



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday November 15, 2024 ~ Parsha: Vayera

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Build The Bridge Over Troubled Water

There's an old saying that a Rabbi gives but one sermon his entire career. I'm not sure I agree, but I understand why this saying exists. It's an understanding that while subjects and topics may change, certain ideas and values find themselves expressed on a regular basis. As I think about the thousands of sermons, bulletin articles, Shabbat messages and other communications over the course of my career, this certainly rings true for me. And one of those values is the importance of reconciliation, of making up, of the need to fix important relationships that for whatever reason have gone awry. Throughout my career, I have seen tensions between parents and children, among sisters and brothers, and between dear friends lead to bitterness and estrangement. I have officiated at too many funerals, and attended too many shiva houses where the grief was compounded by failure to either seek forgiveness, extend forgiveness, or even attempt to talk and reconcile while there was still time. That's not something to just think about on Yom Kippur, but throughout the year as well.

Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel were one of the most successful and critically acclaimed musical duos in history. Simon and Garfunkel had a series of successful singles and albums that culminated with *Bridge Over Troubled Water* in 1970. But despite the amazing vocals and harmonies that characterized their music, theirs was always a difficult relationship. According to reports, Garfunkel was angry when Paul Simon released a single under a pseudonym in their early years together. "The friendship was shattered for life... I never forget, and I never really forgive," Garfunkel wrote in his memoir.

Paul Simon did not appreciate Garfunkel's acting career, which began in the late 1960's. "I think that if Artie had become a big movie star, he would have left," Simon

wrote in his own memoir. "...this made me think about how I could still be the guy who wrote songs and sing them. I didn't need Artie."

Simon and Garfunkel reunited for a huge concert in Central Park in 1981. There was a successful reunion tour in 1993. Yet they still didn't fully reconcile. When Paul Simon was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001, he remarked "I regret the ending of our friendship. I hope that someday before we die, we will make peace with each other. No rush." In 2015, Garfunkel, still angry at the duo's split years earlier, told a reporter "How can you walk away from this lucky place on top of the world Paul? What's going on with you, you idiot?" To which Simon responded several months later, "Quite honestly, we don't get along."

Fast forward to a few weeks ago. After years of bad blood, anger and estrangement, Garfunkel gave an interview to a British newspaper in which he revealed "I actually had lunch with Paul a few weeks back. First time we'd been together in many years. I looked at Paul and said, What happened? Why haven't we seen each other? Paul mentioned an old interview where I said some stuff. I cried when he told me how much I had hurt him. Looking back, I guess I wanted to shake up the nice guy image of Simon and Garfunkel. You know what? I was a fool." Later in the interview, he revealed the following. "We made plans to meet again. Will Paul bring his guitar? Who knows? For me, it was about wanting to make amends before it's too late."

In my role as a pulpit Rabbi, I have been asked to help mediate disputes among family members and close friends over the years. So, I think I understand how difficult that conversation must have been, and perhaps even more so how difficult it must have been for Art Garfunkel to initiate that conversation. It must have been very hard for Art Garfunkel to understand how his actions hurt Paul Simon over a half century ago. It must have been hard for Paul Simon to acknowledge his role in their estrangement as well. But I am particularly moved by Art Garfunkel's desire to try to fix things and restore their relationship motivated by his acknowledgement that he had made mistakes, and at age 83, time was running out. It reminds me of a lesson of our Rabbis, who encouraged people to repent the day before we die. Asked by his students about this, and pointing out that no one really knows the date of their death, the Rabbi said that "Of course, no one knows the date of their death. That is why we must repent today."

Years ago, I told the congregation a story of one of America's most famous Rabbis, who had a falling out with the Cantor of his congregation. Things got ugly, congregants took sides, and the congregational leadership decided that for the good of the congregation, the Rabbi and the Cantor needed to leave. Some years later, the Rabbi took another congregation where the Cantor, now retired, was a member. For years, they would pass each other every Shabbat, and ignore each other. Not a word, not a greeting, not even a Shabbat shalom.

And then the Rabbi's wife died. His children worried about how their father would survive the enormous loss. One day, soon after the completion of the shiva, they came to see him and they found him, much to their surprise, all excited.

"Do you know who came to see me today? " he said. It was the Cantor!" The children were surprised that after so many years of stony silence, the two men would have made up, and they asked their father: "What did he say?"

The father said: "He said to me, Reb Shimon, "*mir halten shoin baide bai neilah; lomir zich iberbeten.*" (We are both closer to the end than to the beginning, so let us make up.) And they did. And from that day until the day that the Rabbi died, the two of them played chess together every single afternoon.

Let that story be a lesson to all of us. We are all one year older than we were at this moment a year ago. It is time make up. Or to paraphrase Simon & Garfunkel, build a bridge over troubled water. And if not now, when?

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner