

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In our parsha, Joseph does something unusual. Revealing himself to his brothers, fully aware that they will suffer shock and then guilt as they remember how it is that their brother is in Egypt, he reinterprets the past: "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt." (Gen. 45:4-8)

This is markedly different to the way Joseph described these events when he spoke to the chief butler in prison: "I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). Then, it was a story of kidnap and injustice.

Now, it has become a story of Divine providence and redemption. It wasn't you, he tells his brothers, it was God. You didn't realise that you were part of a larger plan. And though it began badly, it has ended well. So don't hold yourselves guilty. And do not be afraid of any desire for revenge on my part. There is no such desire. I realise that we were all being directed by a force greater than ourselves, greater than we can fully understand.

Joseph does the same in next week's parsha, when the brothers fear that he may take revenge after their father's death: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Gen. 50:19-20)

Joseph is helping his brothers to revise their memory of the past. In doing so, he is challenging one of our most fundamental assumptions about time, namely its asymmetry. We can change the future. We cannot change the past. But is that entirely true? What Joseph is doing for his brothers is what he has clearly done for himself: events have changed his and their understanding of the past.

Which means: we cannot fully understand what is happening to us now until we can look back in retrospect and see how it all turned out. This means that we are not held captive by the past. Things can happen to us, not as dramatically as to Joseph perhaps, but nonetheless benign, that can completely alter the way we look back and remember. By action in the future, we can redeem the past.

A classic example of this is the late Steve Jobs' 2005 commencement address at Stanford University, that has now been seen by more than 40 million people on YouTube. In it, he described three crushing blows in his life: dropping out of college, being fired by the company he had founded -- Apple, and being diagnosed with cancer. Each one, he said, had led to something important and positive.

Dropping out of college, Jobs was able to audit any course he wished. He attended one on calligraphy and this inspired him to build into his first computers a range of proportionally spaced fonts, thus giving computer scripts an elegance that had previously been available only to professional printers. Getting fired from Apple led him to start a new computer company, NeXT, that developed capabilities he would eventually bring back to Apple, as well as acquiring Pixar Animation, the most creative of computer-animated film studios. The diagnosis of cancer led him to a new focus in life. It made him realise: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."

Jobs' ability to construct these stories -- what he called "connecting the dots" -- was surely not unrelated to his ability to survive the blows he suffered in life. (However, he did delay surgery for his cancer, believing that he could achieve an alternative cure. In this, he was mistaken.) Few could have recovered from the setback of being dismissed from his own company, and fewer still could have achieved the transformation he did at Apple when he returned, creating the iPod, iPhone and iPad. He did not believe in tragic inevitabilities. Though he would not have put it in these terms, he knew that by action in the future we can redeem the past.

Professor Mordechai Rotenberg of the Hebrew University has argued that this kind of technique, of reinterpreting the past, could be used as a therapeutic technique in rehabilitating patients suffering from a crippling sense of guilt. (Re-biographing and Deviance, Praeger, 1987) If we cannot change the past, then it is

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always there holding us back like a ball and chain around our legs. We cannot change the past, but we can reinterpret it by integrating it into a new and larger narrative. That is what Joseph was doing, and having used this technique to help him survive a personal life of unparalleled ups and downs, he now uses it to help his brothers live without overpowering guilt.

We find this in Judaism throughout its history. The Prophets reinterpreted biblical narrative for their day. Then came Midrash, which reinterpreted it more radically because the situation of Jews had changed more radically. Then came the great biblical commentators and mystics and philosophers. There has hardly been a generation in all of Jewish history when Jews did not reinterpret their texts in the light of the present tense experience. We are the people who tell stories, and then retell them repeatedly, each time with a slightly different emphasis, establishing a connection between then and now, rereading the past in the light of the present as best we can.

It is by telling stories that we make sense of our lives and the life of our people. And it is by allowing the present to reshape our understanding of the past that we redeem history and make it live as a positive force in our lives.

I gave one example when I spoke at the Kinus Shluchim of Chabad, the great gathering of some 5000 Chabad emissaries from around the world. I told them of how, in 1978, I visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe to ask his advice on which career I should follow. I did the usual thing: I sent him a note with the options, A, B or C, expecting him to indicate which one I should follow. The options were to become a barrister, or an economist, or an academic philosopher, either as a fellow of my college in Cambridge or as a professor somewhere else.

The Rebbe read out the list and said "No" to all three. My mission, he said, was to train Rabbis at Jews' College (now the London School of Jewish Studies) and to become a congregational Rabbi myself. So, overnight, I found myself saying goodbye to all my aspirations, to everything for which I had been trained.

The strange thing is that ultimately I fulfilled all those ambitions despite walking in the opposite direction. I became an honorary barrister (Bencher) of the Inner Temple and delivered a law lecture in front of

600 barristers and the Lord Chief Justice. I delivered Britain's two leading economics lectures, the Mais Lecture and the Hayek Lecture at the Institute of Economic Affairs. I became a fellow of my Cambridge college and a philosophy professor at several universities. I identified with the biblical Joseph because, so often, what I had dreamed of came to be at the very moment that I had given up hope. Only in retrospect did I discover that the Rebbe was not telling me to give up my career plans. He was simply charting a different route and a more beneficial one.

I believe that the way we write the next chapter in our lives affects all the others that have come before. By action in the future, we can redeem much of the pain of the past. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Joseph went up to greet Israel his father; he fell on his neck and he wept on his neck exceedingly" (Gen. 46:29) In these few words, our Torah describes a dramatic meeting between an aged father and his beloved son who had been separated for twenty-two years. Indeed, the father, who had given the coat of many colors to this favored son as a sign that he would bear the mantle of the Abrahamic legacy, had been led to believe that his beloved Joseph had been torn apart by a wild beast, in consequence of which he had been engulfed by inconsolable mourning for more than two decades. The son, who had basked in the glory of paternal favoritism, had been consumed with the agonizing possibility that his father had been so angered by his dreams that he had sent him on a suicide mission "to seek after the welfare of his brothers...."

And so they stand together now, father and son, each still with unanswered questions, but nevertheless each with unfathomable joy at their reunion.

But which one of the two wept on the other's neck? Our most classical commentary, Rashi, maintains that it was Joseph who wept on his father Jacob's neck but Jacob did not fall on Joseph's neck. Our Sages say that Jacob was reciting the Shema prayer at that time. The Shema? Was it then early in the morning or late evening that, specifically at that emotionally poignant moment, father Jacob had to recite the Shema? Moreover, Ramban (Nahmanides) maintains that if indeed only one of them was weeping, logic dictates that it most likely was the aged Jacob who wept, rather than the much younger and more calculating Joseph.

And if indeed Ramban is correct and not Rashi, then it was Joseph who was reciting the Shema, while

father Jacob was weeping. But this interpretation still begs the question, why the Shema at this particular moment? Let us return to Joseph's initial dreams (Gen. 37:5-11), which ignited jealous hatred unto death against the "dreamer." How can we justify the sons of Jacob, progenitors of the tribal children of Israel, being overwhelmed with such base emotions? First he dreams that he and his brothers are binding sheaves of grain, and that the brothers' sheaves are all bowing down to his sheaves. What upsets the brothers is not merely Joseph's vision of his economic and political superiority over them; it is rather Joseph's hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt in all of Egypt's cultural ramifications. Remember that the Abrahamic traditional profession was shepherding, a nurturing pursuit which left much time for spiritual meditation and which was especially conducive to Israel's climatic condition and terrain. Egypt, "the gift of the Nile," specialized in back-breaking agriculture and the slave labor and dissolute lifestyle of the overlords which went with it.

Joseph then dreamt of the sun, the moon and the stars bowing down to him. From the brothers' perspective, this was nothing short of megalomania.

How different were those dreams from that of grandfather Jacob's dream of uniting heaven and earth with God at the center stage (not Joseph), promising to bring Jacob home to Israel (not to Egypt). They felt that they had to prevent this recipient of the coat of many colors from ever receiving the firstborn's legacy. He was a "turncoat" to the Abrahamic tradition.

The Bible, however, concludes Joseph's dream sequence with "his brothers were jealous of him, but Jacob observed the matter and anxiously anticipated its coming to pass." Jacob as well as Joseph understood that Abraham's mandate was a universal one, to spread "compassionate righteousness and moral justice to all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3, 18:18-19), allegorically speaking to the sun, the moon and the stars.

To be sure, Joseph was still an arrogant youth, who identified the Abrahamic legacy with his own eventual leadership; when a more mature Joseph stands before Pharaoh, ready to interpret his dreams, he declares, "This has nothing to do with me; God will answer in accordance with the welfare of Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:16).

And at the end of his life, with his very last breath, Joseph makes his brothers take an oath that when the Hebrews leave Egypt, they will take Joseph's remains to be buried in Israel. Egypt is merely a way-station on the road to world redemption; the great powers must learn the importance of vanquishing terror and depravity if divine peace and morality are to reign supreme.

Ultimately, all the nations will come to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to learn the word of God from Zion; but along the way, unless there is an America to

act as the world's policeman on behalf of democracy and freedom, the dark forces of suicide bombers will control the global village.

Hence, when Joseph meets his father—who twenty-two years before seemed to have been vexed at him for the arrogance of his dreams—he responds to his father's tears with the fundamental purpose of Jewish being; "Hear, Israel my father, the God who is now our God, the God of love and peace who is now accepted by the family of Israel, will one day be the one God of the entire universe." In effect, his recitation of the Shema is telling his father that Egypt was a necessary way-station in bringing our God of redemption to the world. ©2020 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The dramatic moment that Joseph has dreamed of for decades has finally arrived. His dreams are to be fulfilled and he has achieved the ultimate triumph over his brothers who doubted him and his integrity. And at that moment, when he is at the zenith of his power, he breaks down and weeps. He is unable to control his emotions and his care for his brothers and his father and for the future generations of the Jewish people overwhelms him.

In a flash of reality, he realizes the consequences of his behavior and he pulls back from the abyss that would have destroyed the family of Jacob and prevented the creation of the people of Israel.

The rabbis of the Mishnah long ago told us that wisdom lies with those who can see the consequences of their actions and behavior in advance. Joseph clearly sees that he has pulled the rope as tightly as he is able to, and that any further action on his part would have dire consequences for the very future that he himself envisions.

If there will be a Jewish people and if he reconciles with his brothers, he knows that he will be remembered eternally as the righteous Joseph. If he exacts full revenge, justified as that may be in his mind, he knows that he dooms himself to being, at most, a footnote in the story of human civilization. His behavior towards his brothers, Judah and Benjamin, carries with it not only righteousness and altruism but a certain degree of self-interest and self-preservation. He realizes that only with greater unity of the tribes of Israel will he be remembered and truly justified.

When Joseph was tempted by the wife of Potiphar, we are told by midrash that he was able to overcome that desire because he realized that by succumbing, he would become an outcast amongst the tribes of Israel. And, he would not be represented on the holy breastplate of the high priest of Israel. The rabbis warn us often that no matter what temptation or justification we may have for wanting to separate

ourselves from the other tribes of Israel – many of whom we feel have failings or shortcomings or perhaps have even behaved incorrectly towards us – always brings sadness and personal disaster.

It is very tempting to go it alone and to not be burdened by the weaknesses and foibles of others. After all, we are aware that everyone but us is out of step! Nevertheless, we are constantly warned not to fall into that trap. Joseph realizes that he cannot go it alone despite his temporal power and personal righteousness. And, in the moment of his greatest triumph, he seeks to unite and reconcile and create the necessary vehicle that will make the Jewish people eternal and eventually triumphant morally and physically. ©2020 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

What makes Yosef (Joseph) so keen on settling his families in a suburb of Egypt – a place called Goshen? Goshen seems so attractive that the assurance of living in Goshen helps Ya'akov agree to leave his home and travel to Egypt. (Genesis 45:10, 27, 28)

Isaac Arama suggests that Goshen was not a special place. As is the case with many attractive areas, its importance lies in its location-- far from the capital of Egypt. In the center of the politics of the Egyptian empire, one could easily fall prey to the intrigues and contradictions inherent in the Egyptian political system. Yosef and Ya'akov understood the appeal of remaining far away from such a place.

Netziv, R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah of Berlin, sees it differently. For him, living in Goshen was a way in which Ya'akov's family could have the opportunity to build a life of holiness.

The fundamental difference between these approaches is the following: Arama sees Goshen as a way to distance oneself from a negative-from the Egyptian political scene. Goshen in of itself had nothing positive to offer. Its only attraction was what it was not; the center of Egyptian life.

Netziv disagrees. Goshen had something positive to offer. It was there that the infrastructure of an autonomous sovereign people could be developed.

My Rebbe in Chumash, Nehama Leibowitz, notes that, as is often the case, the background of these commentators contributes to the differing views presented here. Arama lived in fifteenth century Spain and was involved in the Spanish political system. He knew the possible corruption of political office and understood how Ya'akov would have wanted to keep his family far from the center of political life.

Netziv, whose life was meshed with the return to Zion, saw Goshen as a move towards realizing a dream: the building of a state within a state, as a hopeful step towards returning to Israel and developing our national homeland.

But as Nehama remarks, "in spite of all of Yosef's endeavors to prevent them settling down permanently in the land and becoming enmeshed in the attractions of the surrounding society, they forgot the temporary nature of their sojourn in Egypt. The last verse of our portion alludes to the dangers of assimilation when it states, 'and Israel settled in the land of Egypt and in the land of Goshen; they acquired holdings therein and were fruitful and increased greatly in numbers.'" (Gen. 47:27)

This is an important message for Diaspora Jewry today: No matter how developed and sophisticated we are, the dangers of assimilation exist when we are living under the rule of a society that is not Jewish. To be sure, individuals may maintain their Jewish identity in the exile; but for the community of Israel, our destiny lies not in the Goshens of this world, not in Egypt -- but in a place where Judaism is the main compass, in the land of Israel. ©2020 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And you shall recount to my father all of my honor in Egypt and all you have seen, and hurry to bring my father down here." (Beraishis 45:13) For a man who was so humble as to tell Pharaoh, "Not I, but Hashem will interpret the dreams of Pharaoh for good, it seems out of character for Yosef to want to brag to his father Yaakov of his honor and glory. Have the past number of years of power gone to his head? Why does he want his brothers to tell Yaakov what they've witnessed?

Some explain that he wanted to assure Yaakov that he was able to take proper care of him and therefore he should not be worried about coming down to Egypt. The Sforno though doesn't seem to agree as he explains that they should "hurry to bring down my father" so that Yaakov can "rejoice in seeing it." It would seem, then, that Yosef wanted to show Yaakov Avinu something else.

Yosef had left his brothers under less than ideal circumstances. There was a noticeable rift in the family and Yaakov had charged Yosef with trying to repair the damage. As we know, instead of making peace, the brothers sold Yosef. Now, though, things were different.

Yosef had explained to the brothers how everything was part of Hashem's plan. He bore them no ill will and understood that all he and they went through

simply had to happen for a purpose. He now told them to go to Yaakov and say, "So says your son Yosef, come down to me in Egypt." They were to add to this statement by relating the glory they had seen and the esteem and honor which Yosef enjoyed.

What would this mean to Yaakov? That the mission had been fulfilled.

When Yosef approached his brothers, they couldn't even bring themselves to call him by name. They called him, "the dreamer". The Malbim teaches that when someone hates another, he cannot call him by name, as Shaul called Dovid "Ben Yishai," and not Dovid.

When the brothers would come to Yaakov and say, "Yosef is alive," they'd be showing that the hatred was gone. When they described the honor he had and how he was indeed a king, it would show that they were not jealous of him; that they were united.

THIS is what Yosef wanted Yaakov to see, experience, and enjoy. He wanted his father to see his children getting along, being unified, and caring for one another.

There is yet another Father who cherishes this opportunity. Avinu Shebashomayim, Hashem, our Heavenly Father, gets nachas when His children get along. When we are not jealous, combative, or call each other names, then Hashem has such joy and he, like Yaakov did when he came to Egypt, puts an end to the suffering of his people.

When my grandmother passed away in Toronto, Canada, my siblings and I converged on my sister's home there the night before the funeral. [Sadly, there had been a family simcha the night before which most of us were "too busy" to attend, but everyone somehow manages to make it for tragedies; Lesson learned.]

We ordered Chinese food and we all ate and talked, sharing memories and thoughts. Suddenly, my mother a"h was there with her camera, snapping pictures of everyone. My sister couldn't understand it. "Mom," she said. "Your mother is dead and will be buried tomorrow. How can you be taking pictures now?"

My mother paused a moment, then replied, "Yes, her funeral will be tomorrow and I will cry then. But tonight I have all my children together and I'm going to enjoy that and take pictures." ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Why Does Yosef Manipulate His Brothers?

When the seven years of famine which Yosef had predicted oppressed the entire area including Canaan, his brothers were forced to seek food for the family from Egypt. Yosef maneuvered the meetings with his brothers in such a way as for them to

have a complete teshuvah (atonement) for their deeds. The culmination of this confrontation came when Yosef threatened to imprison Binyamin for stealing his cup. Yehudah approached Yosef to plead for Binyamin's release.

"Then Judah approached him and said, 'If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my lord's ears and let not your anger flare up at your servant, for you are like Par'oh. My lord has asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a young child of his old age, his brother is dead, he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.' Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me and I will set my eye on him.' We said to my lord, 'The Youth cannot leave his father, for should he leave his father he will die.' But you said to your servants, 'If your youngest brother does not come down with you, you will not see my face again.' And it was, when we went up to your servant my father, we told him my lord's words; and our father said, 'Go back, buy us some food.' We said, 'We cannot go down, only if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down, for we cannot see the man's face if our youngest brother is not with us.' Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One has left me and I presumed, alas he has surely been torn to pieces, for I have not seen him since! So should you take this one, too, from my presence, and disaster befall him, then you will have brought me down my hoariness in evil to the grave.' And now if I come to my father and the youth is not with us, since his soul is bound to his soul, it will happen that when he sees the youth is missing he will die, and your servants will have brought down the hoariness of your servant our father in sorrow to the grave. For your servant took responsibility for the youth from my father saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you then I will be sinning to my father for all time.' Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the youth as a servant to my lord, and let the youth go up with his brothers. For how can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father."

We must ask what is demonstrated by this plea which indicates that the brothers have accepted the responsibility of their actions and changed their ways? Partly this is answered by the fact that it is Yehudah who steps forward to represent the brothers. The Or HaChaim asks why Yehudah approached instead of Reuven, the first born, or any of the other brothers who were equally responsible for this sin. The Or HaChaim suggests three answers: (1) that Yehudah had set himself as responsible for Binyamin so the others waited but were prepared to act, (2) Yehudah was prepared to lie and say that he stole the cup and put it in Binyamin's sack, and (3) that this was a hint to the fact that Yehudah would some day be the King. The Kli

Yakar suggests a different reason. Yehudah realized that he was more responsible for the dilemma which they now faced because he was the one to suggest selling Yosef. Had he told the brothers to set Yosef free, they would have listened to him.

Another area of teshuvah involved the consequences to Ya'akov because of the brothers' actions. When Yosef disappeared and the brothers brought his bloodied coat to their father, Ya'akov was inconsolable. We must wonder how the brothers could justify leaving their father in such pain. Yehudah faced this pain and pled with Yosef that he could not return without Binyamin or he will have sinned to his father all his days. Rashi explains that he means in this life and in the next. There is reason to believe that he also accepted his sin to his father with the sale of Yosef and now did not wish to continue his father's suffering were he not able to return Binyamin.

Still one more concern of Yosef was the brothers' animosity towards the sons of Rachel. Yosef felt that he needed to see that the brothers would not treat Binyamin with the same hatred that they had exhibited towards Yosef. That was one of the reasons for placing the cup in Binyamin's satchel. Yehudah began his plea with the sentence, "We have an old father and a young child of his old age, his brother is dead, he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him." Yehudah continued by offering himself in place of his brother, protecting Binyamin's life with his own. That unselfish act indicated the final aspect of teshuvah that Yosef felt he was compelled to seek. Even though this action came from Yehudah alone, Yosef understood that the other brothers saw Yehudah already as the future Kingly tribe. They would see his example and follow it.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that Yosef had hidden his emotions from his brothers as well as from his servants. He sent his servants away before speaking to his brothers for fear that it would embarrass the brothers. With all that his brothers had done to him, he sought no revenge and no punishment. He told his brothers that Hashem had used their plan as a means to bring him to Egypt and place him in a position to save their whole family. He urged them to return quickly with Ya'akov and the rest of the people so that he could provide for them in the remaining years of the famine.

We know that Hashem uses the actions of individuals and of nations to further His plan for the world. We also know that plan is for the good of His people and for the good of all Mankind. That does not mean that evil actions are only furthering the good which Hashem is guiding and we should not then be punished for any part in wrong doing. Yosef's statement to the brothers indicates only that the ultimate goal will be reached whether through them or through a different source. Yosef would still have been

in Egypt and risen to a position through which he could help the people. The brothers' sins are still punishable for their intentions as they are unaware of Hashem's choice of outcome.

This may have been Yosef's final message to his brothers and to us. Our actions cannot overcome Hashem's plans, and they will be judged and not dismissed even though those actions accomplished Hashem's plan. We must be thoughtful in our actions to make sure that they are ruled by Torah and not emotion. May we consistently seek the path of Torah in our decisions in life. ©2020 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"**A**nd Yisroel said, 'Enough! My son Yosef is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.'" (Bereishis 45:28) It is really quite amazing how many situations in life become incredibly disastrous, only to have a happy ending after all is said-and-done. It doesn't mean that people do not suffer along the way to the "happy ending," but better they suffer for a positive outcome, than for a negative one.

The problem is, we don't know that everything is going to work out in the end, and there certainly have been plenty of times when it hasn't, at least as far as we're concerned. Chanukah wasn't the first and last time that Jews have rebelled to change their situation, like the Bar Kochba revolt, and much later the Warsaw Uprising. Many of these only made the situation worse not better.

And that wasn't necessarily because the people leading the revolt were insincere, or lacked holiness. For example, Rebi Akiva supported Bar Kochba in his rebellion, and countless other times righteous people joined ranks with those who dared to fight on behalf of the Jewish people.

Every year there are people who celebrate Chanukah while going through their own torturous situations. And they did so the year before, and the year before that, etc. We even know that occasionally people have died from illness or for other reasons even during Chanukah, tragically, sadly affecting the simcha and emunah of those who cared for them.

We like happy endings. We are PROGRAMMED to like happy endings. We believe and feel that ALL of life should have them, which is why we feel ripped off if we watch a movie that doesn't have one. And we feel "ripped off" in life if LIFE doesn't have them, at least if we seemingly did nothing to cause an unhappy one.

The biggest "proof" atheists have that God doesn't exist, or at least that He doesn't get involved in our lives, is that seemingly bad things happen to seemingly good people. They have an easier time believing this than believing that God is there but sometimes has an evil disposition towards man.

We're right about one thing. Life is DEFINITELY supposed to have a HAPPY ending. We're just wrong about WHEN that ending is supposed to be. And many are definitely wrong about what even constitutes a happy ending, which is most of the source of disappointment in a lot of life.

Kabbalah explains that Adam HaRishon became rectified through the Avos. Avraham rectified his soul-level of Nefesh. Yitzchak rectified the level of Ruach, and Ya'akov rectified the Neshamah. They weren't born with these soul parts, because they had their own souls. Rather, when they were spiritually ready, they received their portions of Adam's soul to rectify.

When did Ya'akov Avinu receive Adam's Neshamah? Just after Yosef revealed himself to the brothers, causing Ya'akov to go down to Egypt to join him. His first 130 years were filled with troubles, first from Eisav, then from Lavan, after which he fought with an angel and had to deal with Shechem. And only then did the troubles with Yosef begin that lasted for 22 years! After all THAT had occurred, that is when he merited to get the Neshamah of Adam HaRishon, a very HIGH level soul.

The Talmud asks, why are the Jewish people compared to an olive? Because, just as an olive only yields its oil after being squeezed, likewise the Jewish people only return to "good" after yesurim -- suffering (Menachos 53b). Some people do teshuvah anyhow, but most people need to suffer in order to spiritually sensitize to their need for change.

True as this is, there is another layer of meaning to this, and it is an integral part of the Chanukah message.

Winning is not a constant in history. There are times we win and there are times we lose. There are times when everything goes our way and times where everything works against us. We can succeed when don't merit to, and fail when we think we should not have. Heaven has its own calculations and they go far beyond our own personal lives.

What is consistent, or at least should be, is the effort we make to MEANINGFULLY succeed at the moment of opportunity. The only thing in need of measurement is the level of will we exercised, evident by the effort we made to accomplish what we set out to do. People have incredible potential, but incredibly, they use so little of it.

I heard a story this week about Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, otherwise known as the "Ohr Samayach" and author of "Meshech Chochmah." He was an expert in just about every area of Torah, and someone once asked him how it was possible.

He responded with a personal story. Meir Simchah's own father was paralyzed from the waist down, and permanently remained in a chair, requiring assistance for even his most basic needs. Until that is,

one day a fire broke out in their house.

Apparently the firemen came to awaken Meir Simchah's father, and tell him to leave the house before he burned down with it. Though Meir Simchah slept downstairs with his father (his mother had already died), his brother and sister slept upstairs in the attic.

His father refused to leave without all of his children, and demanded the firemen go up through the smoke to save them. The firemen refused and instead demanded that Meir Simchah's father leave immediately without them.

Instead, his father got up from his chair, ran up the stairs, retrieved his children, and left the house before it collapsed in flames. EVERYONE was shocked and demanded an explanation from his father whom they knew had been truly paralyzed.

The father told them, "When there is a fire, Heaven gives a person supernatural powers!"

Meir Simchah took the message of his father and the fire to heart literally. He lit a fire for Torah in his heart, and had supernatural powers to accomplish great feats in Torah learning. For the Ohr Samayach, there was a fire EVERYDAY, and every day he had special strength to advance in his learning beyond what was normal and natural.

This has not been the case for just the Ohr Samayach, but for everyone who has approached life, and especially Torah learning, the same way. Personally, they may just see themselves grow at what seems to them to be a natural rate. But to everyone else on the outside, the growth is at a staggering rate, leaving those watching in awe.

This had not been the approach of Yehuda, at least from what we see in the Torah. Consequently, not many miracles are mentioned with respect to his life. However, because of Yosef's proactive approach and his burning desire to do what God wanted from him miracles happened for him all over the place, and he grew at a staggeringly quick rate. And when the Chashmonayim defeated the Greeks, that was the supernatural driving them to victory because of the flame that burned within them. When they ran to kindle the Menorah, the oil, like their souls, accomplished much more than was natural.

Then it all fell apart. The Chashmonayim family was completely destroyed, and only 25 years later the Jewish people fell to the power of Rome. Victory was limited and short-lived. Meir Simcha himself died childless, his daughter having died before him, and the gabbai had to say kaddish for him at his burial.

Not very happy endings, at least as far as Hollywood is concerned. But the self-sacrifices they made, the fires they ignited in their hearts, and the efforts they made to use each spiritual opportunity to the max, that was never extinguished. And it has earned them the happiest of endings...where happy endings are ETERNAL.

As we see from history, it doesn't mean that happy endings don't happen in this world too. They DO, and so often. It just means that when they don't, ultimately they really can if we are using the opportunity as a spiritual one to ignite our own fires in the service of God. ©2020 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

The Conflict between Judah and Joseph

The prime subject of the last portions that we read in the book of Braishit is the struggle between Yehudah and Joseph. Joseph is presented to us as a person who has lofty dreams. He dreams of the stars and the moon- of a time where he will gain influence and rule over his brothers. To a great extent these dreams resemble the dreams of his father Jacob. Jacob also dreamed of a ladder extending to the heavens and angels ascending and descending upon it.

One of the obvious differences between Jacob's and his son Joseph's dreams is that Joseph's dreams always come to fruition. In fact, whatever Joseph sets his mind to accomplish, he is successful. When he arrives in Egypt after being sold by his jealous brothers he is able to work for an influential person in Egypt's government. When he is thrown into jail he gains favor with the head of the prison. And when he finally interprets Pharos dream he is elevated to the position as Viceroy, perhaps the most powerful position next to the king himself. Everything that Joseph touches seems to turn to gold.

Judah on the other hand is depicted as a person of seemingly good intentions but nothing seems to work out for him. He presents his bright idea to sell Joseph into slavery only to later be confronted by the deep sorrow of his father. He has a relationship with his daughter-in-law without his knowing, only to be shamed into admitting his guilt and publicly embarrassed. He finally meets his brother Joseph after he is willing to give his life to save the life of his brother Benjamin, only to be embarrassed to own up to his mistake of initiating and carrying out the sale of his brother Joseph-and realizing that he is standing before his long lost brother, the dreamer-and that his dreams have come true.

To make things more difficult, the future king of Israel and the one whom we proclaim will lead us in messianic times, King David, is a direct descendent of Judah not Joseph. It would seem more logical that the future king of Israel the forecaster of the Messiah would come from Joseph!

One reason that our sages explain this phenomenon is because Judah possessed a sincere caring for his brethren. He was the one who undertook responsibility for his brother Benjamin and swore to Jacob that he would bring him back safely. Judah, by his act of caring and assuming responsibility for his

brother, set the tone for all Jews to be named after him as "yhudim", Jews...

But even more important –and this is the character trait that brings me closer to identify with Judah-is his humanness and the fact that he makes mistakes in his lifetime and has the strength and ability to own up to his wrongdoings and start over. His descendent, King David has these same character traits. David, on a simple level-displays poor judgment with reference to Bat Sheva, and a host of other incidences as stated in the book of Samuel, but is always able to rise up from his mistakes and begin anew. His character, which is essentially the character of his ancestor Judah, is one who is represented by a typical Jew who is faced daily with religious challenges and sometimes fails and sometimes is successful. The strength of the Jew is the ability to own up to responsibility and to admit wrong and then start anew.

This appreciation of the fallibility of the human being is one that parents should keep in mind when judging their children and placing undue burdens and responsibilities on them expecting them to be perfect in every way. Parents very often use their children as scapegoats to realize their dreams, without concern for what is really good for their children. Teachers also, often, have unreasonable expectations from their students not allowing them to falter even one bit, without concern that they are after all only dealing with children and that everyone should be given some slack at different times in their lives. I have seen parents who make sure that their children are enrolled in every conceivable activity after school, without keeping in mind that children need some down time and space for themselves and sometimes make mistakes.

The strength of our people is that we resemble and yes even aspire to the character of Judah who is not all perfect but is human in his frailties yet aspires to great heights. ©2020 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the former Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigal Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford and the Hebrew Academy of Atlantic County where together he served for over forty years . He and his wife D'vorah live in Efrat. All comments are welcome at rvmordechai@aol.com



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