



Bereishit

What is at the Heart of our Judaism?

What is at the heart of our Judaism? Right now on the Jewish calendar we are between Simchat Torah and Shabbat Bereishit. As we are all aware, on Simchat Torah we concluded the Torah, the concluding word of which is Yisrael – and therefore the last letter of the Torah is lamed. And on Shabbat, we will commence the Torah once again with the word Bereishit – the opening letter of which is a bet. So, if you bring the last letter and the first letter together, it provides us with the word ‘lev’, which means heart. Emerging from this is a very powerful lesson. For the sake of the continuity of our Torah learning, our Torah devotion and our commitment to a Torah way of life, we need to have a good heart.

In of the Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter two, we read how Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai asked his five top students, what in their view was the most important characteristic that a person should have? And each one gave their answer. The first answer was that the most important characteristic is a good eye. The second said a good friend, the third, a good neighbour, the fourth replied the capacity to see the consequences of our deeds. And the fifth was the view of Rabbi Elazar, and he said, having a lev tov, a good heart. And Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai said that he agreed with that last view, because if you

have a good heart, that includes all other fine attributes.

We have witnessed the miraculous events of the past week or two, during which, thank God, the twenty remaining living hostages have come back home. They are alive and their hearts are amazing. So many of the hostages upon emerging alive made the love signal with their hands. They just want everybody to get on well together. And I believe, after two very bitter years of conflict, we need to focus on our own hearts.

We need to engage and improve our ahavat Yisrael, love of our fellow Jews, our ahavat habriot, love of all human beings and in addition, of course, our ahavat Hashem, love of the Lord, our God. That is why The Talmud tells us, “rachmana liba boi”, the Merciful One, Almighty God, He wants our hearts. And that is the call of the hour. To be better people and to create a world that is built on love, tolerance and friendship.

So therefore, to answer our opening question, what is right at the heart of our Judaism? The answer is, the heart.

Shabbat Shalom.