

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch

Bereisheet 20 “Snake. Pray. Live.”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat shalom. First, I would like to announce that this week’s kiddush & sermon are sponsored by Hersh Waisbord, in memory of his parents and siblings, who were murdered in the Holocaust on Sukkot. May their memories be a blessing.

I would also like to congratulate Lexi Schieber & Jon Gradman, and Yuval, Eli, & Lev, upon the birth of a baby boy. The bris will be held next Friday, details TBA.

And I would like to welcome all our new members:

Tova Perlman, Sholom Licht, Shira Freedlander, Hannah Kark, Emuna Garfield, Shira & Daniel Yoshor, Leor Moaddel, Michal Edelman & Andrew Tepper, Hannah Geller, Erica & Michael Noormid, and Jen Sykes & Aryeh Younger. Thank you all for joining the Mekor Habracha community!

I want to thank everyone again for participating in our High Holiday services this year. Despite all the obstacles we faced, I think the general feeling was extremely positive, which is a minor miracle for any shul, especially during this difficult time. This year was certainly memorable, but we hope our prayers will be answered and the pandemic will be over soon.

The High Holidays are a time of reflection to prepare us for the year ahead. But as we mentioned last week, the time for that deep contemplation is over, and we are in the next stage, when we must resume the daily activities of our lives. As we go through the year, our thoughts from the High Holidays will hopefully resurface and help us along the way.

Bereisheet is an interesting place to start because it is packed with so much deep information. You might think it would make sense to take things more slowly and begin with something less challenging. Instead, we are expected to jump right in and study the most complex parsha in the Torah. However, I think it is fitting to begin with a parsha that can be interpreted on many different levels, because it allows us to discover new insights every year.

A feature that I frequently point out is that the story of Adam and Chava and the serpent is the fundamental story of human failure, because it occurs on the 6th day, which is *during* creation and as a result, failure becomes embedded in our existence. One thing we learn from this is that we should accept the fact that failure is part of the human condition. The truth is, however, that acceptance is not enough -- we must also learn how to cope with it.

One of the parsha's messages on this topic is found in the curse given to the serpent. The passage says *al gechoncha teilech, that he will lose his legs and must crawl on his belly; v'afar tochal kol yimei chayecha, he will eat dust for his entire life*. The Netziv asks in his famous work *Haemek Davar*, isn't that actually a blessing, since it means the serpent will have food wherever he goes? On the contrary, the Netziv says, because if you have an endless supply of food, you have no need to *pray to God*. Dovid Hamelech tells us that God responds to the prayers of all living creatures, as the famous pasuk says in Tehilim says, *poteach et yadecha umasbia lchol chai ratzon --God opens His hand and gives every living creature what it needs*.

I think Parshat Bereisheet is teaching us that life may sometimes seem like a miserable failure, but in truth, hardship is meant to be a catalyst for us to pray to God. If we can tap into the High Holidays to remember this lesson throughout the year, and we are always mindful that we have the precious ability to pray, our lives can become complete, and B'ezrat Hashem, we will be able to transform all our failures into successes. Shabbat shalom.