

D'var Torah for the Second Morning of Rosh Hashanah

5782

*Every person is expelled from the Garden of Eden
Everyone undergoes a flood
Every person has some Abel
About whom he is deathly jealous
In everyone there is a tower of rebellion and confusion*

*Every person goes to himself from his father's house
Everyone nearly binds his son
Deep inside there is a small Sodom
That he just wants to erase already
And there are angels that will rescue him*

*And I also dream like Joseph
Yes they also threw me into the pit
A wheel that repeats inside a costume
And like David I make it into a psalm*

*Everyone is a queen like Esther
Defeats like Deborah any army that would only come
Like everyone she also cries in private
Like Rachel like Moses on Mount Nevo*

*Every person is created in the Image (of the Divine)
An ember burning secrets and clues
Everyone is good content for a movie
A new role inside an age-old storyⁱ*

Dreaming like Joseph,ⁱⁱ is one of the most popular and –I like to add- beautiful songs by Israeli composer Hanan ben Ari. In a new layer of biblical

interpretation, the composer brings the biblical stories home, reminding us that each of us shares some of Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David's stories.

Indeed, I can see myself crying in private like Moses on Mount Nevo, and dreaming like Joseph, and transforming my life into a song unto God, into a Psalm. There are times I feel like a queen (actually more like a king), or defeated, or confused, or jealous, or expelled from some Garden of Eden. I did leave my father's home, and my country, and my birthplace; and I also felt the redeeming salvation of angels watching over me, lifting me away from the chaos of life.

Perhaps this is the reason why the Torah and the Jewish Bible in its entirety, are still relevant today. Like Hanan ben Ari suggests, and like I suggested yesterday, jealousy and courage, pain and love, are an intrinsic part and parcel of our lives, as they were an intrinsic part and parcel of our ancestors' small and complex stories.

Small and complex stories.

Small because they usually involved one or two people, a family of three or four, parents, siblings, lovers. Complex because...because life itself is complex.

Small stories....and yet, from the insider's perspective, both for us and for the biblical heroes, what seem like small stories are actually the big stories of our lives.

I said "the big stories of our lives" and not the big stories of humanity, because humanity has bigger and more epic stories than Abraham sending off Hagar and Ishmael, or David meeting Batsheva, or Jacob loving Rachel over Leah. The Torah has a couple of epic stories as well, like the flood and the conquest of Jericho, and wars here and there, but most of the stories, the good ones, are indeed family stories.

Speaking of epic stories, when I was young, I dreamt of epic stories. Like most teenagers, I wanted to be famous and well known. The truth being said, I wasn't sure how was I going to accomplish notoriety since I didn't play any

instrument, I wasn't an accomplished artist, and I was awful at every sport I played, but I dreamt of being famous nevertheless. Perhaps one day someone was going to write a book about me. In such a book I saw myself as a hero, a military hero being sent to rescue people, or a humanitarian hero, ending world hunger or creating a vaccine to eradicate cancer. Nothing more, nothing less.

Now, while I was dreaming with becoming famous, I read many stories of famous people, including the small-big stories of our ancestors, and slowly but surely I realized that behind every good non-boring story there is a good deal of suffering.

This past month, as part of our month of Elul preparation, we put three classes on Akedat Yitzchak, the Binding of Isaac. Michael Brofman, taught a class, I taught a class, and Helene Jacob taught a class. Hundreds of books have been written just on one chapter in the suffering lives of Abraham and Isaac, and about Sarah's suffering because of this story.

The biblical hero is a suffering hero. Truth be told, while I may dream like Joseph, and write poems like king David, and leave my home like Abraham, I don't wish to be like them.

Now imagine the following story:

Manes was born in Argentina, studied psychology and Jewish education, became a rabbi, married Silvia a wonderful wife, moved to the United States and serves as a rabbi in a mid-size congregation in Fresh Meadows, New York. With his wife they had three wonderful children who themselves formed families. The end.

A story like the one I just told you not only won't make me famous, but won't even occupy half a chapter in a book. A story like the one I just told you won't interest many people and that is the reason why the above story was not the story I dreamt for myself when I was a teenager.

And yet, today, I will give up any dream of being a hero just to continue to live the short boring story I just told you.

The lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the lives of Sara, Queen Esther, and King David, make great stories if you have to read about them, but frightful ones if you have to live them.

I believe I finally understood Akedat Yitzchak: to live Abraham's life, to be called God's hero, you must sacrifice a lot, perhaps even your son, as we just read this morning. And I confess, it is not for me.

So what's the plan B? I didn't become a military or humanitarian hero, I didn't rescue thousands of people or end world hunger, and honestly I doubt I will. As a matter of fact, I know I won't.

I still have hope and dreams, but they are more in line with my story. I can only hope I was a good son to my parents, of blessed memory. And I know I must continue to work hard to become a good human being, a good father, a good husband, a good rabbi, a good friend, and a better golfer. I pray that my children will find happiness, and yes, I do dream with grandchildren, and good, long, and healthy years for me and my loved ones.

I don't expect a book written about my life, but I am OK with that. After all, if one day someone writes a book about my life, I'm not sure I will want to read it.

Maybe I matured. It is possible. I believe I did. One way or another, I feel happier, perhaps because I was able to embrace my unheroic life.

This was about me. And what about you? Where does this dvar Torah take you?

If you like the idea, let me invite you to join me in my unheroic endeavor to become the best possible version of ourselves. Let's not try to live Abraham's life, or Moses' life, or Sarah's life. It won't work, and in addition we don't want their lives. Let's try to live our own lives, but let's upgrade them to a better version of what they are now.

As you know, there is always room for improvement, even in unheroic lives like ours.

And so we pray:

Our God and God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob. God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel and God of Leah. Please, be my God as well.

Help me become a better version of me, day after day in my unheroic life. At the beginning of a new year, I am grateful for a new opportunity to change and to grow.

I am grateful for all my blessings, especially for the beautiful, good, and overall quiet life, you gave me. At the beginning of a new year, I pledge one more time not to take your blessings for granted.

And speaking of blessings, dear God, please bless me, and my family, and my friends, and everybody in this wonderful congregation, and their loved ones, and the Jewish people, and the State of Israel, and the wonderful world You created, with a good, healthy and sweet year. Amen.

ⁱ חולם כמו יוסף, חנן בן ארי

כל אדם מגורש מגן עדן
כל אחד עובר מבול
לכל אחד יש איזה הבל
שהוא מקנא בו עד מוות
בכל אחת מגדל של מרד ובלבול

כל אדם הולך לו מבית אבא
כל אחד כמעט עוקד את בנו
עמוק בפנים יש סדום קטנה
שהוא רק רוצה למחוק כבר
ויש מלאכים שימלטו אותו

וגם אני חולם כמו יוסף
כן גם אותי זרקו לבור
גלגל חוזר בתוך תחפושת
וכמו דוד אני עושה מזה מזמור

כל אחת מלכה כמו אסתר
מביסה כמו דבורה כל צבא שרק יבוא
כמו כל אחת גם היא בוכה בסתר
כמו רחל כמו משה על הר נבו

וגם אני חולם כמו יוסף
כן גם אותי זרקו לבור
גלגל חוזר בתוך תחפושת
וכמו דוד אני עושה מזה מזמור
עושה מזה מזמור

כל אדם נברא בצלם
גחל בוער סודות ורמזים
כל אחד הוא חומר טוב לסרט
תפקיד חדש בתוך סיפור עתיק יומין

חנן בן ארי - חולם כמו יוסףⁱⁱ - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBxl_iiwC4I