

# Opening of the Heart: Becoming a Jewish Grandparent

Source Sheet by Jane Shapiro

Dara Horn: *The World to Come*

“There is a moment that has happened over and over again, in every place children have ever slept, on every dark night for the past ten thousand years, that almost everyone who was once a child will forever remember. It happens when you are being tucked into bed, on a dark and frightened night when the sounds of the nighttime outside are drowned out only by the far more frightening sounds in your head. You have already gone to bed, have tried to go to bed, but because of whatever sounds you hear in your head you have failed to go to bed, and someone much older than you, someone so old that you cannot even imagine yourself becoming that old, has come to sit beside you and make sure you fall asleep. But the moment that everyone who was once a child will remember is not the story the unfathomably old person tells you, or the lullaby he sings for you, but rather the moment right after the story or song has ended. You are lying there with your eyes closed, not sleeping just yet but noticing that the sounds inside your head seem to have vanished, and you know, through closed eyes, that the person beside you thinks that you are asleep and is simply watching you. In that fraction of an instant between when that person stops singing and when that person decides to rise from the bed and disappear -- a tiny rehearsal, though you do not know it yet, of what will eventually happen for good -- time holds still, and you can feel, through closed eyes, how that person, watching your still, small face in the darkness, has suddenly realized that you are the reason his life matters.

David Raphael “*The Afghan*”

It was the perfectly silly Zayde game. I covered Bina up with the blanket and she'd pretend to be asleep. I pulled the blanket back and she giggled and announced “awake”. We did this 10 or 11 times until it was time for another game.

But as she climbed off the couch, I realized that the blanket we had been playing with was, in fact, an Afghan knitted, over 55 years ago, by Nana Francis, my grandmother, her great-great-grandmother. Among our tasks as Nana's grandchildren was to partner with her in the creation of afghans by holding up the hanks of yarn as she wound them into balls. We'd sit on the small ottoman across from her in her lounge chair, two hands raised and moving back and forth as the wool strands traversed the distance between us. I close my eyes, and I am still there; sitting erect, synchronizing the movement of my arms with the flow of the yarn.

The threads of Nana's afghan stretch back hundreds of years. To Horodenka, in the Ukraine, then part of the Austrian Hungarian Empire; to Francis's birth in New York 1904. To Argyle Road in Brooklyn, where two sisters were raised and where the younger “Billie” first met Alvin; to Bayside Queens where a family of three girls and one boy were raised. The Afghan found its corporeal form, a V pattern of reds, oranges, yellows, and greens, knitted together in a small Cape Cod house on Thornhill Avenue in Little Neck, where Pop Max read the “Fovards” while the knitting needles flew in Nana Frances' hands. It was there that eight cousins –laughed, giggled, played tag, Monopoly and the Game of Life; where Nana soaked us in steaming hot baths and scrubbed us with loofa pads. It listened as we laughed at “Nanaisms”, aphorisms, perhaps from the old country. Our favorite: “Don't hold your nose, the smell will go in your mouth”. But it was also with us when we cried in the days following my father's death and cried again when Nana and Pop passed. It was there when we graduated from college, met our wives and husbands and watched in amazement as our own children were born – and when children were born to our children.

And now it has found its way to a row home on Abell Avenue in Baltimore, where my 18-month old granddaughter toddles across the floor, listens to Raffi and cuddles with stuffed animals, while I watch

her with amazement, delight and, simple, pure joy.

Through the years, the edges have frayed, and moths have found its wool fibers. But its colors remain vibrant and it still offers comfort and warmth. Today, more than a half-century after they were knitted with love and devotion, Nana's afghans have followed her progeny; grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren, and now great-great-great-grandchildren, from Atlanta, Baltimore, New York, Boston, New Orleans to Jerusalem.

We knit our lives and wrap our children and grandchildren in the cloths of our memories.

Stardust. Unconditional love is the magic bridge that spans the generations: we love them unconditionally, and they love us back without reservations. It's a two-way experience. It grows the children and gentles the grandparents.

Jane Isay, from *Unconditional Love*

### Discussion Question

*How do Horn, Raphael and, Isay capture the relationship between grandparent and grandchild?*

### Genesis 48:1-20

(1) Some time afterward, Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. (2) When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to see you," Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. (3) And Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, (4) and said to me, 'I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples; and I will assign this land to your offspring to come for an everlasting possession.' (5) Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon. (6) But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance. (7) I [do this because], when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath"—now Bethlehem. (8) Noticing Joseph's sons, Israel asked, "Who are these?" (9) And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." "Bring them up to me," he said, "that I may bless them." (10) Now Israel's eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. (11) And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well." (12) Joseph then removed them from his knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground. (13)

### בראשית מ"ח:א'-כ'

(א) ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה ויאמר ליוסף הגה אביך חלה ויקח את-שני בניו עמו את-מנשה ואת-אפרים: (ב) ויגד ליעקב ויאמר הגה בנך יוסף בא אליך ויתחזק ישראל וישב על-המטה: (ג) ויאמר יעקב אל-יוסף אל שדי נראה-אלי בלוי בארץ כנען ויברך אתי: (ד) ויאמר אלי הגני מפרך והרביתי ונתתי לך קהל עמים ונתתי את-הארץ הנאת לזרעך אחריך אחזת עולם: (ה) ועתה שני-בניך הנולדים לך בארץ מצרים עד-באי אליך מצרימה ליהם אפרים ומנשה פראובו ושמעון יהיו-לי: (ו) ומולדתך אשר-הולדת אחריהם לך יהיו על שם אחיהם יקראו בנחלתם: (ז) ואני ו בבאי מפדן מטה עלי רחל בארץ כנען בדרך בעוד כבדת-ארץ לבא אפרתה ואקברה שם בדרך אפרת הוא בית לחם: (ח) וירא ישראל את-בני יוסף ויאמר מי-אלה: (ט) ויאמר יוסף אל-אביו בני הם אשר-גמולי אליהם בגה ויאמר קחם-גא אלי ואברכם: (י) ועיני ישראל כבדו מזקן לא יוכל לראות ויגש אתם אליו וישק להם ויחבק להם: (יא) ויאמר ישראל אל-יוסף ראה פניך לא פלתי והנה הראה אתי אליהם גם את-זרעך: (יב) ויוצא יוסף אתם מעם ברביו וישתחו לאפיו ארצה: (יג) ויקח יוסף את-שניהם את-אפרים בימינו משמאל ישראל ואת-מנשה בשמאלו מימין ישראל ויגש אליו: (יד) וישלח ישראל את-ימינו וישת על-ראש אפרים והוא הצעיר ואת-שמאלו על-ראש מנשה

Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand—to Israel’s left—and Manasseh with his left hand—to Israel’s right—and brought them close to him. (14) But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head—thus crossing his hands—although Manasseh was the first-born. (15) And he blessed Joseph, saying, “The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day— (16) The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm— Bless the lads. In them may my name be recalled, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.” (17) When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s. (18) “Not so, Father,” Joseph said to his father, “for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head.” (19) But his father objected, saying, “I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations.” (20) So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.” Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

שָׁפַל אֶת־יָדָיו גַּי מְנַשֶּׁה הַבְּכוֹר: (טו) וַיִּבְרַךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְכוּ אֲבֹתַי לִפְנֵי אֲבֹתֵיךָ וַיִּצְחָק הָאֱלֹהִים הַרְעָה אֹתִי מַעֲוֵי עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: (טז) הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגָּאֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל־רָע יְבָרֶךְ אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים וַיִּקְרָא בְּהֵם שְׁמִי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתַי אֲבָרְכֵם וַיִּצְחָק וַיִּדְגֹּו לְרֵב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ: (יז) וַיֹּרָא יוֹסֵף כִּי־יָשִׁית אָבִיו יְדָיִמֵינוּ עַל־רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וַיִּרַע בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּתְמַךְ יְדָאָבִיו לְהַסִּיר אֹתָהּ מֵעַל רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַיִם עַל־רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה: (יח) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו לֹא־כֵן אָבִי כִּי־זֶה הַבְּכוֹר שְׁמִי וְיִמִּינְךָ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ: (יט) וַיִּמָּאֵן אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יְדַעְתִּי כְּנִיל יְדַעְתִּי גַם־הָיָה יְהִי־לְעַם וְגַם־הָיָה יִגְדַּל וְאוֹלָם אֶחָיו הַקָּטָן יִגְדַּל מִמֶּנּוּ וַיִּרְעוּ יְהִיֶּה מְלֹא־הַגּוֹיִם: (כ) וַיִּבְרַכְם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּךָ יְבָרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר יִשְׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם לִפְנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה:

### Group Discussion or Chevruta Questions

1. Does the text suggest anything about the relationship between Jacob and his son Joseph? How would you describe this relationship?
2. Why do you think Jacob would want to claim the two children as his own?
3. Can you recall any of these feelings in your own experience as a parent or grandparent?

### Ruth 4

(4) I thought I should disclose the matter to you and say: Acquire it in the presence of those seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if you will not redeem, tell me, that I may know. For there is no one to redeem but you, and I come after you.” “I am willing to redeem it,” he replied. (5) Boaz continued, “When you acquire the property from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate.” (6) The redeemer replied, “Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own estate. You take over my right of redemption, for I am unable to exercise it.” (7) Now

### רות ד'

(ד) וַאֲנִי אֶמְרָתִי אִגְלוּ אֶזְנֶךָ לְאֹמֶר קְנֶה נֶגְדַי הַיְשָׁבִים וַנִּגְדַּד זְקַנִי עִמִּי אִם־תִּגְאָל גְּאָל וְאִם־לֹא יִגְאָל הַגִּידָה לִּי וְאָדַע [וְאָדַעְתָּ] כִּי אֵין זֹלָתְךָ לְגְאֹל וְאֲנִכִי אֶתְקַדֶּי וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶגְאָל: (ה) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֵז בְּיוֹם־קְנוֹתְךָ הַשְּׂדֵה מִיָּד נְעַמִי וְיָמָאת רֹות הַמוֹאֲבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת־הַמֵּת קְנִיתִי [קְנִיתָהּ] לְהַקִּים שְׁם־הַמֵּת עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר הַגְּאֵל לֹא אוֹכַל לְגְאֹל־[לְגְאֹל־] לִי פֹדֵאֲשַׁחִית אֶת־נַחֲלָתְךָ גְאֹל־לְךָ אֶתָּה אֶת־גְּאֹלְתִי כִּי לֹא־אוֹכַל לְגְאֹל: (ז) וְזֹאת לִפְנֵי בִישְׂרָאֵל עַל־הַגְּאֹלָה וְעַל־הַתְּמוּרָה לְקַיֵּם כָּל־דְּבָר שְׁלֹף אִישׁ נַעֲלוּ וְנָתַן לְרַעְיָה וְנָאֵת הַתְּעוּדָה בִּישְׂרָאֵל: (ח) וַיֹּאמֶר הַגְּאֵל

this was formerly done in Israel in cases of redemption or exchange: to validate any transaction, one man would take off his sandal and hand it to the other. Such was the practice in Israel. (8) So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Acquire for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. (9) And Boaz said to the elders and to the rest of the people, “You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. (10) I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home town. You are witnesses today.” (11) All the people at the gate and the elders answered, “We are. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! (12) And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah—through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.” (13) So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The LORD let her conceive, and she bore a son. (14) And the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! (15) He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons.” (16) Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, (17) and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, “A son is born to Naomi!” They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.

לְבַעַז קָנְהָה־לָּהּ וַיִּשְׁלַף נַעֲלוֹ: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעַז לְזִקְנָיִם  
 וְכָל־הָעָם יַעֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קָנִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר  
 לְאֵילֵימָלֵךְ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחֲלוֹן מִיַּד נְעָמִי: (י)  
 וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמֹּאבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת מַחֲלוֹן קָנִיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה  
 לְהַקִּים שְׁם־הַמֵּת עַל־גִּחְלָתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שְׁם־הַמֵּת  
 מֵעַם אֲחִיו וּמִשְׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ יַעֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם: (יא)  
 וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר וְהַזְּקֵנִים יַעֲדִים יִתְּנוּ יְהוָה  
 אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ כְּרַחֵל וּכְלֵאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ  
 שְׁתֵּיהֶם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַעֲשֵׂה־חַיִּיל בְּאֶפְרַתָּה  
 וַיִּקְרָא־שֵׁם בְּבִית לָחֵם: (יב) וַיְהִי בֵּיתָהּ כְּבֵית פְּרָצִין  
 אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה תָמָר לַיהוָה מִן־הַזָּרַע אֲשֶׁר יָתַן יְהוָה לָהּ  
 מִן־הַנְּעֻרָה הַזֹּאת: (יג) וַיִּקַּח בְּעַז אֶת־רוּת וַתְּהִי־לוֹ  
 לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֵא אֶלֶיהָ וַיִּתְּנוּ יְהוָה לָהּ הַרְיוֹן וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן: (יד)  
 וַתֹּאמְרָנָה הַנְּשִׁים אֶל־נְעָמִי בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא  
 הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: (טו) וְהָיָה  
 לָךְ לְמַשִּׁיב לֶכֶשׂ וּלְכֹלֶל אֶת־שִׁבְתְּךָ כִּי כָלְתְךָ  
 אֲשֶׁר־אַהַבְתְּךָ יִלְדְתוּ אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשְׁבַּעַה  
 בָּנִים: (טז) וַתִּקַּח נְעָמִי אֶת־הַיָּלֵד וַתִּשְׁתַּהּוּ בְּחִיקָהּ  
 וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִמָּנָת: (יז) וַתִּקְרָאנָהּ לוֹ הַשְּׂכֵנּוֹת שֵׁם לְאִמֹּר  
 יִלְד־בֶּן לְנְעָמִי וַתִּקְרָאנָה שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד הוּא אָבִי־יִשִׁי אָבִי  
 דָּוִד: (פ)

### Questions

1. What role does Naomi seem to play here, beyond caring for the baby?
2. How would you describe her relationship to her daughter-in-law as the book concludes? Does it seem to be consistent with the rest of the story?
3. How might Naomi's actions link to the final lines of the book (Megillah)?

