

Sermon Parashat Bereishit 5767

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My father was always studying. He had an office in the house and whenever he wasn't watching TV with us, he was in his office, reading and making notes. I remember the lamp he has hanging over his desk and the books piled all around the room. I often joke with him that at some point there are many volumes that I would like to inherit. In any case when growing up one of the ways I was able to share time with my father was to be in his study with him. As a small child I would wedge myself between my father and the back of his chair. He was always hunched over the desk so there was plenty of room for me to sit and make believe back there. When he taught me for my bar mitzvah or in high school as we would sit together on Shabbat afternoon I would sit beside his desk..

I soon learned his library because often he would send me for some text. I remember so clearly the stacks of legal pads that he would fill with notes. His tools of his trade were books, flair pens and yellow legal pads. I once asked why he was taking such careful notes and he remarked because he was in the process of editing a book and needed to take careful notes so that he could share precise comments with the author. My father's pen was the surgeons scalpel carefully dissecting the texts, analyzing the references and making corrections.

As I grew in my studies, he would share specific insights he had gleaned from the books and subtle though significant corrections he offered to scholars about their works. As I learned he taught, as he taught I learned. I learned specific texts, but I also learned methodology. He showed me how to find obscure texts cited even if the citation was wrong. Occasionally, a presented text simply cannot be located and that is when my father calls me. I have a CD for my computer that contains rabbinic literature such as all the midrashim, all the Talmud, Tosephta and Mishna, all of the responsa literature, Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Rashi and the Tosaphot. With the tap of a few keys I can find almost anything. I have replaced the indexes and other compilations my father used to use with a CD Rom. The goal is the same, the desire is the same, it is just the tools are changing. Even in our ancient profession the tools are changing. Just like the dentist who's daughter follows him into that field, like the eye doctor who does the same – they learn from each other. They build off of each other.

In this week's Torah reading we begin again. It is the story of the world in formation, one item of creation building off the previous. Water is created and then fish, sky and birds. Each taking its predecessor one step further. That is what we were meant to do. We have many choices in the direction we take our predecessor's work and that is why a verse from this week's reading is so disturbing. I can make sense of the story of Cain killing Able. A moment of unchecked rage, jealousy, and confusion results in the senseless killing of a brother while the other is filled with remorse and forced to wander the world carrying this burdensome weight of his brother's murder. However, what I can't understand, or should I say refuse to understand, is Lemeach. Lemeach marries Adah and Zillah and with Zillah they create a son Tuval who learns how to manipulate

metals. Thus, we enter the bronze age. The midrash tells us that it is using this newly acquired skill that the Lamech was able to kill even more efficiently than his ancestor Cain. Not only does he brag about it, he also sings about it.

יִכְ יַעֲצֹפֵל יִתְגַּרֵּה שִׁיא

“And Lamech said to his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to my speech; for I have slain a man for wounding me, and a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.” (Genesis 4:23-24)

As our Etz Hayim Humash teaches. “Lamech’s taunts, threats and boasts are of the kind customarily uttered in ancient times by those about to engage in combat. He is bragging that he does not need divine protection because he can defend himself with the new weapons of war. He places his faith in the power of technology.” (Page 29)

“Lamech’s taunts, threats and boasts are the kind customarily uttered in ancient times by those about to engage in combat.” In modern parlance, we say those are fighting words. Those are the words of someone picking a fight, words followed by actions of a person prepared to start a war. Today Lamech has been replaced by Ahamanidajad, President of Iran who we funded and established and now seeks a war. Today Lemach has been replaced by North Korean leader Kim Jong-II as he lures South Korea and China into a war. These are the descendants of Lamech. See them for what they are. And choose differently. We can choose to fight fire with fire. When they draw their weapons we can do the same. This week’s reading is filled with lineages. So and so begets so and so. Therefore let me add one more violence begets violence. If we are going to be goaded into war I pray we have first exercised every other political and diplomatic option.

South Korea's Ambassador to Australia Cho Chang-Beom said on Tuesday that military action should not be chosen as a means to resolve the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s nuclear issue. He said South Korea supported the UN Security Council sanctions against the DPRK, but stressed that the resolution underlined the need to intensify diplomatic efforts to resolve the issue peacefully. "A military option should be excluded as a means of breaking the impasse." And it is Cho Chang-Beom that we ought to follow. Before Iran qualifies for the elite club of seven nations that hold nuclear capability they must be stopped. I realize Kim Jong-II believes that sanctions by the U.N. security council is an act of war but before N.Korea tests another bombs, once again flexing its military arsenal it must be stopped and how we choose to do that will either be a real act of war or possibly prevent such engagement.

We have choices. We have options and although I am not a diplomat, not a political scientist, I see the choices.

In a bizarre chronology the narrative of Lemach concludes with the birth of Shet. As soon as Lemach finishes his oration the Torah says. “And Adam knew his wife again; and she bore a son, and called his name Seth; For God, said she, has appointed me another

seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” (4:25)

We have choices. We have options and although I am not a diplomat, not a political scientist, I see the choices. We can be like decedents of Lemach seeking war and battle or we can be like decedents of Shet born in replacement of the murdered Abel. Shet ultimately brings Enosh into the world who is described as *huchal l'kro beshem adonai*. Who began to call God by name. (4:26) Or as Sforno explains *az hitchilu tzadikei hador*. – He started the righteousness of his generation. He started something good. We have choices. We have options and although I am not a diplomat, not a political scientist, I see the choices. We can start something good or we can pick of the glove and begin the duel. We have choices. We have options and although I am not a diplomat, not a political scientist, I see the choices. We can as the prophet teaches, “beat our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:1-4)

The world has so many role models for violence and mass destruction of human life. Hitler, Milosovic, Hussein. We must not permit Ahamanidajad and Kim Jong II to be added to the list of perpetrators or such crimes against humanity. Rather we must find the Ghandi's, Kings, and Sadats who at great personal risk gave their lives for the cause of peace and the preservation of life not its destruction.

I believe I have been able to take my father's work one step further. I believe it was true of my father and his. My grandfather after whom I am named was a Hebrew school teacher, my father a grand rabbi and maybe one day I will be as well. But this much I know. As long as I continue to align myself with roles models of his caliber I have a chance. I often carry a brief case that is embossed with three gold letters – JMS my initials. But the satchel belonged to my grandfather Jacob Max Stein. It is a rather large attaché, seemingly large enough to hold the largest of our sacred books. In it, I, too carry those sacred books. The holy books of our people are the tools of my trade. They are the tools I use, they are the tools I have inherited and I pray I continue the legacy of bringing Torah to a world in desperate need of it.