, tragedy might have been averted. Judaism is a religion of holy words, and one of the themes of Genesis as a whole is the power of speech to create, mislead, harm or heal. From Cain and Abel to Joseph and his brothers ("They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him"), we are shown how, when words fail, violence begins."

This is an idea Rabbi Sacks develops in From Optimism to Hope (pg. 35):

*There's an extraordinary verse in the early Bible that's invariably mistranslated. Read literally it says this: And Cain said to his brother Abel. And it came to pass that when they were in the field Cain rose against his brother Abel and killed him. The syntax is fractured. Cain said—but the Bible doesn't say what he said. The sentence breaks off midway, and the message is as sharp as a jagged edge. When conversations fail, violence begin; and violence has no victors, only victims. . . Wars are won by weapons. **Peace is won by words.***

He writes about this again regarding Yosef and his brothers. From the very beginning of their discord, the Torah states: בראשית ל"ז:ד ויראו אחיו כי אתו אהב אביהם מכל אחיו וישנאו אתו ולא יכלו דברו לשלום:

Bothered by the puzzling phrase דברו לשלום, literally translated "speak to him to peace," he cites

Rav Yonasan Eibeschutz, who comments: *Had they been able to sit together as a group, they would have spoken to one another and disputed with each other, and would eventually have made their peace with one another.* Rabbi Sacks concludes: *The tragedy of conflict is that it prevents people from talking together and listening to one another.*

In an article entitled "Love and Hate" <https://outorah.org/p/804/>, Rabbi Sacks continued this thought in another context. He expands on the Pasuk that commands us to rebuke rather than hate. He writes: *Love your neighbor as yourself. But not all neighbors are loveable. There are those who, out of envy or malice, have done you harm. I do not therefore command you to live as if you were angels, without any of the emotions natural to human beings. I do however forbid you to hate. That is why, when someone does you wrong, you must confront the wrongdoer. You must tell him of your feelings of hurt and distress. It may be that you completely misunderstood his intentions. Or it may be that he genuinely meant to do you harm, but now, faced with the reality of the injury he has done you, he may sincerely repent of what he did. If, however, you fail to talk it through, there is a real possibility that you will bear a grudge and in the fullness of time, come to take revenge...*

*What is so impressive about the Torah is that it both articulates the highest of high ideals, and at the same time speaks to us as human beings. If we were angels it would be easy to love one another. But we are not. An ethic that commands us to love our enemies, without any hint as to how we are to achieve this, is simply un-liveable. Instead, the Torah sets out a realistic program. **By being honest with one another, talking things through, we may be able to achieve reconciliation – not always, to be sure, but often. How much distress and even bloodshed might be spared if humanity heeded this simple command.***

And this brings us to our Parsha this morning. In his Lessons on Leadership (p. 29) in an essay entitled "The Price of Silence," Rabbi Sacks cites the **Netziv** who made the astute observation that Yitzchak and Rivka seem to suffer from a lack of communication. He noted that Rivka's "relationship with Yitzchak was not the same as that between Sarah and Abraham or Rachel and Yaakov. When they had a problem, they were not afraid to speak about it. Not so with Rivka. (*Ha'amek Davar to Gen. 24:65*)

The Netziv senses this distance from the very first moment Rivka sees Yitzchak, as he is "meditating in the field" (Gen. 24:63), at which point she fell off her camel and "covered herself with a veil" (Gen. 24:65). He comments, "She covered herself out of awe and a sense of inadequacy, as if she felt she was unworthy to be his wife, and from then on this trepidation was fixed in her mind.

Their relationship, suggests the Netziv, was never casual, candid, and communicative. The result was, at a series of critical moments, a failure of communication. For instance, it seems likely that Rivka never informed Yitzchak of the prophecy she had received before the twins, Esav and Yaakov, were born, in which God told her “the elder will serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). That, apparently, is one reason she loved Yaakov rather than Esav, knowing that he was the one chosen by God. If Yitzchak had known this foretelling of their sons’ futures, would he still have favored Esav? He probably did not know, because Rivka had not told him. That is why, many years later, when she hears that Yitzchak was about to bless Esav, she is forced into a plan of deception: she tells Yaakov to pretend he is Esav. Why does she not simply tell Yitzchak that it is Yaakov who shall be blessed? Because that would force her to admit that she has kept her husband in ignorance about the prophecy all the years the children were growing up.

Had she spoken to Yitzchak on the day of the blessing, Yitzchak might have said something that would have changed the entire course of their, and their children’s, lives. I imagine Yitzchak saying this: “Of course I know that it will be Yaakov and not Esav who will continue the covenant. But I have two quite different blessings in mind, one for each of our sons. I will give Esav a blessing of wealth and power: ‘May God give you the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth ... May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you’ (Gen. 27:28-29.) I will give Yaakov the blessing God gave Abraham and me, the blessing of children and the promised land: ‘May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham’” (Gen.28:3,4).

Yitzchak never intended to give the blessing of the covenant to Esav. He intended to give each child the blessing that suited them. **The entire deceit planned by Rivka and carried out by Yaakov was never necessary in the first place. Why did Rivka not understand this? Because she and her husband did not communicate.**

Now let us count the consequences. Yitzchak, old and blind, felt betrayed by Yaakov. He “trembled violently” when he realized what had happened, saying to Esav, “Your brother came deceitfully.” Esav likewise felt betrayed and experienced such violent hatred towards Yaakov that he vowed to kill him. Rivka was forced to send Yaakov into exile, thus depriving herself of the company of the son she loved for more than two decades. As for Yaakov, the consequences of the deceit lasted a lifetime, resulting in strife between his wives and even between his children. “Few and evil have been the days of my life” (Gen. 47:9), he said to Pharaoh as an old man. So many lives scarred by one act which was not even necessary in the first place. Yitzchak did in fact give Yaakov “the blessing of Abraham” without any deception, knowing him to be Yaakov, not Esav.

Such is the human price we pay for a failure to communicate. The Torah is exceptionally candid about such matters, which is what makes it so powerful a guide to life: real life, among real people with real problems. Communication matters. In the beginning God created the natural world with words: “And God said: ‘Let there be’”. We create the social world with words. The Targum translated the phrase, “And man became a living soul,” (Genesis 2:7) as “And man became a speaking soul.” For us, speech is life. Life is relationship. And human relationships are built through communication. We can tell other people our hopes, our fears, our feelings and thoughts. . . .

There are times when much depends on clear communication. It is not too much to say that there are moments when the very fate of the world depends upon this. . .

So many aspects of our lives are impacted by misinformation and enhanced by genuine communication. This is why friends, parents, partners and leaders must establish a culture in which honest, open, respectful communication takes place, and that involves not just speaking but also listening. Without it, tragedy is waiting in the wings.

And this brings us to מעשה אבות סימן לבנים. We are living in the galus brought about by churban bayis sheni. Our exile at the hands of the Romans and the destruction of the Second Temple were the result of intense factionalism and internal strife, *sinas chinam*. Chazal tell us that it is the story of Yaakov (the Jewish people) and Esav (the Roman Empire) brought to fruition. A disappointing story that could have been prevented by communication and dialogue.

Today, across the Jewish world, there remains much internal conflict. When individual Jews or groups of Jews have disagreements, as inevitably happens, we have to find ways to deal with them respectfully, to ensure we continue to thrive as a people. We must maintain open channels of communication.

We are living in a time where factionalism is at its worst. The polarization and deep divides in our country and the Jewish world must end if we want to usher in the Messianic age, and an end to our exile.

Two years ago, Rabbi Sacks enunciated the following seven principles he felt were necessary to achieve this goal. It is found on <https://rabbisacks.org/seven-principles-maintaining-jewish-dialogue/>

He wrote: *I have set out below what I regard as seven of the key principles for maintaining Jewish dialogue. I hope some, or all of them, speak to you.*

PRINCIPLE 1: *Keep talking, even when you disagree. The more you talk, the more you are likely to eventually find a way to work together.*

PRINCIPLE 2: *Listen deeply to one another. Hear what your opponent is saying. Listening is profoundly therapeutic. It is also deeply spiritual. The good news about the Jewish people is that we're among the world's best speakers. The bad news is that we're among the world's worst listeners. This has to change. Shema Yisrael, the great command, means, "Listen, Israel."*

PRINCIPLE 3: *Always be humble and modest by striving to understand the point of view with which you disagree. That was the way of Hillel. It remains the first rule of conflict management.*

PRINCIPLE 4: *Never seek victory. Never ever seek to inflict defeat on your opponent. If you seek to inflict defeat on your opponent, your opponent – such is human psychology – will seek to retaliate by inflicting defeat on you. The end result will be that even if you win today, you will lose tomorrow, and, in the end, everyone will lose. Don't think in terms of victory and defeat. Think in terms of what is best for the Jewish people.*

PRINCIPLE 5: *If you show contempt for other Jews, they will show contempt for you. If you show respect for other Jews, they will show respect for you. If you seek respect, give respect.*

PRINCIPLE 6: *Remember that the ultimate basis of Jewish peoplehood is "Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh", "All Jews are responsible for one another." We may not agree on anything, but we remain a single extended family. If you disagree with a friend, tomorrow he or she may no longer be your friend. But if you disagree with a family member, tomorrow he or she is still part of your family. Being a family is what keeps us together. We don't need to agree with each other, but we do need to care about each other.*

PRINCIPLE 7: *God chose us as a people. He didn't choose only the righteous; He chose all of us. It is as a people we stand before God, and it is as a people we stand before the world. The world doesn't make distinctions, anti-Semites don't make distinctions. We are united by a covenant of shared memory, shared identity, and shared fate, even if we have differing perspectives on our faith.*

The Sages said that the Torah was given to make peace in the world. How can we, the Jewish people or the State of Israel, be at peace with the world if we are unable to live at peace with ourselves? Bear this in mind the next time you are tempted to walk away from some group of Jews that you think has offended you. We are each called on to make some effort, some gesture, to listen to one another, to forgive one another, and to stay together as an extended, almost infinitely varied family. That is the only ultimate tikkun for the echoing grief of the [Churban] that has haunted our history, and reverberates still.

May we learn the lesson of our history and commit to keep the lines of respectful communication open within the Jewish community and beyond, and may we see the day when peace will reign supreme. May we merit to see this day soon, amen.