

## Brothers Crying Out From the Ground: The Biblical Roots of Our Divided Society Judy Klitsner

### 1. Cain and Abel

א) וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קִבֵּיתִי אִישׁ אֶת יְיָ: (ב) וַתִּסֶּף לָלֶדֶת אֶת אָחִיו אֶת הָבֶל וַיְהִי הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה: (ג) וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה: (ד) וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַם הוּא מִבְכֹּרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֲלֵבֶהָ וַיִּשַׁע יְיָ אֶל הֶבֶל וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ: (ה) וְאֶל קַיִן וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחֲרֹק לְקַיִן לְמַעַן חָרָה לֵךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנָיו: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל קַיִן וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקֶּם קַיִן אֶל-הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:

The man knew Eve... she conceived and bore Cain, and said: 'I have acquired a man with the LORD.' And she continued to give birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a tiller of the ground. At the end of days, Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD paid heed to Abel and to his offering; but to Cain and to his offering He did not pay heed. And Cain was very angry and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry and why has your face fallen? Is it not so: if you do well, there will be uplift, and if you do not do well, sin couches at the door; and to you is its desire, but you may rule over it." And Cain said to Abel his brother, and it was when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him.

### 2. Abarbanel on verse 1

**I have acquired a man with the Lord.** ... she said this in order to brag: if the first time, woman was created from man—flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones—now the man, Cain, is made from the woman, Havvah... Therefore, man has no superiority over

woman, since now man comes from woman. 'I have acquired a man with God' means she attributed (Cain) to herself and not to his father.

### 3. Bereishit 1:16

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים... אֶת־הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים:

God made... the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars.

### 4. Radak on verse 7

הלא אם תטיב שאת - אם תטיב לבך ומעשיך יהיה לך שאת, פירוש כפרה וסליחה כמו נושא עון (שמות ל"ד) של חטאת הוא יצר הרע...

**If you will do well there will be uplift.** If you improve your heart and deeds you will have uplift, meaning atonement and forgiveness of sin, that is the evil inclination...

### Bereishit 49:3

רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אֶתָּה כָּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי יֵתֵר שְׂאֵת יֵיתֵר עָד:

Reuben, you are my first born... exceeding in rank and exceeding in honor.

### 5. Bereishit Rabbah

על מה היו מדיינים? אמרו בואו ונחלוק את העולם אחד נטל הקרקעות ואחד נטל את המטלטלין. דין אמר ארעא דאת קאים עליה ידי ודין אמר מה דאת לביש ידי. דין אמר חלוץ ודין אמר פרח מתוך כך ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו ויהרגהו. רבי יהושע דסכנין בשם רבי לוי אמר שניהם נטלו את הקרקעות ושניהן נטלו את המטלטלין ועל מה היו מדיינים? אלא זה אמר בתחומי בית המקדש נבנה וזה אמר בתחומי בית המקדש נבנה... ומתוך כך (בראשית ד) ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו וגו'. יהודה בר אמי אמר על חוה הראשונה היו מדיינים...

**Cain said to Abel his brother...**What were they arguing about? They said, "Come, let us divide the world." One took the land and the other took the moveable objects. One said, "The land you are standing on his mine." The other said, "What you are wearing is

mine.” One said, “Take it off!” the other said, “Get off!” As a result, “Cain arose over Abel his brother and killed him.”

... What were they arguing about? One said, “In my portion will the holy temple be built.” The other said, “In my portion will the holy temple be built”... As a result, Cain arose over Abel his brother and killed him.”

Rabbi Yehuda bar Ami said, “They were arguing about Havvah.”

### Rashi on verse 8:

כנס עמו בדברי ריב ומצה להתעולל עליו להרגו ויש בזה מדרשי אגדה אך זה ישובו של מקרא:

**Cain said to Abel.** He engaged in contentious words with him, to create a pretext to kill him. There are many midrashim on this, but this is the plain sense of the text.

### 6. Bereishit 37

וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם: וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בָרַךְ־זֶקֶנִים הוּא לֹו וַעֲשָׂה לֹו בְּתֻנֶּת פָּסִים: וַיִּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי־אֵלָּו אֶהָב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלָם:

וַיִּחַלֵּם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגֵּד לְאָחָיו וַיּוֹסֶפוּ עוֹד שִׁנְא אוֹתוֹ: ... וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם־מִנְשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסֶפוּ עוֹד שִׁנְא אוֹתוֹ עַל־חֲלֻמֹּתָיו וְעַל־דִּבְרָיו: וַיִּחַלֵּם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיּוֹסֶפֶר אוֹתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלֻמֹּתַי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי:

Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons because he was the child of his old age; he made him a colorful tunic. His brothers saw that their father loved him best and they hated him; they could not speak a friendly word to him. Joseph dreamed a dream and told his brothers and they hated him more... His brothers said to him, “Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?” They hated him even more for his dreams and his words. He dreamed another dream and told his brothers. He said, “... the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

### 7. Bereishit 39

וַיְהִי אַחֵר הַדִּבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתֵּשֶׂא אִשְׁת־אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ אֶל־יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂכָבָה עִמִּי: וַיִּמָּאֵן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אִשְׁת־אֲדֹנָיו הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא־יַעַדֵּעַ אֹתִי מִה־בִּבְיֹוֹת... וַיְהִי בַּדְּבָרָה אֶל־יוֹסֵף יוֹם יוֹם וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׂבֵב אֶצְלָהּ לְהִיּוֹת עִמָּה: ...וַתִּתְּפָשֶׂהוּ בְּבִגְדוֹ לֹאמֹר שְׂכָבָה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: ... וַתִּקְרָא לְאִנְשֵׁי

בֵּיתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר רְאוּ הֵבִיא לִנִּי אִישׁ עִבְרִי לְצַחֵק בְּנִי בָּא אֵלַי לְשִׁכַּב עִמִּי וְאָקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל: ...  
וַתִּנָּח בְּגָדוֹ אֶצְלָהּ עַד-בּוֹא אֲדָמִיו אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ: וַתִּדְבֹּר אֵלָיו כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר בָּא-אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד הָעִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר-  
הֵבִאתָ לִנִּי לְצַחֵק בִּי: ... וַיְהִי כַשֵּׁמֶעַ אֲדָמִיו אֶת-דְּבָרֶי אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה לִי  
עֶבְדְּךָ וַיַּחֲר אַפּוֹ:

After these things, his master's wife raised her eyes to Joseph and said, "Lie with me!" He refused and said to his master's wife... She spoke to Joseph every day and he would not heed her to lie with her... she grabbed him by his clothing saying, "Lie with me!" He left his garment in her hand and he fled... She called her household staff and said to them, "See, he has brought a Hebrew man to mock us. He came to me, to lie with me, and I cried out in a loud voice..." She kept his garment with her until his master came to his home. She spoke to him such words as these, saying, "he came to me, the Hebrew servant, whom you brought to us, to mock me..." When his master heard the words of his wife which she had spoken to him saying, "such as these things (words) your servant did to me," his anger flared.

## 8. Bereishit 45, 50

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף ... וְלֹא-יָכְלוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנֹת אוֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפָּנָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו גִּשְׁוֹ-נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגָּשׁוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֶחֱיֹכֶם אֲשֶׁר-מָכַרְתֶּם אוֹתִי מִצְרַיִם: וַעֲתָה אֶל-תַּעֲצְבוּ וְאֶל-יֹחֵר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי-  
מָכַרְתֶּם אוֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי לְמַחְיָה שָׁלַחֵנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵיכֶם: ...וַעֲתָה לֹא-אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אוֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים  
וַיְשִׁימֵנִי לְאֵב לַפְרֹעָה וּלְאֲדֹנָן לְכָל-בֵּיתוֹ וּמַשָּׁל בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיֵּשְׁבֶת בְּאֶרֶץ-גֹּשֶׁן וַהֲיִיתָ קְרוֹב אֵלַי אַתָּה  
וּבְנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי בְנֶיךָ ... וְכָלכַּחֲתִי אֶתְּךָ שָׁם:

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph... and they were unable to answer him because they were dumbfounded... Joseph said to his brothers, "Draw near to me," and they drew near. And he said, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold to Egypt. And now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me here; God has sent me before you to save life... Now it is not you who sent me here, but God; He has made me a father to Pharaoh... and a ruler over all the land of Egypt. You will dwell in the land of Goshen and be close to me, you and your children and grandchildren... and I will provide for you there..."

וַיִּפֹּל עַל צַוְאֵרֵי בְנֵימִן אָחִיו וַיִּבֶךְ... וַיִּנָּשֶׁק לְכָל אָחִיו וַיִּבֶךְ עֲלֵהֶם וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן דִּבֶּר אֲחִיו אֵתוֹ

He fell on Benjamin's neck and cried and Benjamin cried on his neck... and he kissed all his brothers and cried upon them, and afterwards his brothers spoke to him.

... וַיְנַחֵם אוֹתָם וַיְדַבֵּר עַל לִבָּם:

...[And Joseph] consoled them, speaking to their hearts.

## 9. R. Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi

אם אנחנו היינו כותבים את הפסוק היינו כותבים 'ואהבת את בני האדם כמוך'. מדוע דווקא 'לרעך'? האם לא ראוי לאהוב גם את מי שאינו רעך? ...הציווי צריך להיות קודם כל כלפי רעך. קל לנו יותר לאהוב את מי שרחוק מאיתנו, את מי שאין לנו איתו מערכת יחסים קרובה ואין לנו מחויבות כלפיו. החיבה אליו היא כללית ואמורפית. משום כך התורה מצווה אותנו... לאהוב את הקרוב – רעך, כמוך.

If we were to write this verse, we would have written, “Love human beings as yourself.” Why specifically “your fellow”? Would it not be more fitting to love the one who is *not* your fellow? [But] the command has to be first and foremost in relation to your fellow. It is easier for us to love those who are far from us, those with whom we are not in a close relationship... Love for those people is general and amorphous. For this reason, the Torah commands us to love the one who is near, your fellow, as yourself.

### Teacher Bio

Judy Klitsner is a senior educator at Pardes. A disciple of the great Torah teacher Nehama Leibowitz, Judy lectures internationally, bringing an accessible, text-based teaching style to her broad and diverse audiences. Judy is the author of the award-winning book *Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other*. She is the founding board chair of Sacred Spaces, an organization that seeks to address abuses of power in Jewish institutions.