

Lessons Learned

Ramban refers to Sefer Breishit as Sefer Yetzirah whose purpose is to present the stories of the patriarchs as they foreshadow Jewish History based on *Maasay Avot Siman L'Banim*. The first 3 Parshiot in Breishit present 3 unique stories of tragedy associated with Adam, Noah and Abraham. What lessons can we derive from them?

As mentioned in last week's article, *Parshat Breishit* instructs mankind in general and the Jew in particular that just as Hashem built, destroyed and rebuilt worlds before creating this world, we must be prepared to adapt failure into a steppingstone to build something better and more complete. Each of the main actors in the first 3 *Parshiot* experienced major failure or disruption of their lives and world. Their responses to their challenges ranged from destructive to admirable and something we must strive to emulate by studying and learning from their experiences.

After his initial sin, Adam reacted with denial to his world being ripped away from him. He sought to reenter Eden after he was cast out but was blocked by the whirling blades of the Cherubim who guarded its entrance. At that moment Adam's world was destroyed. He alienated his wife by blaming her for the calamity that befell them and separated from her for an extended period. His already shattered world was further broken with the murder of Abel, the son of pure heart and dedication to God who he hoped would carry on his legacy. He is left with only Cain, the son that God condemned for the murder of his brother. The execution of that decree against Cain was delayed 7 generations, but the destiny of Cain's offspring was sealed. All that Adam built was destined to be destroyed.

Chazal tell us of an encounter between Adam and his estranged son Cain. Adam inquired of Cain what punishment he received for his crime. Cain replied that he repented and was forgiven. Immediately Adam proclaimed *Mizmor Shir L'Yom*

HaShabbat. What is the connection between Cain's admission and Adam's proclamation? Adam realized that even though his world was shattered he had the ability to admit his failure and rebuild his relationship with Hashem. The world that Abel represented was gone; however, he could rebuild its ruins and strive to create something even better. He subsequently reunites with Eve and they have another child, Seth. The choice of name is interesting as it represents the birth of a child to replace Abel who was murdered by Cain. They prayed the child should eclipse Abel and rebuild the worlds they lost with their exile and Abel's murder. The world Seth would build should come closer to the ideal that Hashem envisaged during creation. Adam learned the lesson of starting over after the destruction of his original world.

Unfortunately, the new world that Adam attempted to start through Seth became corrupted. At the end of Breishit, Hashem, *Kvayachol*, expresses remorse for creating man. He decides this version of man must be erased, providing Noah with an opportunity to rebuild the world yet again. The impending destruction of the world was painful for Noah in many ways. He realized that everything he knew and loved, except for his immediate family, would be destroyed. The approaching clouds of destruction, ignored by his generation, would consume everything. A dark period would commence as the world again was to be destroyed and rebuilt. Hashem gave Noah the ability to withstand his opposition, overcome his fears, build the ark, and save his family so he could rebuild the world. Upon exiting the ark, Noah acts appropriately, offering sacrifices to Hashem, Who commits to refrain from bringing another flood to destroy the world. However, Noah soon fails and forfeits his close connection with Hashem. Ultimately, he is remembered more for his incident with his son and grandson and the curse they received than for saving humanity from the flood. He fades from the scene unremarkably. His offspring, the generation of the Tower of Babel, rebel against Hashem and are punished through a different form of destruction. Instead of physical destruction, they are divided by language. Loved ones, friends and neighbors became estranged from each other; result and punishment for becoming enslaved to their technological prowess and quest while losing connection to the world around them. They sacrificed their existence on the altar of technological achievement and failed terribly.

Abraham's arrival proclaimed a new vision of the world. His message was man's goal is not to accumulate power or seek maximum enjoyment but to seek Hashem everywhere and cling to Him. Man does not have to always be fully successful to accomplish this. *Kedusha* is a dialectical experience, it frightens man but at the same time it attracts him. He is driven to come close to Hashem even though *Lo Yirani HaAdam VaChai*, man must fail in fully realizing that goal. This was an astounding, unheard of message that slowly resonated with people of his generation.

However, Abraham endured great stress and personal sacrifice for propagating his beliefs. His own father denounced him to the authorities, and he was thrown into an inferno. Abraham realized that he had to cut his ties with his family and set off on his own to continue his search and mission. His world crumbled around him, and he had to rebuild his life elsewhere, together with his beloved wife Sara. Without parents, children or home, Abraham truly was in rebuilding mode. He was tested repeatedly with challenges, yet he persevered because his faith in the God he discovered and revealed was unshakable. Where Adam and Noah endured a physical rebuilding of their world, Abraham's was a spiritual odyssey that ultimately left him all alone. Chazal refer to *Avraham Halvri* because he stood alone on one side of the river while the rest of the world stood on the other, opposing his attempt to spread the word of the One, True God. Abraham's mission was to rebuild a spiritual world out of a world void of spirituality.

The tenacity and dedication Abraham demonstrated for his mission to pursue Hashem and *Kedusha* is alive and well in his descendants. I personally reconnected with that spirit when as I listen with rapt attention, amazement, anger, admiration and love whenever my mother עמר"ש recounts just a part of her heroic story of miraculous survival during the Holocaust from the depraved Nazis Yimach Shmam, and the local Poles and Ukrainians that eagerly collaborated with them to exterminate our people. Her ordeal continued after the war as she navigated the cruelty of the Ukrainians and the anti-Semitism of the Russians who occupied her

town. I was spellbound as she related how she felt the Hand of Hashem guide her at various low points during her terrible ordeal, giving her the hope and strength to persevere, survive and build a family of dedicated Torah observant Jews. Like Abraham leaving his homeland, she survived the hostile hordes dedicated to her destruction, overcoming them with the help and guiding hand of Hashem to leave her home and rebuild a new world out of the one torn away from her and reduced to blood soaked ashes.

My mother is a direct descendant of illustrious Hassidic dynasties, including Rupshitz, Belz, Kretchnev, Narol. Her father HY'D was a first cousin of the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum OB"M. The Satmar Rebbetzin along with a veritable Who's Who of Hassidic royalty walked her to her Chupa, standing in for her parents who were murdered *Al Kiddush Hashem* during the Holocaust. She and those who survived to rebuild Judaism in America after the destruction of their world are the true heirs of Abraham's legacy. May Hashem grant my mother and all who survived to rebuild our Jewish world good health, long life and comfort from their anguish. May their rebuilt world finally herald the realization of *Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbat* that Adam composed when he rebuilt his world, with the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days.

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This article was originally dedicated L'Zecher Nishmot Eitam and Naama Henkin, Aharon Bennett, Nehemia Lavi HY'D, who were murdered Al Kiddush Hashem.