



TorahRedux

But Yosef doesn't forget, because it's not about him anymore. The Torah classifies Yosef as a "successful" person – אִישׁ מְצַלֵּחַ – the only instance the Torah describes someone this way; this title belongs uniquely to Yosef.

The Malbim notes that the word itself is the causative form of the word for success – מְצַלֵּחַ – meaning Yosef was literally someone who caused the success of others. As the story makes abundantly clear, Yosef did in fact bring success to others; First, making Potiphar's household successful, and then running the prison successfully, and eventually, the entire government.

What if that were your definition of what success looks like? We ought to be mindful that it is the Torah's definition, after all. The egocentric definition of success as personal gain is victory, but it's not success. Success is improving other people's lives, nothing more, nothing less.

The progression of Yosef's story is in the common thread of his God-given charisma, looks, talents, and smarts. In the beginning, he thought it made him better than everybody else, but then he grew up, and understood that it merely gave him a greater ability to help others.

R' Shlomo Farhi suggests that this was the symbolic significance of Yosef's stripy cloak Yakov had given him; that Yakov saw in Yosef the ability to bring together people of different stripes and backgrounds.

Our sages herald Yosef as the greatest of his generation. He stood strong and tall in the face of nightmares his brothers could never begin to imagine, and he did it with his distinctive style and flair.

In shackles and from the pits, he never forgot that God was with him and calibrated his sensitivity to others' problems and determined to help them, despite being down on luck more than any of them.

Your fortune will change when you stop looking out for yourself.

Family Feuds

3 minute read | Straightforward

In the stories of the middle phase of Yakov's life, the recurring theme is internal clashes within the family. There is a constant tension between Rachel and Leah, and it spills down to their children when Yosef's brothers hate him for being Yakov's favorite.

To be sure, multiple moments mark them out as great humans. Rachel recognized her father for the scoundrel he was and gave Leah the secret code signals on what was supposed to be Rachel's wedding



day so that Leah wouldn't be discovered and humiliated; Yosef saved his family from starvation when he could have taken revenge.

But as much as we hold these individuals up as our righteous and saintly ancestors and even bless and name our children after them, they seem to compete and fight rather often, vying for Yakov's attention.

Is it every man and woman for themselves?

R' Yitzchak Berkowitz cautions us against this superficial analysis.

Some things are constant, like the characteristics of Avraham, defined by his loving outreach and warm, kind heart, and God promises that Avraham's name would be the one we highlight in our prayers – מְגִן אַבְרָהָם.

But past that common denominator, perfection looks different from person to person, and it doesn't follow that what's good for me will work for you. The correct perspective to understand these stories – and ourselves – is that we are all different people with different personalities and perspectives, with different responsibilities requiring different things.

The stories of Yakov's family are of people vying to leave their mark, fighting to contribute, fighting to matter, fighting to leave an impact, and it's something we should notice that our greats tend to do, raising their voices to draw out individuality and avoid homogeneity. These clashes are not about a winning ideology; they're about making sure that different voices exist.

The notion of collectivism and unity – אֶחָדוּת – is all too often propounded to squash individuality, and we mustn't tolerate that. On the contrary, the Torah is indisputably tolerant of pluralism, the existence of different voices. As the Lubavitcher Rebbe put it, people are not dollars. Your voice and existence are not fungible. You are not replaceable, and we need you to shine.

God creates all of us as separate individuals, born with a particular makeup and tendencies that mark us as distinct and unique elements of the universe. It is who you are to the core, but some people never become who they truly are; they conform to the tastes of others and end up wearing a mask that hides their true nature. R' Shlomo Farhi teaches that dulling your essential self to conform with others is heresy and sacrilege that profanes and squanders who we are put in this world to be.

There is a beautiful and uncommon blessing we say upon seeing a crowd of multitudes – חַכַּם הַרְזִים – the knower of secrets, which the Gemara explains as acknowledging God's greatness in knowing each of us in our individual hearts, despite our different faces and minds. This is a subtle but vital point – God is great not because of the glory and sheer size of the crowd, but because God can see each of us as distinct within the sea of all too forgettable faces; God can see the individual within the collective.



It is a blessing in praise of the God who creates diversity in our world, rejoicing in our different minds, opinions, and thoughts. It is a blessing over Jewish pluralism. It is one thing to tolerate our differences; it is quite another to acknowledge them as a blessing. It is one thing to love Jews because we are all Jewish; that is, the same. It is quite another to love Jews because they are different from ourselves.

Sure, we have a group identity, but there is also individuality, and everyone expresses their sparkle in their own unique way.

As much as the world has gotten smaller in a certain sense, our world is also bigger today than it's ever been, so it's not zero-sum. Opportunities are abundant all around us, and you mustn't be shy about shining in whatever way you do it best.

Our world will only sparkle when you do.

Parallel Lines

3 minute read | Straightforward

Most of the second half of the book of Genesis is about Yakov's children, with a strong focus on Yosef. Yet, right in the middle of the Yosef narrative, the Torah interrupts with a cryptic parallel side story about Yehuda, commonly glossed over, and perhaps a little awkward.

Yehuda had a son who displeased God and died. Presuming some form of levirate marriage, wherein marriage outside the family clan was forbidden, Yehuda's second son married Tamar, but would not uphold his duty to have a child with her, and he died as well. Afraid that Tamar was somehow responsible for the death of his sons, Yehuda withheld his third son from her, leaving her in limbo as the first chained woman – an aguna. She then disguised herself as a harlot to seduce Yehuda and became pregnant.

When word spread that Tamar was pregnant, the obvious conclusion was that she had violated her duty to the family clan, and so she had to be executed. At the last minute, she revealed her ruse, and Yehuda admitted fault.

What is this story doing in the middle of the Yosef stories?

R' Jonathan Sacks observes that this story mirrors the Yosef story, and illustrates that Yosef and Yehuda had a parallel and corresponding rise and fall.



Both stories involve deception through clothing – Yosef with his blood-stained tunic, and Yehuda with Tamar’s seductive disguise.

The Torah begins this narrative with Yehuda isolated:

וַיְהִי בַעַת הַהוּא וַיֵּרֵד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחָיו וַיֵּט עַד־אִישׁ עַדְלָמִי וַשְּׁמוֹ הִירָה. וַיֵּרָא־שָׁם יְהוּדָה בַת־אִישׁ כְּנַעֲנִי וַשְּׁמוֹ שׁוּעַ וַיִּקְחָהּ וַיְבֵא אֵלֶיהָ – And afterward, Yehuda descended from his brothers and camped near an Adullamite whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and lived with her. (38:1, 2)

Yehuda’s descent was both literal and figurative – וַיֵּרֵד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחָיו. The Midrash teaches that the remaining brothers held Yehuda responsible for their father’s misery; he separated himself and did what no one else in the family had done – he married a Canaanite.

The turning point in this story is powerful, where Tamar reveals that she had fulfilled her duty to the clan when the they would not uphold their duty to her:

הוּא מוֹצֵאת וְהִיא שְׁלָחָה אֶל־חַמְיָהּ לֵאמֹר לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אָלַהּ לּוֹ אֲנֹכִי הָרָה וַתֹּאמֶר הֲרָה וַתִּרְנָא לְמִי הַחֲתָמֹת וְהַפְתִּילִים וְהַמְטָה הָאֵלֶּה. וַיִּכַּר יְהוּדָה – As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, “I am with child by the man to whom these belong.” And she added, “Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these?” Judah recognized them and said, “She is more in the right than I since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he was not intimate with her again. (38:25,26)

As surely as Yosef and Yehuda hit rock bottom, they could both rise once more.

Admitting his wrongdoing, Yehuda unlocked the ability to make amends, and the man who had once proposed murdering his brother Yosef could transform into a man who would stand up for his brother Binyamin when he was in danger.

It is worth highlighting the enormous gamble Tamar took to avoid embarrassing Judah. Chazal hyperbolically liken humiliation to murder. R’ Jonathan Sacks quips that we cover bread at the Shabbos table so that we don’t embarrass the bread when we make kiddush first; if only we were so careful with people with feelings!

R’ Jonathan Sacks notes that these stories contain the first instances of teshuva – repentance and forgiveness – the power to heal what would otherwise lead to permanent relationship fractures.

Yakov’s family found their way back when they learned to admit their mistakes to themselves and each other.

So can we.



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R' Shlomo Farhi teaches that we can never know which moments in our lives are the inflection points. The Midrash is not about insincerity; it's about indecisiveness. If we knew which moments would be the ones that mattered, we'd be fully present and engaged to give our all.

If Reuven had only known, says the Midrash. If he'd known that the future was watching that moment, he might have found the conviction to follow through. But Reuven could not know. He had not read the story. None of us can read the story of our life – we can only live it.

As R' Jonathan Sacks notes, it is impossible not to recognize in Reuven a person of the highest ethical sensibilities. His heart is in the right place and he only means the best. But though he had a conscience, he lacked courage and conviction. He knew what was right, but dwelling on his mistakes had robbed him of the resolve to act boldly and decisively; and in this particular moment, more was lost than Joseph. So too was Reuven's chance to become the hero he could and should have been.

The feeling of regret is the pain of what could have been. To minimize regret, engage in every moment wholeheartedly and fully present.

The future is watching.

I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.

I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond.

If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?

Neli

PS - *TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. My business, Hendon Advisors, allows me to dedicate time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I source and broker the purchase and sale of healthcare businesses; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers. If you are a buyer of healthcare businesses or can make introductions to healthcare operators who might buy or sell, just reply to this email to get in touch.*

Redux: *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.