



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
304 E. Midland Avenue - Paramus NJ 07652- 201.262.7691

A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday, December 17, 2021 ~ Parshat: Vayechi

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Last Sunday night, the annual Miss Universe pageant was held in Eilat, Israel. Now ordinarily, beauty pageants don't interest me. After all, why would I waste time watching young, leggy, thin-waisted women pontificating about world issues when I could be watching Sunday Night Football, filled with young, well-built, muscular men with a penchant for ignoring COVID protocols.

As far as these types of events go, as they say, I only read the articles!

Now, as I said, the Miss Universe pageant isn't my thing. (And let's face it, if it was, would I reveal that in this rather public forum?) But this year, I was interested, as Israel has never hosted this event before, and that was guaranteed to draw attention, scrutiny, and controversy. And what a spectacle it was. The locations in Israel were magnificent. Eighty young women representing countries throughout the world gushed about how wonderful Israel was through their perfectly glossed lips and magnificent teeth. Hundreds of millions of people in 172 nations viewed the event. The comedian, Steve Harvey, was his usual entertaining self, and his praise of Israel was both authentic and heartfelt. Even the amazing stage, which I read was built in Portugal and flown to Israel for this occasion, truly dazzled, so much so that if it had entered the evening gown competition, it would have surely won.

Now what does this have to do with Lalela Mswane, Miss South Africa?

Miss South Africa, by virtue of her title, represents South Africa in international competitions of this sort. But because the event was held in Israel, the government of South Africa which has unfriendly, if not hostile relations with the state of Israel, and its many members of government who are ardent supporters of the BDS (Boycott Divest and Sanction) movement, publicly opposed her participation in the event, and demanded that she bow out.

Ms. Mswane refused, and in doing so showed tremendous courage, far more courage than it takes to participate in the swimwear competition.

But perhaps more interestingly, there was a great backlash within South Africa against the government's pressure campaign against her. The governing board of the pageant in South Africa publicly supported her desire to compete and represent her country in Israel. Public opinion strongly supported her participation as well. And the rest is history. She competed and came in third.

Now in the scheme of things, a beauty pageant ultimately is not that important, unless you really believe that a woman's worth and potential is measured by how she looks. Israel has bigger concerns than that. But at a time when Israel's legitimacy is still denied by many, when too many governments support the anti-Semitic BDS movement, when each year there are countries that refuse to allow their athletes to compete against Israeli athlete in international competitions, (indeed, Miss Malaysia and Miss Indonesia also refused to compete in the pageant last week), a meaningless event like this that showcases Israel's many positive qualities takes on real international significance. It took tremendous courage for Miss South Africa to defy her government and embrace Israel so passionately and so warmly.

Miss South Africa 2021, Lalela Mswane, came in third (that's second runner up in pageant lingo) in the competition. But for all who cares about Israel, she was the winner in our book.

Thank you, Miss South Africa.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner