



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
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OU ISRAEL

As we conclude this year's reading of *Sefer Breisheet* 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* wrote that our Sages referred to *Sefer Breisheet* as *Sefer Yesharim*- 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...."

Rabbi Yosef Breuer, zt'l, the grandson of *Rav Shimshon 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." God's Torah not only demands the observance of Kashruth 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. God'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 *Yesharim*- 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*.

Indeed the saintly and revered *Rosh Yeshiva*

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of *Yeshivat Mir* in Yerushalayim, **Rav Chaim Shmulevitz ztvk'l** taught (*Sichot Musar*, p. 347), "Yashrut is the most important attribute amongst all others, and all other character refinement is dependent upon it..."

Similarly, **Rav Yehuda Amital ztvk'l**, the



Rav Yehuda
Amital ztvk'l

beloved founding Rosh Yeshiva of *Yeshivat Har Etzion* frequently spoke and taught about the concepts of *yashrut* and *mentschlichkeit*. Rav Amital would refer to the phrase we recite each morning, which introduces the

recitation of *korbanot*: "Le-olam yehei adam yirei shamayim," "A person should always be God-fearing." Rav Amital would explain this phrase as so: "Le-olam, yeheh adam," "One should always be a person" that is, first one must be a *mensch*; afterwards, one can fear God.

Yehi Ratzon, as we bid farewell for now to *Sefer Breisheet*, may each of us continue to be inspired by the legacy of our *Avot* and *Imahot*, and may we strive each and everyday to emulate their conduct, and live a life of *Yashrut* and *mentschlichkeit*. ■

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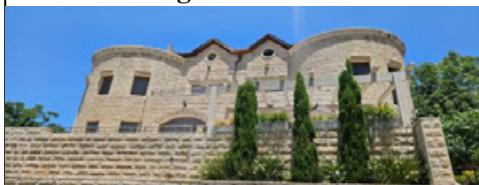
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