



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

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As we return to *Sefer Breisheet* again this *Shabbat*, I feel my heart and thoughts being drawn to the beautiful introduction to *Sefer Breisheet* penned by the *Netziv*, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin zt'l.

The *Netziv* writes that our Sages referred to *Sefer Breisheet* as *Sefer Yescharim*- the book of the ethical ones, the book of the *mentsches*. The *Netziv* explains that our *Avot* and *Imahot* are indeed considered to be *yesharim*- ethical and morally straight individuals.

"This is a great praise for the Avot (and Imahot)-that beyond their righteousness and holiness and devotion and love for Hashem, we could describe them even more so that they were yesharim-they dealt fairly and treated all humanity with love,dignity and respect, as each and every human being is one of Hashem's creations.."

This *hakdama* of the *Netziv* to *Sefer Breisheet*, is in essence the *Netziv's* opening commentary on the entire *Chumash*, as if to instruct us that the essence of the entire *Torah* is to instruct us that a *Torah* centered life requires us to strive to be morally sound,ethical human beings.

Rabbi Yosef Breuer, ztl, the grandson of Rav Shamshon Refael Hirsch zt'l, and Founding Rabbi of the *Khal Adath Jeshurun* in Washington Heights, New York, famously wrote these words about the moral code that a Jew must strive to adhere to:

"Kosher" is intimately related to "Yoshor."

G-d's Torah not only demands the observance of Kashrut and the sanctification of our physical enjoyment; it also insists on the sanctification of our social relationships. This requires the strict application of the tenets of justice and righteousness which avoid even the slightest trace of dishonesty in our business dealings and personal life. G-d's Torah not only demands of us to love our neighbor in that we concern ourselves with his welfare and property, but it insists further on a conduct of uncompromising straightness ("Yoshor") which is inspired not only by the letter of the law but is guided by the ethical principle of honesty which, then, would deserve the honorable title of "Yeshurun."

The *Netivot Shalom*, the *Slonimer Rebbe* zy'a, asks an interesting question. If indeed this entire first book of the *Torah*, is considered to be the book of *Yescharim*- why does it include the very real human stories, and family dynamics and personal struggles of the *Avot* and *Imahot*, what value or message are we meant to gain or glean from these detailed accounts?

The *Slonimer Rebbe* explains that in order for one to truly become a *yashar*- a truly fair, just, ethical human being, we must constantly work to refine our character. This first sefer of the *Torah*, which recalls the earliest giants of humanity and *Am Yisrael*, presents us with the most fundamental blueprint to living a life of *Kedusha*, the refinement of character, growth

and spiritual maturation that each of us must strive for, to emulate our Avot and Imahot and truly become yesharim.

Rav Kook ztvk'l, in his introduction to his work on character development, *Midot HaRiyah* wrote:

The refinement of character intellectually is the prerequisite to that refinement being actualized emotionally and through our deeds and actions. If it is not clear to us what is good and what is bad, how are we to connect with and cling to our inherent good, and distance ourselves from any negativity and hurtful behavior?

Left Rav Kook, each of us needs to work to channel our innate goodness, and be a conduit for good to prevail over evil in this world.

Yehi Ratzon, as we return again to *Sefer Breisheet*, and move forward in the coming year may each of us continue to be

inspired by the legacy of our Avot and Imahot, and may we strive each and every day to emulate their conduct, and live a life of *Yashrut* and *mentschlichkeit*. ■

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