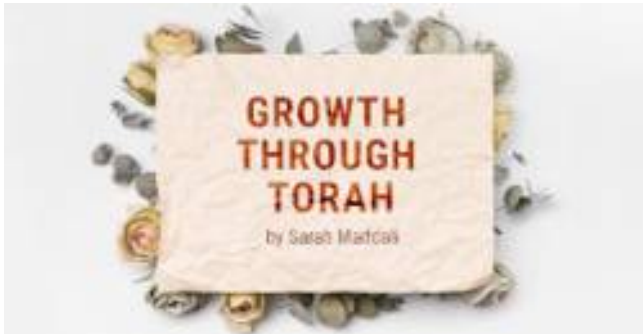


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Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due

For over a decade, Joseph didn't catch a break with being the recipient of a string of seemingly negative events: through the betrayal of his brothers, being sold into slavery, and then thrown into jail for a false accusation of seducing Potifar's wife.

Finally, Joseph's golden opportunity arises when he is quickly taken out of jail and placed in front of Pharaoh, the most powerful person in Egypt,

who needs his help. "And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I dreamt a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you comprehend a dream to interpret it.'" (41:15) At last, Joseph is in a position to garner power, prestige, or in the very least freedom.

Joseph's response to Pharaoh, however, negates any personal motive and instead puts his trust in God at the forefront. "Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, 'That is beyond me; it is God Who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare.'" (41:16) Instead of capitalizing on an opportunity, Joseph remained steadfast to his faith and humility.

Even if not boasting about his talent of interpreting dreams, Joseph could have just mentioned to Pharaoh that he could try, or that he had been successful in the past. Why potentially forfeit this opportunity by claiming it is beyond him and only up to God?

Lesson: It feels good to take credit for things that we have or accomplished. When someone receives a compliment for being pretty, for example, one usually bats their eye lashes, and accepts the compliment, feeling pride and almost an entitlement: they work hard in keeping their figure, keeping up on the latest fashion, making sure their makeup is perfect, etc. While all that may be true, no one chooses what eye color they will have, how big or small their nose will be, or the speed of their metabolism.

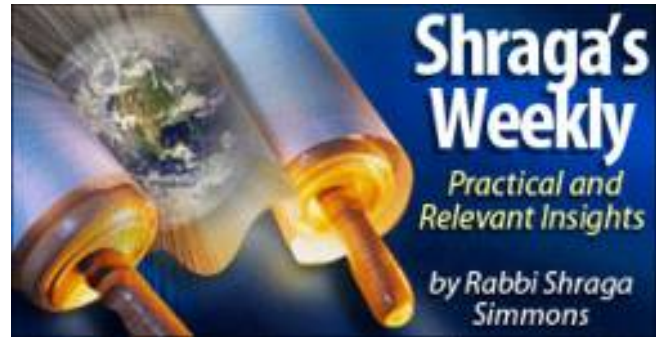
Joseph recognized that it is God who bestowed him with everything, and was not willing to take even a small amount of credit for something, even

if it meant forfeiting an opportunity that could cost him his freedom.

There is a beautiful idea that when someone gives credit where credit is due they bring redemption to the world. This is brought down in the Talmud (Megillah 15a) when in the story of Purim, Esther told King Achashverosh about the evil plot in the name of Mordechai. God brings miracles through people who are able to displace themselves and their ego and recognize someone else. Those are the people that will not take credit for God's miracles, who allow God's presence to be revealed in the world because they are not taking credit.

For example, if someone were to take sole credit for their big promotion, proclaim that it was their prowess, business acumen, foresight, etc. there is no room for God in that picture. When we acknowledge that God is the One who bestows us with everything, our amazing talents and capabilities, we exercise real humility and bring God into the picture. And that enables us to strive to accomplish great things.

Exercise: Give credit where credit is due. If you share a nice idea, say where you heard it from. If someone pays you a compliment, give credit to God, and to anyone else who may have had a part in it.



Exile and Return (part 2)

The Sages enumerate four separate "exiles" that the Jewish people have endured since first settling the Land of Israel over 3,000 years ago. Each of these exiles is qualitatively different, in the sense that our oppressors sought to uproot different aspects of Jewish life and practice. The four exiles are:

1. **Nafshi (Emotional)** – Babylonian tyrant Nebuchadnezzar wanted the Jewish people to emotionally submit themselves to him and his idolatry. They refused, so Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the First Temple and sent the Jews packing to Babylon.
2. **Gufani (Bodily)** – While living under Persian domination, the Jews experienced an exile which threatened to annihilate them through the genocidal machinations of Haman, the villain of the Purim story.
3. **Sichli (Intellectual)** – Under the rulership of the Greeks, the Jews were subject to harsh decrees prohibiting their connection to God and Torah. The tide of Greek philosophy and culture – chronicled in the Chanukah story – threatened to extinguish Jewish practice and thought.

4. **HaKol (Combination)** – The current exile began 2,000 years ago with the Roman destruction of the Second Temple and the disbursement of the Jews to four corners of the globe. During this time, Jews have been subjected to a horrific combination of all other exiles – perpetual persecution, expulsion, mass murder, and more.

Wink of an Eye

While this is terribly depressing, this week's parsha – read each year during Chanukah – contains a message which will inspire and enlighten.

The parsha begins with Joseph sitting in a dungeon prison in Egypt. Joseph is cold, hungry, unbathed and unshaven. Meanwhile, upstairs in the palace, King Pharaoh is having esoteric dreams that no one is able to interpret. The Butler speaks up and recommends Joseph as a possible solution. The Torah (paraphrased from Genesis 41:14-46) describes what happens next:

"Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they rushed him out of the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and was brought to Pharaoh. Joseph proceeded to interpret the dreams properly. Pharaoh was impressed... put a gold chain around his neck, and accorded him the title of Prime Minister."

An amazing turn of events: from prison to palace in two minutes flat.

Even more, Joseph's experience is an arbiter of things to come. As the Midrash says: "Maase Avot Siman L'Banim" – events of the ancestors foreshadow events of their descendents.

A few hundred years later, the Jews eat matzah on their way out of Egypt. Why? Because they left in such a hurry and didn't have time for the bread to rise. The redemption – a 180-degree turnaround from slavery to freedom – happened in moments. As the verse says, "God saves as quick as the wink of an eye."

The Chafetz Chaim explains that this is also how the future redemption will occur. In fact, the Talmud says that if someone takes a vow "not to drink wine on the day the Messiah arrives," they are always forbidden to drink wine – because the Messiah could come any day! As Maimonides records in his "13 Principles of Faith:" "I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may delay, nevertheless every day I anticipate that he will come."

Reversal of Fortune

What is the key to reversing our exile and bringing about redemption?

In the times of the Maccabees, when the Greeks attacked Jerusalem, they didn't try to destroy the Temple or burn it down. Rather, they defiled it by offering pig sacrifices and placing a statue of Zeus in the Temple.

The Greeks didn't want to totally destroy Jewish life. Rather, they sought "li-challel" – literally, to make it empty. They wanted to tear the heart and soul out of Judaism, to sap its divine core and reduce it to symbolism.

This explains why the Greeks carefully scoured the Temple searching for pure flasks of oil (bearing the seal of the High Priest). They knew that defiling the oil would silence the Menorah –

representing the light of Torah which contains the depth and meaning of Jewish life. The Greeks knew this was the way to best "conquer" the Jewish nation.

The way to reverse such an attack is to put the meaning back in Judaism.

Our forefather Jacob knew this lesson well. In Genesis 46:28, before bringing his entire family down to Egypt for what would become a brutal period of slavery, Jacob sent Judah ahead to make preparations in the Goshen region. The Talmud explains that Judah's preparations were to build a yeshiva, a house of Torah study. Through learning Torah and uncovering the depth of meaning, we pour light into the world and drive away the darkness of exile.

Light and Dark

Chanukah, it so happens, is an auspicious time to pour light into the world. Jewish law states that ideally, the menorah should be placed outside your front door, in order to publicize the miracle. This has deeper significance: Since the mezuzah is placed on the right side of the doorway, we add the menorah to the left side, so the home is now "surrounded by mitzvot." What great proclamation of Jewish pride!

Chanukah takes place in the winter, the season when natural light is in short supply. Likewise, the events of Chanukah tell of the Jewish people reconnecting at a time of spiritual darkness. Each night, as we slowly increase the number of candles in the menorah, we symbolically increase our commitment to bring the light of Torah into our lives.

As noted, the four Jewish exiles are represented by the words "Nafshi (Emotional), Gufani (Bodily), Sichli (Intellectual), and HaKol (Combination). The beginning letters of each of these four Hebrew words are Nun, Gimmel, Shin and Hey – precisely the same four letters on the Chanukah dreidel. (On the dreidel, the letters stand for Nase Gadol Haya Sham – "a great miracle happened there.")

Amazingly, these are also the same four letters of the word "Goshna," the place where Judah built the yeshiva in Egypt. Reversal of our exile is achieved through the light of Torah.

There is a fascinating twist to this idea: Dreidels in Israel have one letter different – Nun, Gimmel, Shin, Pey, spelling "Nase Gadol Haya Po" – a great miracle happened here. So instead of the four letters forming the word "Goshna," an Israeli dreidel spells "Gofna" – meaning "wine."

Amazingly, when Jacob blesses his sons before he dies, the blessing he gives to Judah – from which the Messiah descends – is a blessing of wine (Genesis 49:11). And the Talmud (Brachot 57a) says that a dream of wine foretells the coming of the Messiah!

Amazingly, some descriptions in "Sefer HaChashmonayim" indicate that the Maccabees hid in a place called the "Hills of Gofna."

Conquering Exile

At times, the world can seem depressing. Confusion, anger, jealousy and greed dominate the news, and often our social and commercial dealings as well. Climate change, corruption in

government, terrorism, disease. Things look bleak.

We need the hope of redemption.

In 1943 in the Bergen Belsen concentration camp, devout Jews secretly gathered to light the Chanukah candles. After chanting the blessing, "Who made miracles for our ancestors, in those days at this season," the Bluzhever Rebbe broke into sobs, for he had already lost his wife and 10 children.

The Rebbe said: "We may wonder as we stand here in the Nazi pit of death, where are the miracles for us today? Yet of one thing I am certain: Just as God pulled the Maccabees from darkness, and just as He has preserved the Jewish people throughout the ages, the Jewish people will survive this, too."

Rabbi Azriel Tauber, a businessman and Torah scholar in New York, says he was able to survive the Holocaust because every day, his father would encourage him and say: "Don't despair, my son, for redemption can come at any moment."

Our task is to keep focused on the Torah, the voice of sanity in today's tumultuous world. And in the merit of the Chanukah candles, may we see the end of our exile, once and for all.

[Next week: Part 3 of "Exile and Return"](#)



Joseph's Brothers and the Art of Repentance

In this week's *parashah* we read the dramatic story of Joseph, now viceroy of Egypt, meeting his brethren after 22 years of separation. The brothers do not recognize Joseph, and when he accuses them of espionage they are overcome with trepidation. They immediately attribute their troubles to the heinous sin that they committed so long ago, when they sold Joseph into slavery.

In voices full of torment, they cry out, "*Aval – Indeed –* we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has come upon us."¹ The brothers could, of course, have ascribed Joseph's accusation to the whim of a mad Egyptian despot, but herein lies their greatness. Instead of shifting blame, they searched their souls and looked within themselves for the cause of their misfortune.

We can appreciate the depth of their self-scrutiny through an examination of the Hebrew word *aval* (indeed) which has a double meaning. It can also be translated but. At first glance, these disparate words appear contradictory. The Torah, however,

is teaching us a profound lesson. Most people, when explaining themselves, prefer to use the word *aval* as "but" in order to justify their negative behavior. They readily concede that their conduct was incorrect, but then go on to say, "*But*, there were mitigating circumstances beyond my control ...," "I know that I was wrong, *but* I was provoked ...," "I probably shouldn't have said that, *but* she/he pushed my buttons ...," etc., etc. Thus, with that little *but*, they give themselves license to continue to follow the same ill-advised path.

The brothers, the Tribal Patriarchs of the Jewish people, teach us how to repent, to do *teshuvah*. They teach us how to shed our bad habits, improve our character traits, and rediscover our true essence. They use the word *aval* – not as "but" (a loophole) – but rather as *indeed*, acknowledging, "Yes, *indeed*, we have sinned, we are accountable." Thus they display the path of *teshuvah* for all generations.

On Yom Kippur, when we recite *Vidui* (Confession), we repeat these very words: "*Aval anachnu va'avoseinu chatanu ... Indeed*, we and our fathers/ancestors have sinned" – no ifs, ands or buts! On the other hand, when people say, "I know I did such and such, **but** -," qualifying their confessions with that little insidious *but* attempts to justify continuing to follow the same corrupt path and cancels out their *teshuvah*.

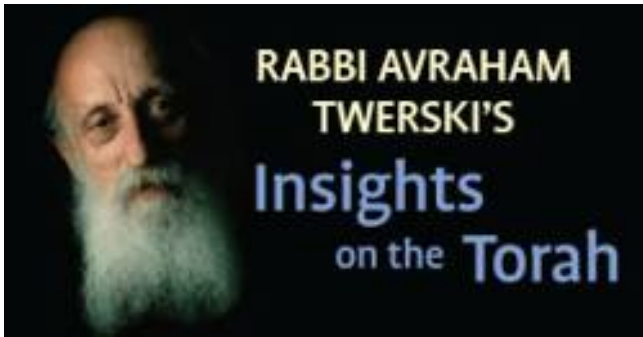
That which *we choose* to forget, God will remember, but that which *we choose to remember* and do *teshuvah* on, God will not only forget, but He will cancel the evil decree – the painful consequences of our sin – and convert the

transgression into merit. "If your sins are like scarlet, they will become white as snow"²

Most of us are good and decent people. It is the excuses that we make with but that allow us to stray from the path. We have a choice: We can emulate the Tribal Patriarchs by saying "Indeed," and grow, change, and realize our potential, or we can indulge ourselves with "but" and sink into our weaknesses. *It all depends on us.*

There is yet another lesson that we can learn from the brothers' confession. To all intents and purposes, the sin of which this apparent Egyptian despot is accusing them has no connection to the family squabble that took place 22 years previously in Canaan. And yet the brothers see a direct link between the tragedy that is now befalling them and the events that occurred so long ago. Nothing happens in a vacuum, and there is no forgetfulness before God. If we choose to ignore the transgressions of our past, if we fail to do *teshuvah* and ask forgiveness for them, then Hashem will find ways to remind us. God's time is different from ours, Eventually all our transgression will catch up with us in the most unexpected way. Time and again we see the law of *middah k'neged middah* (measure for measure), which, in our contemporary world, is often referred to as "what goes around comes around."

1. Genesis 42:21.
2. Isaiah 1:18.



Joseph and Preserving Someone's Dignity

Joseph saw his brothers and he recognized them, but he acted like a stranger toward them (42:7)

Jacob grieved relentlessly over the loss of his beloved son whom he assumed to be dead, and he refused to be consoled. “I will go down to the grave mourning for my son” (*Genesis 37:35*). Joseph knew what kind of agony his father was suffering. Even if he was not able to communicate to him when he was a slave of Potiphar or when he was in prison, he was certainly able to do so once he became viceroy of Egypt. Why did he not inform his father that he was alive and alleviate his profound grief?

Furthermore, Joseph is referred to in Torah writings as “Joseph the *tzaddik*.” Is it characteristic of a *tzaddik* to wreak vengeance and torment his brothers the way Joseph did? We would expect that as a *tzaddik*, he would not harbor a grudge and would forgive them.

The explanation I heard from my late brother, R' Shlomo, addresses these questions and provides

an answer that is both ethically and psychologically sound.

If Joseph had forgiven his brothers for their shameful act, he would have been the magnanimous person who, from the goodness of his heart, forgave his offenders. The brothers would have forever been the groveling penitents who would have to eternally bear the guilt of their behavior. There would be no opportunity for them to make any amends. They would never again be able to face Joseph or their father. Their spirits would have been totally crushed.

Joseph wished to avoid this. He wished to give his brothers an opportunity to redeem themselves and retain their self-esteem.

The Talmud says that true and effective *teshuvah* is achieved only if the person is placed in the same circumstances of his sin and under the same temptation. Joseph, therefore, designed it so that this would occur. After his absence, Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob's sons and the only other child of his beloved Rachel, had now become Jacob's favorite child. Joseph arranged to have Benjamin brought to him, and he singled out Benjamin for special treatment, giving him five times as much as he gave the brothers. He then engineered it so that Benjamin was suspected of thievery, and said that he was going to keep Benjamin as a slave. He had set the stage for the litmus test. Would the brothers act as they had toward him, saying, “Let Benjamin stay here. This is a good way for us to be free of his favoritism,” and again be indifferent to their father's feelings as they were when they sold him into slavery? Or had they realized and

repented their mistake, and were ready to sacrifice themselves to return Benjamin to their father?

When Judah said that he must return Benjamin to his father and offered to stay as a slave in his place, Joseph saw that the brothers had thereby corrected their behavior and had done proper *teshuvah*. They had redeemed themselves and would no longer have to bear the guilt and shame for their sin. Joseph was now prepared to reveal his identity to them. Far from being a vengeful torment, Joseph's actions were in their interest, enabling them to redeem themselves and walk with their heads raised high.

What about Jacob's agony? Joseph knew his father well. He knew that, painful as the ordeal was, Jacob would gladly accept years of suffering in order to provide his children with the opportunity to gain self-respect. This could not have been achieved in any other way, and Joseph was certain that he was doing what his father wished.

This interpretation shows us the overriding importance of self-esteem. One psychologist writes, "If you have given your child self-esteem, you have given him everything. If you have not given him self-esteem, then whatever else you gave him is of little value." Self-esteem is *the* major component of a healthy personality.

We should be aware of this. Sometimes we say or do things to another person that may depress his self-esteem. We should be aware that this is a kind of psycho-logical homicide. The Torah repeatedly emphasizes the importance of upholding every person's dignity. The saga of Joseph and his brothers teaches us to what extent we must go to

preserve a person's feelings of self-respect and dignity.

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