

Vayigash 2022

Don't be Afraid

2 minute read | Straightforward

After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he invited their entire family to relocate from the famine-plagued Canaan to Egypt's fertile and prosperous land under Yosef's protection and influence. When Yakov discovered his long-lost son was alive and well, he was overwhelmed at the prospect of reuniting the family before he died. But he had reservations, and God had to reassure him:

יַאָּמֶר אָנֹכִי הָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךְ אַל־תִּיָרָא מֵרְדָה מְצְרַיְמָה כִּי־לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשִׂימְךְ שָׁם – And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation". (46:3)

Undoubtedly, God was speaking to some nerves or anguish Yakov was experiencing at the idea of leaving the land of his fathers. Yakov was afraid of the unknown, leaving the safety, security, and comfort of the land his family had grown up in. But fear makes us withdraw, which may be the point God was addressing.

And God's reassurance contains a powerful notion that reverberates through the ages. Difficulties don't have to diminish – they can be the making of us. Strength and growth come with pain and sacrifice.

Of 3,000 or so years of Jewish history, perhaps 400 at best were sovereign and secure, with the rest in one exile or another. Yet, the trajectory has only been upwards. There is no greater freedom than knowing we can thrive in exile.

It's ultimately true of life itself – we build through overcoming adversity with self-sacrifice. So counterintuitively, outstanding achievements are not despite adversity; they are a product of it. Leaning into the challenge will be the making of you – בִּי־לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשִׂימְךּ שֶׁם – that's the only place it can happen.

When everything is easy, it's hard to be our best, and Yakov's life embodied this. His family could only be reunited in a foreign land, paving the way to slavery and eventual redemption. His life was truth and greatness, but always with pain and on the run.

R' Yitzchak Berkowitz teaches that this theme is recursive – time and again, the resistance is not the obstacle – it's the catalyst. The obstacle is the way. It's the story of the matza on Pesach; it's the story of Purim and Chanuka. Overcoming the challenge is what lets us become great.

That's not to diminish in any way the severity of the different ordeals life hurls our way – the struggle is real.

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But we don't have to be shackled by our shackles; the challenges can give us a siege mentality. The key to unlocking this superpower is God's message to humans.

Don't be afraid.

Dying Of Embarrassment

2 minute read | Straightforward

Yosef planted stolen property on Binyamin and imprisoned him to determine if his brothers had changed over the years.

Yehuda stepped forward to persuade their captor with a heart-rending plea on behalf of their elderly father; to return home without his youngest boy would be the death of him. Out of mercy for their elderly father, Yehuda begged Yosef to release Binyamin.

Seeing them stick up for each other, Yosef knew that they had changed, and this was the moment to reveal his identity:

יַיִּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחָיו אַבִי חָי וְלֹא יָכְלוּ אָחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהֲלוּ מִפָּנִיו – Yosef said to his brothers, "It is I, Yosef. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer because they were so shocked.

While the reveal stuns them into silence, Yosef's question is a little strange. Yehuda has just been talking about their elderly father and his frail health as to why Yosef should let Binyamin go. Yosef already knows that Yakov is alive!

So why would he ask if his father was still alive?

The Beis Halevi explains that Yosef's rhetoric isolates their concern for their father. They love their father. They worry for him and don't want to trouble him. But, Yosef asks, what of my father, the father you put through years of inconsolable anguish and grief? Is he only alive to you now that you are the victims?

They were shocked into silence. Not just because of the surprise of Yosef's reveal, but because he is transparently correct that they are hypocrites! The Midrash teaches that when our souls arrive in Heaven, we are put on trial to account for how we spent our lives, likening the experience to the mortifying and humiliating moment Yosef revealed himself to his brothers. It's not about surprise; it's about the ad hoc justifications and hypocrisy we regularly indulge in.

Yet what happens next shows the caliber of these great heroes. Having said his piece, and without a hint of malice, he simply embraces them.



It is worth noting that until he revealed himself, Yosef was a threat to them, but his brothers were dangerous too. Yehuda was known for his decisive albeit arguably rash actions, and Shimon and Levi were infamous and feared killers. But rather than humiliate his brothers in front of an audience, Yosef commands his guards and staff to leave, endangering himself and risking his life.

The story is a paradigm for how to mend a broken relationship. Yosef's reproof is concise but comprehensive on delivery and accepted without dispute when received.

We all have relationship struggles over far less.

Which ones can you mend with a few well-chosen words?

There and Back Again, and Every Step Along the Way

4 minute read | Straightforward

One of the most formative moments in Yakov's life was when he fled his parent's home after obtaining Avraham's blessing from Yitzchak. He was no longer safe around Esau, and his mother Rivka advised him to escape to her brother's house.

Yakov ran with nothing more than the clothes on his back, and he would not return home until decades later. Alone and afraid, Yakov slept one night and had a stark vision of a stairway to heaven, with angels climbing and descending over him. When he woke, he asked God to protect him, and God promised to do so.

It's a powerful story about God's presence and power transcending national boundaries, about the unique and eternal covenant between God and Avraham's descendants, and the everlasting gift of the Land of Israel. It speaks to us by acknowledging the tensions that threaten us in exile, with its all too relatable struggle of trying to build and secure our future in a hostile world.

The Sfas Emes notes that Yakov's journey is one we all make on a personal and national level, escaping Esau's clutches in one form or another. We must eventually leave our comfort zones, perhaps when we realize that the familiar safety and security we once knew have eroded beneath us and that we need to find someplace else.

The Torah doesn't just say where Yakov went; it emphasizes that he left Beersheva – וַיֵּלֶה מָּבְאַר שָׁבַע מִּבְּאַר שָׁבַע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבַע מִבְּאַר שָׁבַע מִבְּאַר שָׁבַע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבַע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבָע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבָע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבָע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבָע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבָע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבָע מִבְּאַר מִּבְּאַר מִבְּאַר שָּׁבְע מִבְּאַר מִבְּאַר מִבְּאַר מִבְּאַר מִּבְּע מִבְּאַר שָּׁבַע מִבְּאַר מִבְּיִבְּע מִבְּאַר מִבְּאַר מִבְּע מִבְּאַר מִבְּע מִּבְע מִּב מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִּבְע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִּבְע מִּבְע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִּבְע מִּבְע מִּבְע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִּבְע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִּבְּע מִבְּע מִּבְּע מִּבְּבְע מִּבְּע מְּבְּבּע מִּבְּע מְבְּבּע מִּבְּע מִּבְּע מִּבְּע מִּבְּע מְּבְּע מְבְּבְּע מְבְּבּע מִּבְּע מְּבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּע מְבְּבּע מְבְּבּע מְבְּבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּבְּבְּבְּע מְבְּבְּבְּבְּע



great people. You contribute to the places you are a part of, and they are worse off when you leave. But your contribution goes where you go, every step along the way, and all the spaces in between.

At the end of Yakov's life, he laments the difficulty and misery that blighted his life. Yet even in what R' Jonathan Sacks describes as the liminal space, the non-moments in between the great chapters of Yakov's life, he sees visions and grapples with angels, and God promises to keep him safe, watching over him like a parent.

R' Hirsch highlights how Yakov starts with nothing and nobody and finds himself nowhere precisely because Yakov doesn't need any of that to become who he's meant to be. He has everything he needs within him already.

Moreover, God appears to Yakov and promises to protect him precisely at this low point, before he is somewhere, before he is someone, and before he has something. Yakov has not yet undergone his transformation to Yisrael; he is not yet the man he will become. Having just left his parents' house, he has only just begun his journey into adulthood. But precisely at that moment, at Yakov's lowest, God appears for the very first time and promises to keep him safe. The Torah tells us nothing about how Yakov earns this remarkable privilege, perhaps indicating to us that God is there at our rock bottom moment, in the darkness and without cause, with the promise that we can shine brightly once again, perhaps even more than in the good old days.

R' Shlomo Farhi notes that this theme precisely tracks the trajectory of Yakov's life story. Yakov is born not just a twin, but literally holding on to his brother's foot, and his childhood is defined by competition with Esau – his identity exists solely in relation to his brother; he must be attached to get by, which perhaps sheds some light on why Yitzchak may have doubted Yakov in his youth. Years afterward, when Yakov and Esau meet up again, Esau offers Yakov to join forces, and Yakov declines in order to travel alone with his own family – Yakov's ultimate victory over Esau comes when Yakov develops his ability to transcend competition and strife to stand on his own. Esau has no power over Yakov when Yakov can resist not only Esau's strength but can gracefully decline his diplomatic overtures as well.

The defining struggle of Yakov's life is in the enigmatic incident at the river, when Yakov battled a mysterious and shadowy figure we identify as Esau's guardian angel, and the question is posed once and for all, can Yakov stand alone? He holds his own and earns the title of Yisrael.



Yakov's story is a quest to pave his own way, build a home, and secure his family's future in a hostile and turbulent environment. But the catalyst was Yakov all along, and it was within him all along.

Taking the dream at face value, we might wonder why Yakov doesn't ever think to climb the ladder to heaven. There is simply no need to climb the ladder in this interpretation. Yakov can build his family, and they will impact the world through their actions, and he doesn't need inherited wealth or renown, and he doesn't need anybody's help. Even when he is nowhere, he doesn't need to climb the ladder to become other than who he is; who he is and where he is will do perfectly.

The legacy of Yakov is that we have a spark within us, and we take it wherever we go. If we've been anywhere great, we are a part of what made it so, and if we did it there, we could do it anywhere. The model of Yakov's life demonstrates that we can even do it in the middle of nowhere; that humans have a generative capacity to produce and contain growth and sanctity.

As the Ropshitzer said, the holiest place isn't the Beis HaMikdash, and the holiest moment isn't Yom Kippur; it's right here, right now.

His Brother's Keeper

5 minute read | Straightforward

After a famine struck Canaan and the surrounding region, Egypt was the only place that could adequately sustain refugees. Yakov sent his sons down to Egypt to obtain provisions, where Yosef noticed them, and Yosef imprisoned Shimon for an extended period of time to make sure they brought Benjamin back with them. After releasing Shimon, Yosef had his goblet planted in Benjamin's sack and claimed the right to enslave the framed thief. Believing their innocence, the brothers agreed, only to be crestfallen when the missing goblet was discovered in Benjamin's personal articles, and Yehuda stepped forward with an impassioned plea, the turning point in the family's story:

וַיִּגַּשׁ אַלִיו יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאֶמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנִי יְדָבֶּר־נָא עַבְדְּךְ דָבָר בָּאָוְנֵי אֲדֹנִי וְאַלִּיה בַּנְער בְּפָרְעֹה... כִּי עַבְדְּךְ עָבְר אָקִי יְבָּרְ־נָא עַבְדְּךְ תָּחַת הַנַּעַר עָבֶד לַאדֹנִי וְהַנַּעַר יַעַל עִם־אָחָיו. כִּי־אֵיךְ אָעֶלְה לֵא אָבִיאָנּוּ אַלִיךְ וְהָנַעַר יַעַל עִם־אָחָיו. כִּי־אֵיךְ אָעֶלְה יִמְצָּא אָת־אָבִי: בְּרִא אָשֶׁר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בְּרִא אַשֶּר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בּרִי אָשֶׁר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בּרִי וְהַנַּעַר אֵינָנּוּ אִתִּי כָּן אֶרְאָה בָרָע אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בּירֹאַ אַבְּדְּךְ תַּחָת הַנַּעַר אֵינָנּוּ אִתִּי כָּן אֶרְאָה בָּרְע אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בּירֹאָ אַבְּדְּךְ הָּמָחָיו. פִּי־אֵיךְ אָעֶר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בּירֹאָ אַבְּרְבְּ וְהַנַּעַר אֵינָנּוּ אִתִּי בְּן אָרְאָה בְּרִע אֲשָׁר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בּירֹאָ אָבְייִבְּי וְהַנַּעַר אֵינְנּוּ אִתְּי בְּן אָרְאָה בְּרִע אֲשְׁר יִמְצָא אָת־אָבִי: בְּיִבְּר בְּיִי וְהַנָּעֵר אַיְנְנִּוּ אָתִי בְּן הָנָעָר יִמְלָּא אָת־אָבִי: בְּיִר אָמִיי בְּרָע אָשֶׁר יִמְעָם אָבִיי וְהַנָּער אָבִייּנְיּ וְהַנְּעָר אַרְיִי וְהַנְּנִיּ וְהָּבְּיִי וְהַנְּעִר אַיְרְיִי יְהַבְּר בְּאָרוּיִי וְהַיּבְּי בְּבְיּבְיּבְיּבְיּבְיּי בְּמָרְיּבְּי בְּבְיּבְיּבְער אָבְיּבְיי בְּיִי בְּעְרְיִי וְהַיּבְיי בְּיִי בְּיִיךְ אָּערְיִי וְהַיּבְיי בְּיִי בְּיְבְיְבְיי בְּיִרְיִי אָתְייִי יְבְיּרְ בְּאָרְיִי וְבְיִבְיְיְבְיִי בְּיִבְיְיִי וְנְבְיִי בְּיִי בְּיִבְיְיְיִי בְּיִבְייִי בְּיִייְיִי בְּיִבְייִי בְּיִבְייִי בְּיִבְייִי בְּעְבְיִייְ בְּיִבְייִי בְּיִי בְיִבְיְיִי בְּיִייְיִי בְּיִייְיִי בְּיִייְיִי בְּיִייְיִי בְּיִיְיְנְיִי בְּיִייְיִי בְּיִי בְּיִיְיְיִי בְּיִיְיִייְ בְּיִייְי בְּיִייְבְיי בְּיִבְייִי וְבְיִייְ בְּיִייְייִי בְּיְבְייִי בְּיִייְיִי בְּיְבְייִי בְּיְיִייְיי בְּיִייְיְיְיִי בְּיִייְי בְּיִייְייִי בְּיִייְיי בְּיְבְייִי בְּיְבְייִי בְיּיְיִייְי בְּיְבְי בְיּבְייִייְי בְּיִייְי בְּיְבְיְי בְיִייְי בְּיִייְי בְּיִייְי בְּיְבְייִי בְּיִייְי בְיִיי בְיְיְבְיי בְיִייְי בְּיְבְייִי בְייִי בְּיְיְיְייִי בְּיְבְייִי בְּיְבְיּייִי בְּיְיִי בְיְיְיי בְּיְייִייְי בְּיְייִייְי בְּיְיְיְיְבְייְיְיְיְיְיְיְיְיִיי בְּיְ

Rashi highlights that Yehuda is not simply begging; he makes a fervent and forceful appeal to save Binyamin. The Gemara suggests that Yehuda was willing to draw swords over this, meaning Yehuda TorahRedux | Ancient Words, Timeless Wisdom Subscriptions and feedback: Neli@TorahRedux.com



was willing to sacrifice not only his liberty for his brother; but his very life. The Tosefta recognizes this moment as the singular deed that seals Yehuda's eventual right to the crown.

Where once upon a time, Yehuda had advocated for the rejection of a sibling, he would not and could not tolerate the notion for even a moment, taking absolute responsibility for a planted goblet, something so completely beyond his control. With this bold step, Yehuda showed that he and his brothers had changed, and Yosef's charade was no longer necessary, and it would be safe for Yosef to reveal his true identity.

Before proceeding, we should recognize that what Yehuda did was highly unusual.

There's a common law doctrine called frustration. When an unforeseen event renders an agreed contractual obligation impossible, the contract or agreement has been frustrated and is set aside – אונס בטריה. Any normal person would be well within their rights to disclaim any responsibility for the planted goblet – who could have foreseen it? There is no universe where it's in any way Yehuda's fault! Yehuda could so easily go home empty-handed to their father, broken-hearted and dejected, because what more could he have done to save Benjamin? Knowing that this nightmare scenario is theatrical because the goblet was planted, we know that the answer to what he could have different or better is nothing at all; it was nobody's fault. Yet Yehuda rejected this tantalizing prompt to escape responsibility, choosing instead to endanger himself to save his brother.

Given the deep significance of this moment in the story, as accentuated by our Sage's comments, what was the fuel that drove Yehuda to such an extreme extent?

R' Jonathan Sacks suggests that Yehuda's behavior is characteristic of being a leader. Making mistakes is an occupational hazard of leadership, but it's a feature of being in a role with no rules navigating uncharted territory. Yehuda had made his mistakes, advocating for getting rid of Yosef, and then with his judgment in the story with Tamar. But he had admitted his mistakes and taken responsibility, learning and growing from them to face another day. He was not debilitated by his past failures and would not fail again; the stuff kings should be made of.

R' Yitzchok Berkovits suggests that Yehuda understood that taking responsibility meant he could stop at nothing and could not allow for failure. Yehuda actually says as much to Yosef! One of the most fundamental premises of Judaism is that we have a duty to each other of mutual responsibility to look out for each other – כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה. The Hebrew expression goes quite a bit further than the notion of responsibility, articulating the legal concept of personal guarantee. There is just no such thing as a good person who minds their own business and leaves community and society to their own devices. That's just not what a good person looks like! We are all fully responsible for living the Torah's laws and ideals ourselves, but we are just as responsible for our fellow man and their responsibilities. The Torah teaches us that we don't just owe God; we owe each other.



Yehuda's example, and the example of any great leader, is that being responsible means stopping at nothing. If something goes wrong, leaders find another way, and there is no such thing as getting too discouraged.

It's hard to overstate how monumental this moment is. Yehuda had rehabilitated himself fully, and it is what allows Yakov's family to peacefully reunite, relocate, and reintegrate together after decades of hurt.

Cycle after cycle, generation after generation, families fought and went their separate ways. Cain killed his brother Abel. Lot had to separate from his uncle Avraham. Yishmael had to be separated from his brother Yitzchak. Esau had to be separated from his twin brother Yakov. In the book of Genesis, the stories of where we come from, families drifting apart is the natural course of events until this very moment – מעשה אבות סימן לבנים.

If the book opened with the haunting and existential question of "Am I my brother's keeper?;" then the Torah's answer is categorically and unequivocally that yes, you absolutely are!

Yehuda really is his brother's keeper. With this essential lesson, the cycle has been broken, setting the scene for the epilogue of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus and the Jewish People.

The Gemara suggests that Yosef cried when he embraced Binyamin for the first time, not only for their emotional and tearful reunion after a lifetime apart; but because Yosef was crying for the two Batei HaMikdash in Binyamin's territory that would be destroyed because of societies rife with internal hatred and animosity.

Perhaps the Gemara is communicating how hard it is for us not to hate our brother. Yosef and Binyamin had only just learned the lesson but knew that their descendants were doomed to repeat the same mistakes. Friction is part of what it is to be human – but we can be better than that. The stories of our history are about how hard it is to get along. It's the story of our present. It's the story of our future.

The Torah talks to us – it is written knowing exactly who we are, our shortcomings, and what we struggle with. And just the same, it calls on us to be our brother's keeper, to take responsibility for one another, even, or perhaps especially, the ones it's hard to get along with. It can heal a family, and it can alter the course of history.

We might fail, it might be hard, and the odds might be against us. But there is no avoiding it. It's hard, but it can be done, and it's the stuff greatness is made of.

How to Not Kill Your Family



6 minute read | Straightforward

There is a treasured custom in some communities for parents to bless their children before kiddush on Friday night. Traditionally, fathers will bless their sons to be like Ephraim and Menashe and their daughters like the Matriarchs.

It's not hard to understand why we'd want our daughters to be like the Matriarchs; they are the role models and heroines in the stories of our greats. While we have others, such as Miriam and Devorah, the Matriarchs are a natural conceptual category that we intuitively understand.

But of all the great heroes in our heritage, why are Ephraim and Menashe, in particular, the specific role models we would want our sons to emulate?

Ephraim and Menashe occupy a distinctly unique conceptual category; they transcend a natural hierarchy. While hierarchies are inherent to family dynamics and structures, it is highly irregular to see generation jumpers. Yet, these young boys earned parity with their uncles a generation earlier and are counted as tribes alongside Yakov's sons.

But transcending family dynamics wasn't just something that happened to them when Yakov blessed them; transcending family dynamics was a fundamental reflection of who they were.

The Bnai Yissaschar explains that every generation in Genesis suffered rivalry rooted in unequal blessings, favor, or talent, whether from God or a parent. Brothers kill each other in the case of Cain and Abel, come close to it with Yakov and Esau, and fight and fracture in every other instance. But when Yakov crossed his hands and blessed his younger grandson with the better blessing ostensibly fit for the elder without a word of protest, it was the first time a snubbed sibling didn't have a moment's thought of entitlement or jealousy.

Ephraim and Menashe showcase what is arguably the most difficult of the Ten Commandments, the commandment of envy – וְלֹא חַקְמֹּך . It's difficult to practice because jealousy originates in the subconscious. The only solution is to adopt the perspective that God's blessings are abundant; not exclusive, finite, scarce, or zero-sum, that there isn't a fixed amount of happiness, health, love, or money in the world, so someone else's good fortune cannot subtract from yours, and it cannot diminish the pool of blessings available to you in the future. Ephraim and Menashe lived that in their relationship with each other.

As R' David Wolpe notes, this is the first time siblings show acceptance of inequality. It's the way the world is; we simply have to accept that there will be different distributions of blessings, gifts, talent, and luck. And the acceptance of God's gifts at unequal levels is the only way brothers succeed in not killing each other.

Put simply, their relationship with each other transcended competitive dynamics and hierarchies, and there is no better blessing to wish on our sons.



That's great, and it has merit enough to stand on its own, but it still doesn't get to the core of the matter, which is where this quality came from.

My Zaide suggested that if your father is Yakov and you are born, raised, and live in his house, it's relatively easy and not especially surprising that you follow his way. In comparison, to be born in Egypt, the crown jewel of a world devoid of spirituality and meaning, whose culture was excess and materialism, rife with lust and idolatry; and yet master the spiritual life as well as any of Yakov's sons, is the ultimate achievement.

So perhaps the blessing we wish on our children is to master both worlds – the private world of spirituality and the public world of commerce and community, participating without being consumed.

But perhaps there's something else, hiding in plain sight.

In social psychology, self-categorization theory is the concept of how we categorize and perceive ourselves and others. We categorize our role in the society as the self – "I;" the social self – "we;" and the comparative outgroup – "them." The "us" versus "them" mentality is natural and stems from our deep evolutionary need to belong to a group in order to survive, belong, and flourish.

Where Yosef's brothers went so wrong was that they identified him as the outgroup, the other, the enemy, a threat, and not one of them. As the Sfas Emes notes, part of what was so mortifying by Yosef's grand reveal was that their threat assessment and identification had been so badly miscalibrated; Yosef may have been an annoying, immature, troublemaker, but he had always and only ever been one of them. By not protesting at the superior blessing given to his younger brother, Menashe revealed that he understood his role as a brother and ally; he was not competing with his brother.

And here's the essential point – if Menashe learned this lesson from observing his father's life story, cast out from his family then subsequently healing, ultimately rising and magnanimously reuniting his family; then it could never be a lesson that can be repeated or passed on, and blessing our children with a quality they could not possibly hope to emulate doesn't ring true or make any sense. In that case, the blessing to our children would be to have a father like Yosef, which is self-referential and absurd, so they must have learned this lesson in a way that everyone can.

Most of us want to protect our children from struggles because if we shoulder their burdens, they'll be happier, right? Not usually. Children are happiest when parents bolster and support their children's ability to tackle life's challenging experiences.

Resilience, or better yet, antifragility is not an inherited genetic trait; it is earned and honed. It is derived from the ways children learn to think and act when they are faced with obstacles, large and small. The road to resilience comes first and foremost from children's supportive relationships with parents, teachers, and other caring adults. These relationships become sources of strength when children work through stressful situations and painful emotions.



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With antifragility, we don't merely recover; we also add some other thing on top. When we're infected with a virus, we heal and become immune to subsequent infection. It is more than resilience, which is the return to a fixed state. Antifragile is a dynamic state that requires some stressor to stimulate growth

But without stimulus, we can atrophy. Moshe warned of the day the Jewish People would get too comfortable and lose their way:

וַיִּשְׁמֵן יְשֵׁרוּן וַיִּבְעָט שְׁמַנְהָ נָשִיתְ וַיִּטשׁ אֱלוֹהַ עָשָהוּ וַיְנַבֵּל צוּר יְשֵׁעָתוּ — So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked, you grew fat and gross and coarse, and forsook the God who made him, and spurned the Rock of his support. (32:15)

The Haggadah echoes the same by warning us of the threat of Lavan; Pharaoh is a direct threat we know to be cautious about, but a devious Lavan poses an indirect threat equally serious. If Yakov had stayed with Lavan, he might have been fabulously wealthy; and he would not have lost his life, but he would have lost his soul.

We are products of modernity, for which there is no shame; we cannot be anything other than what we are. But what defines us, and what does not? We are Jews; our history and our culture define us, not the society we live in. Our society can influence the expression of our history and our culture, and a Jew today looks different from a Jew in the Middle Ages or a Jew five centuries from now.

When our enemies threaten our very lives, "us" and "them" are self-explanatory and straightforward, but we currently live in one of the rare periods where that's not the case – thankfully! But the threat is never gone; it merely contorts itself into a different form. While everyone knows that assimilation is a silent killer, materialism is only a slightly less malignant form of assimilation but still very much within the same conceptual category.

So perhaps while "us" and "them" were faulty in Yosef's brothers, they were rediscovered and reclaimed by Yosef and his sons; and that's the heart of what we wish for our sons. To know who they are, to correctly identify threats, to stand up in the face of adversity, to rise to the challenge, and to thrive in overcoming it.

In our families and communities, we can and must correctly identify the "us," who we are alongside each other, and stand up to "them," the challenge that modern culture poses. If you cannot correctly tell "us" from "them," then all the concomitant dangers naturally follow when we turn what should be "us" into "them" – competition, fear, jealousy, anger, alienation, and literal or metaphorical death.

Our sons will go out into the world and confront all sorts of trials we cannot imagine or prepare them for, and because they will face those challenges differently and achieve different outcomes.

So we desperately wish for them to be like Ephraim and Menashe because although neither easy nor guaranteed, their example proves that by facing challenges together, it is possible to remain brothers



and allies, united in happiness with and for each other, so long as they know who they are, where they come from, and what they stand for and against.

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. And if you saw, heard, read, or watched anything that spoke to you, please send it my way - Neli@TorahRedux.com.

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. I have been blessed to operate a niche business that allows me to dedicate a substantial amount of time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I want to talk to home care companies, so if you know anybody in the home care industry, please introduce me!

PPS - It took me years to start making a parnassa; if anyone you know is looking for a job, please put them in touch with me. With a helping hand from Above, I have successfully helped **7 people** find jobs so far!

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.