

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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פרשת ויחי
י"ב בטבת תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 47:28-50:26

In this *parasha*, Yaakov blesses his sons on his deathbed and asks them to bury him in Cana'an.

This is the last *parasha* in the book of *Bereshit*. As we finish the first of the five books of Moshe, there is a note of hope, as indeed there is at the end of each of the books.

The book of *Bereshit* is filled with conflict. It starts right at the beginning with the snake versus the humans (chapter 3) and Kayin's murder of his brother, Hevel (chapter 4). The strife increases during the stories of Noach and his son, Cham, after the flood (chapter 9); Avraham's and Lot's servants (chapter 13); Sarah and Hagar (chapter 16); Yishmael and Yitzchak (chapter 21); Yaakov and Eisav (chapters 25 and 27); Yaakov and Lavan (chapters 29 and 31); Rachel and Leah (chapters 29 and 30); Dina's brothers and Shechem (chapter 34); Yosef and his brothers (chapters 37 and 43-45); and many other stories scattered throughout the book.

But the book of *Bereshit* ends with reconciliation (50:15-21):

טו וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָי-יוֹסֵף, כִּי-מֵת אָבִיהֶם, וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לוֹ יִשְׁטְמֵנוּ יוֹסֵף; וְהָשִׁב יְשִׁיב, לָנוּ, אֵת כָּל-הָרָעָה, אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָנוּ אֹתוֹ. טז וַיִּצְווּ, אֶל-יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר: אָבִיךָ צָוָה, לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר. יז כֹּה-תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף, אָנָּה שָׂא נָא פֶשַׁע אַחִיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי-רָעָה גָּמְלוּךָ, וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא, לִפְשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱ-לֹהֵי אָבִיךָ; וַיִּבְדַּךְ יוֹסֵף, בְּדַבְרָם אֵלָיו. יח וַיֵּלְכוּ, גַּם-אֶחָיו, וַיִּפְּלוּ, לִפְנֵי; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, הִנְנּוּ לְךָ לַעֲבָדִים. יט וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף, אֵל-תִּירְאוּ: כִּי הִתַּחַת אֱ-לֹהִים, אָנִי. כ וְאַתֶּם, חַשְׁבַּתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה; אֲ-לֵהֶם, חַשְׁבָּה לְטָבָה, לְמַעַן עֲשֶׂה פִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה, לְהַחֲיִית עַם-רַב. כא וְעַתָּה, אֵל-תִּירְאוּ--אֲנֹכִי אֶכְלָפֵל אֶתְכֶם, וְאֶת-טַפְכֶם; וַיִּנַּחֵם אוֹתָם, וַיְדַבֵּר עַל-לִבָּם.

15 And when Yosef's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said: 'It may be that Yosef will hate us, and will fully pay us back all the evil which we did to him.' 16 And they sent a message to Yosef, saying: 'Your father did command before he died, saying: 17 So shall you say to Yosef: Forgive, please, the transgression of your brothers, and their sin, for that they did evil to you. And now, please, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.' And Yosef wept when they spoke to him. 18 And his brothers also went and fell down before his face; and they said: 'Behold, we are your servants.' 19 And Yosef said to them: 'Fear not; for am I in the place of God? 20 And as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, the survival of many people. 21 Now therefore do not fear; I will sustain you, and your little ones.' And he comforted them, and spoke kindly to them.

A very important message can be derived from these verses. Life is filled with conflict and strife, but at the end of the day, there is always hope for reconciliation, even among sworn enemies such as Yosef and his brothers.

Shmot (Exodus) is also filled with strife. Pharaoh enslaves the children of Yisrael and tries to kill the Jewish boys; the Egyptians suffer through the plagues and destruction at the Reed Sea; Amalek attacks the Jews; the Jews build the Golden Calf just after receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. But the book of *Shmot* also ends with reconciliation: it addresses the raising of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), which, according to many commentators, was the reconciliation between Hashem and the Jewish people.

This same pattern of conflict occurring over the course of a book and reconciliation taking place at the end appears in both the book of *Bemidbar* (Numbers) and the book of *Devarim* (Deuteronomy). [*Vayikrah* (Leviticus), being a book of laws and ideas, contains no stories, therefore, there is no resolution in the book.]

As with everything in the Torah, this structure is not coincidental. There is a profound message for us, especially during the current *zeitgeist* of conflict, political and otherwise.

Part of human existence is conflict. Either purposefully or inadvertently, people sometimes “bump into” each other. The Torah therefore reminds us at specified intervals at the end of each book that reconciliation continues to remain an option

and is possible. This idea brings a ray of light and hope into a decade of human history that will be remembered as one of conflict on many fronts.

Let us not lose our faith that in the end, there will be a resolution to all conflict, and peace will reign. After all, this is what God ultimately promises in *Vayikrah* (Leviticus) 26:6: “וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ, וְשָׁכַבְתֶּם וַאֲיִן מִחֲרִיד.” – And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and nothing will make you afraid.”

Shabbat Shalom, and I hope you are having a wonderful and safe winter break.

For Discussion:

- Think of an argument you had with someone. Was there a reconciliation? How did it come about?
- Choose a Torah story in which there was conflict. Please re-tell the story and focus on how the story ended.
- How do you feel when you have a fight with someone? How do you feel when you make up with them?