

Fraternal Love as a Key Factor in Human Redemption

By: PINCHAS STOLPER

Introduction

We will show that fraternal love is a key factor in human redemption. The Torah teaches this by illustrating the lives of seven sets of brothers each of which advances beyond that of its predecessor. The ultimate achievement of fraternal love will herald the messianic era, the advent of *Mashiah ben Yosef* and *Mashiah ben David*, may they come speedily in our days.

Mashiach – The Attainment of Fraternal Love

Many think of the Torah as a book of laws, but above all it is a manual for the elevation and perfection of human relationships. This is why the first book of the Torah is almost totally devoted to the lives of our patriarchs and matriarchs, their families, dreams and struggles.

A major theme that runs through the Torah is the strained relationship between brothers. Indeed mankind's first crime was the murder of the younger brother by the older. It would therefore follow that a major goal of mankind is to discover a formula by which brothers and sisters can live in harmony.

While the Torah does not speak explicitly of the *Mashiah*,¹ many of its pages describe developing and maturing interpersonal relationships that are saturated with messianic significance.

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What is most significant is that the quality of fraternal relationships in the Bible is not static. From one Biblical set of brothers to the next, the quality of the relationship changes and progresses. Each set of brothers represents an upward step in a changing and evolving relationship which improves progressively from one set of brothers to the next. We move from brothers who hate to brothers who ultimately love.

Seven Sets of Brothers: Stepping-stones to Mashiah

The Torah describes seven evolving and maturing fraternal relationships. These seven sets of brothers represent major historic plateaus. Each is a lesson in how mankind should strive for *Mashiah*. Viewed historically, the story of the seven sets of brothers is the story of mankind itself.

The progress made by each of the seven sets of brothers is so striking that we are left with the impression of having traced the personality and spiritual development of a single individual who struggled, persevered, and, at the end of his life, resolved his inner conflicts and totally refined his personality.

The *Medrash Tanhuma* (Exodus 27) reveals a frightening and alarming psychological insight: כל האחים שונאים זה את זה – all brotherly relationships contain elements of hatred. Our rabbis teach that people who are closest to one another often harbor a jealousy which can destroy the relationship. When Biblical brothers succeed in overcoming their jealousy and hatred they become instruments of redemption. By uniting and resisting tale-bearing, brothers avoid the negative tendencies that tear them apart. The inevitable ascendancy of tolerance and empathy promotes both familial and national unity which in turn paves the way for the realization of the Divine plan for human salvation.

R. Yisrael Salanter taught that “the most difficult challenge confronting each human being is to change even one negative personality trait.” The impulse which drives brothers to compete and hate is so instinctive that when overcome it plants the seeds of the promised redemption.

¹ See, however, Rambam, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:1 that *Mashiah* is mentioned in *N’vuas Balaam*.

According to *Sefer Hashborashim* of the Radak, the word *ah*, brother, is the root of *ehad*, one. Forging ideal relationships between brothers is the basic ingredient for reaching the goal of the human enterprise in which the Jewish nation is the *s'obr she-b'eesab*, the “yeast” that moves and activates all of human history. The goal of the Jew must be to bring civilization to a pinnacle of spiritual achievement, to such a time as proclaimed by *Sh'ma Yisroel* – when *Hashem Elokeinu*, “the Lord who is our *Hashem*” will become *Hashem Ehad*, “the one *Hashem*” of all mankind. To achieve the goal of human unity, to progress from *aleph* to *het*, demands that Jews unite as *ahim*, as brothers.²

We will analyze seven sets of Biblical brothers who dominate the landscape of the Torah and beyond. They act as a roadmap leading from the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, through the discord and hatred which characterized relationships between Yizhak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Eisav, and Yosef and his brothers. Suddenly, this pattern is broken as there bursts forth a radically new and changed relationship, that of Ephraim and Menashe, the sons of Yosef. Subsequently, Aaron and Moshe develop an even more extraordinary kinship which sets the stage, generations later, for the highest and most exemplary of ‘brotherly’ relationships, that of David and Yehonatan who were not biological brothers but brothers in a

² The number ‘eight’ in Jewish thought denotes the messianic redemption. The Gemara in Arakhin 13b states:

כנור של מקדש של שבעת נימין היה . . . ושל ימות המשיח שמונה שנאמר (תהלים יב:א) למנצח על השמינית.

This is then referenced by R. Judah Loew b. Bezalel (the Maharal of Prague) in his *Netsach Yisrael*, chapter 32 where he writes:

ובמוצאי שביעית בן דוד בא. יש לך להתבונן, כי אין ראוי למשיח רק המספר שהוא אחר השבעה, וזהו מדריגת המשיח למי שידע מדריגתו של משיח ומעלתו העליונה. כי מדרגת עולם הזה מדרגתו מספר שבעה בלבד, מפני כי מדרגת המשיח על עולם הזה, ועולם הזה הוא מיוסד על ז'. ובמסכת ערכין (יג ב) כינור של מקדש וכו'.

The Maharal in the following paragraph continues:

אבל לימות המשיח הוא מדריגה יותר על זה. כי לימות המשיח יתאחד הרבה אשר הוא באולם הזה על ידי המשיח, ולכך הכינור הוא של שמונה. כי השמיני הוא נגד האחדות אשר יש בהם הרבוי, ולכך הכינור של שמונה נימין.

R. Bahya b. Asher (רבנו בחיי) in his *Sefer Bahya* under *Chofek* כד הקמה writes:

ועוד יש בזה טעם אחר והוא כי חשבון שמונה רמז לשמן המשיח, שהוא על מעלת שמונה, וידוע כי חשבון שמונה הוא אחר השבעה במעלת האחד ובזמן המשיח יחזרו כל האומות לאמונתנו, הוא שכתב (צפניה ג:ט) כי אז אהפך אל עמים שפה ברורה לקרא כלם בשם ה' לעבדו שכם אחד.

sublimely spiritual sense. They represent the ideal fraternal relationship, unprecedented and unduplicated in all of human history. Theirs is the road which points to the messianic era.

Cain and Abel. Human history opens with the conflict of two brothers whose jealousy and hatred results in murder. When Cain saw that his younger brother had earned *Hashem's* favor, Cain's strategy for regaining his temporal and spiritual kingly privileges, which are the birthright of the firstborn, was to murder his brother. The first crime between two human beings is fratricide. Resonating through history is that inhuman retort: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

From Yizhak and Yishmael to Yaakov and Eisav. The next two sets of brothers are Yizhak and Yishmael and Yaakov and Eisav. But is there a genuine progression from the Yizhak and Yishmael relationship to that of Yaakov and Eisav?

Note that while the Sages see Eisav as the eternal competitor and antagonist of Yaakov, this is not explicitly stated in the Torah text. On the contrary, Yizhak never banished Eisav. He loved him to the end and apparently was not aware of his negative traits. The *Humash* never openly states that Eisav shared the particular characteristics of Yishmael of whom the *Humash* says "And he shall be a wild ass of a man: his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him and over all his brothers shall he dwell" (Genesis 16:11). The simple meaning of this, according to Rashi, is that Yishmael would "be an untamed brigand, a hated plunderer and warrior."

While Yishmael's banishment is described by the text in detail, in the case of Yaakov and Eisav, it was Yaakov who fled his father's house while Eisav remained at home. Looking at the *p'shat*, the plain meaning of the Torah, we learn that Eisav was on a higher level than Yishmael, giving credence to the double link in the progression of the seven sets of brothers.

Yishmael was banished from Avraham's home because his influence could no longer be tolerated. Contrast this with the Torah's description of the reconciliation of Yaakov and Eisav, "And he (Yaakov) passed in front of them and bowed to the ground seven times until he reached his brother (Eisav). Then Eisav ran to him, hugged him and fell on his neck and kissed him; then they both cried" (Genesis 33:3-4). The Sages debate as to whether this was a

full and sincere reconciliation. Even R. Shimon bar Yochai, who taught that “it is an accepted principle that Eisav hates Yaakov,” says that “Eisav’s compassion overwhelmed him at that moment and he kissed Yaakov with his full heart” (Rashi *ibid.* quoting Genesis Rabba).

The Netziv in Ha’amek Davar says: “‘They both cried.’ This teaches that at that moment Eisav was overcome with love for Yaakov as Yaakov was overcome with love for Eisav. This also took place in later generations when the children of Eisav were filled with a pure spirit and recognized the exalted qualities of the children of Yaakov. Then the Jew was also aroused to recognize that Eisav is indeed his brother, just as R. Yehudah ha-Nasi loved his Roman friend, Antoninus. There are many similar examples.”³

Ephraim and Menashe. Brotherly relationships take a dramatic and decisive about-face with Ephraim and Menashe, the fifth set of brothers. The story of the unique blessing which Yaakov bestowed on his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe, the blessing with which Jewish fathers bless their children each Friday night, *ישמך אלקים*, *כאפרים וכמנשה*, “May *Hashem* make you as Ephraim and Menashe,” is the key to that relationship. What is out of character and most intriguing about Yaakov’s blessing is that “Yisrael put forth his right hand and placed it on the head of Ephraim who was the younger (Genesis 48:14), thereby favoring the younger brother over the older. Following this deliberate, shocking, and provocative act the Torah continues its narrative by telling us absolutely nothing about the recipients’ reactions to their blessing! The Torah’s silence here is shattering and deafening. With dramatic and resonating silence, Menashe accepts the fact that his younger brother is chosen for the special role to which the older brother is normally entitled by reason of birthright. Most importantly, hatred ceases to be the dominant factor in brotherly relationships. A revolutionary new relationship emerges, opening the

³ The statement of the Netziv does not reflect the consensus of *Hazal* or the reality of subsequent history. Until this century, the Isaac/Yishmael rivalry receded while the Eisav/Yaakov relationship, as reflected in *Hazal*, has been the focus of the 2000 year-old fourth exile of Eisav, i.e., Edom and Rome.

door to the possibility of redemption and more immediately, to the next step, the advent of Moshe and Aaron.

Moshe and Aaron. We continue our study with Moshe and Aaron. Their unique relationship demonstrates the key role that fraternal relationships played in molding Jewish history, particularly at the pivotal moments which resulted in the birth of Am Yisrael, the nation which was created for the express purpose of changing the manner in which human beings relate to each other.

The factor which made possible the Exodus, the birth of Israel as a nation, and the Revelation at Sinai was the exemplary brotherly relationship of Moshe and Aaron so radically different from the negative relationships between Cain and Abel, Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Eisav or Yosef and his brothers. Brotherly love created a unique partnership between two towering leaders ending 210 years of Jewish bondage and exile, and making possible the creation of two essential Jewish institutions: *Malkhut*, kingship, awarded to Moshe Rabbeinu and *Kehunah*, priesthood, awarded to Aaron. This new *ah* relationship paved the way for humanity's greatest moment, the Revelation on Sinai. When the Jewish people stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai they enjoyed total unity, as expressed by Rashi, כַּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד, "as one man, as though with one heart."

The unique relationship between Moshe and Aaron is celebrated in Psalm 133:1, King David's ode to the messianic age. הֲנֵה יָחַד מָה טוֹב וּמָה נְעִים שִׁבְתָּ אַחִים גַּם יָחַד, "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in harmony." This is how Rashi understands the Psalm: "Only when *Hashem* Himself, will sit in the Holy Temple together with the Jewish people who are called *ahim*, brothers, and *rayim*, friends, only then will *Hashem* be *yahad*, will He and His people be joined together." But how are Jews to achieve this ultimate "good and pleasant?" When we are reunited as one people in our own land, when we are again *ahim*, united as brothers - only then will the Messiah come. The Radak comments, "This refers to the *Melekeh* (King) *Mashiah* and the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest, who, in the messianic age will be brothers in greatness without a shred of jealousy between them (*v'lo yekan'u zeh lazeh*)." Psalm 133 continues, "Like the precious oil upon the head running down the beard, the beard of Aaron, comes down the hem of his garments." This sentence demonstrates that Aaron, and not Moshe, is to be credited with

bringing about the Exodus and the Revelation at Sinai. The redemption from Egypt became possible due to two factors: first, Aaron's success in overcoming his jealousy of his brother, and second, Moshe's refusal to accept the leadership of the Jewish people, insisting that Aaron's position as Prophet and elder brother entitled him to be leader. Rashi teaches that for seven days Moshe pleaded with *Hashem* to appoint his brother Aaron, king and leader in his stead. Moshe refused leadership for one reason - to avoid usurping the prerogatives, prestige and honor of his older brother, Aaron. ויאמר בי ה' שלח נא ביד תשלח – "I beg you, O Lord," exclaimed Moshe, "please, send someone more appropriate, [Aaron, the one you are accustomed to send]" (Exodus 4:13). Moshe finally relented when *Hashem* said to him, וגם הנה הוא יצא לקראתך וראך ושמח בלבו, "See, Aaron is setting out to greet you, and when he sees you, his heart will be glad" (ibid., 4:14). Rashi adds, "It is not as you think that he will resent you because you are ascending to greatness." The Talmud (Shabbat 139a) relates, "Said R. Malachi; (As Aaron's reward for) 'and when he sees you his heart will be glad,' (concerning the appointment of his brother) Aaron merited the *Hoshen Mishpat*, (the breastplate worn by the High Priesthood over his heart)."

David and Yehonatan. Contrast the murder of Abel by Cain with the fifteen chapters in I Samuel devoted to the description of the moving and dramatic saga of two men, each in-line to be king of Israel, Yehonatan the son of King Sha'ul, and David the son of Yishai. Each should have hated the other and each had ample reason to murder the other. Each rose above politics, pragmatism, family, succession, and reality, motives and aspirations typical of nearly all human beings. In a most dramatic and unexpected turn of events, two outstanding individuals overcame self-interest, hatred, jealousy, and ego. Yehonatan sublimated his dreams of royalty to serve a higher purpose, the establishment of David's line of kingship, the *Malkhut Bait David* from which *Mashiach* is destined to be born. The selfless and self-sacrificing behavior of Yehonatan is the greatest such story ever told. This is the living gift and legacy of Yehonatan, whose name means '*Hashem* gave,' and David, whose name means 'beloved.' In I Samuel (18:1) it is written, "The soul of Yehonatan was bound up with the soul of David and Yehonatan loved David as he loved himself." Then, "Yehonatan removed his cloak and his tunic" (ibid., 18:4), symbols of royalty and kingship, and voluntarily presented

them to David, of his own free will, thus acknowledging the providence and will of *Hashem*. Yehonatan endangered and ultimately sacrificed his life so that his arch-competitor would rule Israel in his father's stead. This overwhelming act of brotherly love and self-effacement made possible the emergence of the House of David, the vehicle for human redemption.

Note that Cain and Abel and David and Yehonatan struggled over the same prize: who would be the one to wear the crown as *Hashem's* representative on earth? While Cain tragically solved his challenge by murdering his brother, Yehonatan resolved his by offering up his life, not only so that David could live, but so that David would inherit his crown. This total transformation, traditionally called a *tikkun*, a correction or rectification, completes the circle and serves as a paradigm for humanity's redemption.

Yehonatan and David aspired to and reached the highest levels of human brotherhood. Are not all Jews and indeed all human beings brothers? It was the sacrifice of Yehonatan that led to the establishment of the messianic line.

Indeed, when David learned that Yehonatan fell in battle, he spoke of him as his beloved brother; "I am stressed because of you, my brother Yehonatan, you were very pleasant to me, your love for me was far more wonderful than the love of my wives" (II Samuel 1:26). Are Yehonatan and David 'brothers?' The text clearly confirms that they are.

The relationship of David and Yehonatan repaired the very foundation of the house of Israel. Yehonatan was a descendant of Binyamin, the son of Rachel while David was a descendant of Yehudah, the son of Leah. Their friendship was thus a reconciliation and a mending of the split between the two sides of the family of Yaakov.

The Ultimate: Mashiah ben Yosef and Mashiah ben David.

Examine each opposite end of our brotherly spectrum. Contrast the first set of brothers, Cain and Abel, and the seventh set of "brothers," David and Yehonatan. Then contemplate the final, eighth set of "brothers," - *Mashiah ben Yosef* and *Mashiah ben David* who are not yet on the scene, but who when they reveal themselves as messianic personalities, will bring the saga of the brothers to a close with the onset of the messianic era.

In fact, it is the reconciliation of the two royal brothers in the guise of *Mashiah ben Yosef* and *Mashiah ben David* that will bring the two competing tribes of Yosef and Yehudah into harmony, and will make possible the messianic era of human reconciliation, peace and justice.

Among the seven sets of brothers, two hold the key to the Messianic era: Yosef who ruled over Egypt and David, who ruled over Israel. It is from their descendants that *Mashiah* will rise.

Mashiah ben Yosef will be followed by *Mashiah ben David*, who will restore Israel to its former glory. Why Yosef and David? Because they share the experience of having been rejected by their brothers. At first their brothers failed to recognize the role which the G-d of history had assigned to their brother, but later both Yosef and David achieved full reconciliation with their brothers. Both succeeded in restoring a relationship of harmony, trust and love. As David says in Psalms 122:8: ... למען אחי ורעי אדברה נא שלום בך. “For the sake of my brethren who are my comrades I shall speak peace in your midst. For the sake of the House of *Hashem*, our G-d, I will request your good.” Brotherly relationships loom large because they are fundamental in the task of molding a unique people with the responsibility to bring to fruition the Torah’s plan for human destiny.

Diversity and Unity

The progression between the seven sets of brothers from Cain and Abel, up until David and Yehonatan sets the pattern for the brotherly relationships each Jew must internalize in order to participate in the messianic adventure. Only then can we as a whole succeed in transforming the Torah community from one in which one segment distrusts and sometimes despises the other, into one in which each segment respects and cherishes the other. The Torah did not envision a monolithic Jewish nation, but one of many tribes and colors. The grandeur of the Jewish national concept calls for each of the twelve tribes to march under its own banner, to demonstrate its unique style, and at the same time to be capable of uniting under one King and one Torah.

Encouraging diversity within the Torah community is legitimate and healthy provided that each segment respects the other’s differences and lives in brotherhood and harmony.

There are precisely eight sets of brothers leading from Cain and Abel to the ultimate messianic era of *Masbiab ben Yosef* and *Masbiab ben Dovid*. We progress from Cain who murdered Abel, to Yitzchak and Yishmael, to Yaakov and Eisav. Finally we come to Yosef's brothers who were prepared to murder their brother but who in the end, achieved unity and reconciliation proclaiming, כלנו בני איש, "We are all brothers, the children of one father" (Genesis 42:11). All of us, including our brother Yosef, represent facets of the same truth. We must co-exist in peace.

A missed opportunity. Many centuries later an attempt was made to bring about the messianic era. The relationship described as הנהגה משה טוב, the cooperation between two great leaders nearly succeeded when R. Akiva recognized Bar Kochba as *Masbiab*. Although they stood at the very precipice of a potentially messianic era, their partnership failed because the students of R. Akiva were unable to attain the relationships of Ephraim and Menashe, Moshe and Aaron, David and Yehonatan. The reason for their failure is cited by the Talmud (Yevamot 62b): שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, "They did not adequately honor each other." Whatever that phrase actually means, their failure to give their colleagues the respect that was expected from on High, resulted in two thousand years of Jewish exile and suffering from which we are now hopefully emerging.

Much like R. Akiva and his colleagues who rebuilt Jewish life following the devastating *hurban*, our generation has experienced six great miracles: the miraculous rebuilding of Jewish life following an equally devastating *hurban*, the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty; the conquest of Jerusalem; the rebirth of the Torah world; the *ba'al teshuvah* movement; and the liberation of Soviet Jewry. No rational person could have anticipated any of these events. Despite clear evidence of *Hashem's* hand, the overwhelming majority of Jews remain oblivious to the challenges and demands presented by these great events. As a result, the Jewish world and the world at large face unimagined tests and dangers.

Conclusion

Instead of marshalling our forces and intensifying our efforts to reach the non-observant, we witness an upsurge of fragmentation, intolerance and narrowness within the Torah world.

Our guiding light ought to be Yosef whom the Torah calls the *ba'al ha'halomot*, the master of dreams. It was he who reunited the twelve brothers to form one nation. It was he who restored peace to the House of Israel. It was he who demonstrated that it is possible to rise to extraordinary spiritual heights in a non-Jewish society. It is Yosef who, alone among Biblical personages, is called by our Rabbis, *ba-zadik*, the righteous one.

Our seven Biblical sets of brothers were among mankind's greatest personalities, people of unusual qualities, principles, idealism and determination. Their evolution represents the pattern on which we must design our own lives. They were real people who engaged in a daily struggle to overcome their limitations to rise to divine loftiness.

If their dreams are to be realized, they must become our own. We must learn not only from our ancestors' triumphs, but also from their struggles. Indeed, the Torah teaches this so that we can achieve what all parents expect of their children: to be better than they. While this may seem impossible, is not the challenge for which *Hashem* has placed us on this earth? ❧